

Sunday Sermon March 1, 2026

I love Nicodemus. The Gospel tells us he was an important man. He was a religious leader, admired and respected in his faith tradition, and yet he was curious. Something inside of him told him he didn't have all the answers. As smart as he was, as much as people might have told him how helpful and insightful he was, Nicodemus knew there was more.

He saw something in Jesus that he wanted to grasp. He saw spiritual power. A spiritual depth in the itinerant preacher from Nazareth, and Nicodemus wanted more of that.

But Nicodemus was also cautious. He came to Jesus by night, not wanting to get in trouble with those who saw Jesus as a threat to the established order that worked so very well for them and for their friends.

Nicodemus questions Jesus about the Kingdom. The Kingdom that Jesus has been teaching and preaching about – the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom Jesus came to proclaim and to usher in. But Nicodemus, like us, was immersed in the Kingdom of Man. The earthly kingdom he sees all around him, the oppressive power of the Roman Empire.

Nicodemus' eyes are focused on earthly things. He's an 'I'll believe it when I see it' sort of guy. Jesus is proclaiming and living out heavenly things, a world that can't be seen with human eyes. And Nicodemus, in a moment of refreshing honesty, pleads "how can these things be?" How can the things of God, life in the Kingdom of God, be real? Look at world in which we live!

Jesus was trying to help Nicodemus to see with eyes of faith. To see beyond earthly things, beyond the Kingdom of Man, so that he might see the Kingdom of God breaking in.

"No one can see the Kingdom of God without being reborn," Jesus says. And Nicodemus, so caught up in the physical world, says: "How can I crawl back into my mother's womb?" He just didn't get it. Jesus was inviting him into a new way of seeing, a new way of living, life in the Kingdom, and Nicodemus just couldn't get beyond his old ways of seeing and thinking.

He couldn't comprehend life in the Spirit- the power of love to unite and transform – How can this be? He pleads. How can it be real?

Begs the question for us today: What's real? That might be central question underneath Nicodemus' curiosity. I know it was the question that the Velveteen Rabbit asked the skin horse that day in the nursery, because:

"The Skin Horse had lived longer in the nursery than any of the others. He was so old that his brown coat was bald in patches and showed the seams underneath, and most of the hairs in his tail had been pulled out to string bead necklaces. He was wise, for he had seen a long succession of mechanical toys arrive to boast and swagger, and by-and-by break their mainsprings and pass away, and he knew that they were only toys, and would never turn into anything else. For nursery magic is strange and wonderful, and only those playthings that are old and wise and experienced like the Skin Horse understand it.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you know it will hurt sometimes."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled. "The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

— **Margery Williams Bianco, The Velveteen Rabbit (adapted)**

What's real? I believe that's Nicodemus' question for Jesus, and it's the question for us, tonight/today. Is it what you can store in a bank or lock in a safe, or is it something more?

Jesus suggests that it's life in the Spirit. That's the love that Christ came to bring and that He pours out on us tonight/today and that He invites us to share, generously.

Life in the Spirit is the gift of faith that enables us to see beyond the physical and enter into a new dimension of life, a deeper dimension, life in God, what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.

It is life rooted in love. God's love for us and our love for each other and for God. This love has the power to transform us and to change our world.

"For God so loved the world, that God gave God's only Son, so that all who believe in Him, and who pattern their life on His, will not pass away like the things of this world, but will have new life in this world and eternal life beyond."

Once it happens, it lasts for always.

Amen