

SERMON- Lent 2 (A)

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Genesis 12:1-4a

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

John 3:1-17

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

March 4-5, 2023

Psalm 121

OPENING:

About ten years ago, my wife and I went on our honeymoon to Vieques, the beautiful small island off of Puerto Rico. They speak Spanish there and neither myself nor my wife speak any Spanish.

When we went, we enjoyed all the beautiful beaches and all the wonderful people, but on Sunday, of course, I said that we have to go to church.

Luckily there is an Episcopal Church, called *Todos Los Santos*, "All Saints."

So we went and the church was packed, we were the only *gringos* there.

We were greeted so nicely and warmly.... and we were fine with just being there, but then someone came into our pew and asked if we spoke Spanish, and we said: "No."

So they found someone who knew English and then translated every word of the sermon for us.

It was amazing, they did not have to do that, but it was so kind and so hospitable. And, for coffee hour, they insisted that we stay and talk with them. They were so amazing that I almost went back the next week. And I wish I could work it into my contract somehow that I could go there whenever.

Every time I am here with you all, on Saturday, it reminds me of my honeymoon and that trip on my honeymoon.

I get to be, when I am here, not quite on vacation, but I am relaxed, I feel loved. I don't understand everything that's happening BUT on the other hand I do. I feel calm, I feel accepted, I feel like I am in the right place.

NICODEMUS

But I also feel a little like Nicodemus, he was the "priest-in-charge" of his faith community and he was supposed to have all the answers. And like Nicodemus, I come to you by night, slipping in to maybe not be noticed, because again I just love being here.

I think that's what Nicodemus wanted when he visited Jesus by night.

He did not know exactly what was going to happen, he did not understand the language being spoken, but his faith drew him towards this person because that person drew him towards God.

That's what I feel when come to you on these nights, or when we are together at Shrine Mont or wherever. There is a Spirit here that makes my heart sing and my soul feel alive.

But it's also hard, like Nicodemus who says: "How can these things be?" We do not speak the same language, we don't look the same, we come from different cultures.

Nicodemus even asks: "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

"Oh to be born again"—it's so much easier to learn a language when you are little and young, when you learn something from a small age.

If I were to be born-again, I would tell my parents that I need to learn Spanish, not French. Spanish, not Latin, Spanish not Greek or Hebrew. But that's okay:

Nicodemus has these questions for Jesus, he does not understand him, but it's okay, Nicodemus wants to understand up here (in his head) but he slowly begins to understand it here (in his heart and in his soul).

The language that Nicodemus does speak though is the language of the church. Nicodemus is skilled in the Bible and the Law. He wants to know Jesus, and, through the language of the church, he tries to communicate with him. Later in John's Gospel we will find Nicodemus, after Jesus has died, helping to bury Jesus, because the church taught him that language.

I don't understand you always, but we are all looking, like Nicodemus, looking for Jesus in the night. We communicate with him and each other by sharing the Body and Blood, with the sign of the peace and by being in this relationship which is a great gift.

VIDEO:

The video is of the translator of the new Spanish Book of Common Prayer opening, unpacking, a copy of this book for the very first time.

While you watch this video, think about the situation where sometimes when you get a gift from your grandmother, or your uncle, and you open up the wrapping and you look it and sometimes you don't even know what to call it.

You say “thank you.... But what is it?”

Here is the translator for the Spanish Book of Common Prayer, opening it up for the first time:

<https://youtu.be/jRGQMnylWf8?t=2>

Notice how much he has marked up his Book of Common Prayer. That’s because that’s our common language, our prayer book, how we pray is how we come together.

The Episcopal church is united by that.

We don’t have the Pope like the Roman Catholics, other denominations have different things, we have the Book of Common Prayer. That’s why it’s so important to translate it correctly and know it well.

I love that whole video but I love how at the end he tells that story about St. Jerome and the Lion,

the metaphor is that sometimes things take a while and you need patience and it’s hard, and that’s the process of translation and that’s the process of being in relationship when you don’t always understand one another.

That’s what it’s like for Saturday night and Sunday morning to meet, for English and Spanish-speaking to unpack and open up the great gift that is our relationship with one another.

That’s us getting to know one another. I know that it’s a gift, but sometimes I don’t know what it’s called. We keep asking that question:

“What are we to one another?”

Sometimes I don’t know what to even call each other. “What is it?”

- 1) “Latino Ministry”
- 2) “Spanish Speaking Congregation”
- 3) “*San Timeo’s*”
- 4) “One Saint Timothy’s”

I don’t know exactly who we are, but I know that it’s a great gift.

Maybe we can say this: “We are one Church who happen to worship God in two different languages.”

CONCLUSION

When Nicodemus goes to Jesus, goes to visit him by night
What language does he use, is it the language of Judaism? Does he speak in Spanish, in English? No, He has to learn a different language.

What language do we speak?

Our hope and prayer is that we use the language of God's love, not necessarily by what comes out of their mouth, we know the same language as a follower of Jesus,

My favorite part of this Saturday service is the Lord's Prayer.

When Jesus said it, it was in Aramaic, then it was written down in Greek, later it got translated into Latin, we then sing it in Spanish, using an American English tune, in an arrangement done by Julio who is Bolivian.

Thank you for that gift, and thank you for the gift that is YOU.

Our goal not to learn Spanish, not to learn English. Not necessarily.

Our goal is for us to unpack the gift of this relationship and see its beauty and how we can tell, even in the darkest of nights, that God's light shining through.

AMEN