

By night.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night.

A senior Pharisee come to check out
the new kid on the block.

Make sure he didn't rock the boat -
rocking boats ain't good for fishing.

Either fit in or f-f-f-f forget it.

Instead Jesus proved a spiritual Hercules,
effectively diverting the Jordan in flood
to flush out Nicodemus' cosy Augean stables,
knee deep in shh, you-know-what.

Rather than checking out the new kid on the block,
the new kid checked out him.

'Never mind all your religious credentials,
You've got to start again, be born anew, old son.'

They were probably on the roof top
in the cool of the evening.

‘Feel that breeze, blowing off the Med?

See God’s spirit like a breeze,
blowing you wherever,

Go with the flow, man.’

God did not become man to make small talk,
the philosopher Kierkegaard quipped.

This is big talk, big time.

Then Jesus cuts to the heart
not just for Nicodemus but for every one.

After all, Nicodemus in Greek means people’s champion.

‘Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
so I must be lifted up.’

Thanks for that, Jesus, very helpful. Drrr!

A bit of background.

When the Jews had escaped from Egypt

and wandered in the wilderness for forty years

they'd offended God for some misdemeanour or other.

Forty years presented a lot of opportunities for offending

and God was quite huffy back in those days

before the Church of England came along to cheer him up.

For punishment he sent them venomous snakes

who were despatching God's people

more efficiently than the Corona virus.

'God forgive us,' Moses implored.

'How do we stop to this?'

God's instructions were simple if curious.

'Make a serpent of bronze,

hold it up on a stick,

and if people look up at that,
the snake bite won't harm them.'

What was going on?

Psychologically people were seeing their dreaded foe
put in its place,
nailed to a stick, a monster no longer.

Often with a snake bite it's not the venom
but the body's reaction to it that kills,
the adrenalin surge which causes heart failure.
No need to be terrified of a snake on a stick
or a virus on a stick.

And looking at Jesus being lifted up?

Well, that's what I meant by the heart of the matter.

Deep down we all fear being crucified.

Crucified by cancer,
crucified by Alzheimers,
mangled in a car crash,
whatever.

In our nightmares we die in a thousand ways,
whereas, we're all going to die,
but only in one way.

It's as if Jesus is saying,
'Look at what harms you to heal you.

Don't blight your life
by worrying about your death.'

We all do,
the equivalent of blowing our savings
on a nuclear bunker
when we should be enjoying God's life
in all its fullness.

I suspect the only question
God will ask us on judgement day is
'Why didn't you simply enjoy life
and my beautiful world?'

All death is bad.

But crucifixion must be the worst.

At the heart of our churches are crucifixes,

Jesus lifted up on a cross,

saying this is so bad, but God is bigger than this.

Easter trumps every Good Friday.

So seize the day, a glorious day, and get on with life.

Jesus hammers home his point with a one line sermon:

'God so loved the world,

that he gave his only begotten Son

to the end that all that believe in him may not perish
but may have eternal life.'

Comfortable words I read at every 8 am Communion.

I've done 25 years of them, a life sentence.

I once had a dream where I'd died

and was approaching the gates of heaven,

but then turned away, because I felt so unworthy.

Dear St Peter called me back.

'David, however bad your ministry,

you've taken 25 years of eight' o'clocks,

Sunday in, Sunday out.

You poor old soul, come on in!'

By night.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night

and was met by light, the light of the world.

At the very end of John's Gospel
Nicodemus appears again,
of Good Friday,
when day was as dark as night,
and along with Joseph of Arimathea
bravely squares up to Pilate
and insists Jesus is buried in a tomb
rather than thrown into a lime pit,
paving the way for resurrection.

With a new vicar on the horizon
maybe we cast ourselves as Nicodemus
checking out the new kid on the block.

If the new vicar's worth his salt,
it'll be the new kid on the block
who'll check out us.

By night, we all come to Jesus by night,
Strangers in the night, to be met by tremendous light,
celebrated by that great Father of the Church,

Frank Sinatra:

Strangers in the night, exchanging glances

Wondering in the night what were the chances

We'd be sharing love before the night was through?

Strangers in the night, two lonely people

We were strangers in the night

Up to the moment when we said our first hello

Little did we know

Love was just a glance away,

a warm embracing dance away.

And ever since that night

We've been together

Lovers at first sight

In love forever

It turned out so right

For strangers in the night.