

Nick is the Senior Warden of a large urban church in Arkansas. He and his wife Elaine had raised their children there. In fact, he had been raised there. He has done EFM and been a delegate to both the Diocesan Convention and the general Convention. He is currently on the board of Sewanee. What he doesn't understand, though, is this new push that the Presiding Bishop is making towards evangelism. He has been an Episcopalian his whole life. What is this big deal that Michael Curry is making about the Jesus Movement and the Way of Love? And yet there is a certain discomfort that he feels now that he keeps hearing about this: especially in two areas: the ordination of gay priests and the whole movement towards racial reconciliation. Nick feels as though he has been a good Episcopalian his whole life, but suddenly it is not enough. Suddenly not only is he feeling uncomfortable about the way some of his

fellow parishioners are complaining about same sex marriages and is really noticing that there are not very many people of color in his church. After all, this is Arkansas and there are plenty of people of color in the population, why are they not in the church? He wants to do something about both of these things: to speak out, to bring it to the vestry for conversation, to talk to his priest about it, but he also doesn't want to rock the boat: after all, when other churches are worrying about falling attendance and lessening pledges, his church is doing fine. He doesn't want to do anything to mess that up. He feels a stirring but does not know what to do about it. He decides that he could have a private meeting with the priest, maybe after the Vestry meeting some night when others aren't around....

Remember last week I said that in Lent we would look at the wounds that we

experience that keep us from the fullness of life?

Nick is Nicodemus: a member of the faithful religious, doing everything right, according to the book....and then being drawn by God to go deeper into obedience, and he can't. He can't just hear the call to stand up for the LGBTQ Community. He can't just hear the call to dismantle the tentacles of his White privilege. To do either of these things would be to rock the boat, to cause a stir. After all, who was he to think that there needed to be a change? Why should he think that he was being called by God to do anything special? His faith did not work like that. He always followed the good Episcopal way of things: be smart, be educated, give to the church, work on the social outreach committee. Why, then this pull to this other thing?

Abraham was called by God to leave his home and move to a place that he did not know anything about, to leave his whole social system, his support network, his social safety net, his extended family, and go to a whole new place and set up a whole new life for himself. He was compelled to leave the safety net of what he knew and leap into the non-safety net of what is beckoning.

And he did. And he became the father of not just Judaism, but of Christianity and Islam as well. Truly his descendants number greater than the stars, just as God promised.

Nicodemus and Nick are soul brothers in the faith: hesitant and confused in the face of the New Thing that God might be doing. Abraham is the model, the goal: hearing the call of God clearly. Living into his faith.

It is not that we are vile sinners, rampantly breaking all the ten commandments, and causing social and familial ruin...it is that we are hesitant and careful, too careful, afraid to rock the boat, afraid to dig down deep and realize how much our comfortable faith and more comfortable social reality keeps us from hearing the voice of vitality to move forward into something new.

It is frightening to move into something new.... Especially if we suffer from the all too familiar habit of trusting in our security instead of in God.

The wound of hesitancy is really a wound of trust, and under that wound of trust is fear: fear that God may not have our back, thinking that by not taking the risk, by not rocking the boat, we are preserving our safety. What we don't see, what the fear blinds us to is that the

boat is sinking, that what we are clinging to as safety has a shelf life that has already expired.

What is it that God is calling us to in our lives that we are hesitant to do? That might shake up our world and maybe even the world a little bit, but we are afraid to do it? What is it?

I love the Episcopal Church because it ordains women and people of color and folks of all sorts of sexual orientation and gender identity. But, women priests lag behind male priests in hiring and promotion, as do priests who are priests of color. The one transgender priest we had in Arkansas left the state partially because no congregation would give her a full time position? Hmmmm.....What are we afraid of?

Abraham was on board with where God was leading him, Nicodemus came onboard with Jesus and was there at the end of Jesus' life,

helping him, one of his devoted followers. He dropped his fears and followed.

In a few minutes we will initiate the St. Mary Magdalene Chapter of the Daughters of the King. To me, a woman priest, someone who mostly wants to eliminate all vestiges of patriarchal domination in the church, the DOK seems like more of a throwback to an older model of church than I feel comfortable with. I have been hesitant about DOK, challenging their role to “support the priest”, but I have seen the energy in the room while these women gather and I have heard their laughter and vibrant conversation as they trained these past six weeks. I sense the movement of the Spirit among them. I wonder if they are hearing something from Jesus that the rest of us need to hear? Are they being led by God, as Abraham was in times past, to step into something new? I tell you what: there is not a bit of hesitancy in them to love God and to love their neighbor. I

tell you something else: they are committing themselves to a lifetime of prayer. NOW, that is a radical act of following God. The rest of us better hold onto our hats: more than a dozen St. Nicholas women are going to be praying. We had better watch out.

Let's step out, all of us, out of the wound of fear and hesitancy. Wherever it is that God is calling us to in our lives, whatever thing feels and rings true, as scary as it might be, let us walk into it like Abraham: fully, in the daylight. Let us let our clandestine visits with Jesus in the dead of night cease and let us stand faithfully by his side even though it might eventually lead to death, resurrection, and, even, perhaps, the kingdom of God.