

Second Sunday in Lent

“Now I say unto you, that ye must repent, and be born again: for the Spirit saith, If ye are not born again, ye can not inherit the kingdom of heaven.”—Alma 5:24 AV

Explore

On My Heart

Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, paper hearts, pencils

Before class cut out plenty of colorful paper hearts. Fold them in half vertically. As the teens arrive, give them several folded hearts; ask them to open their heart and write a question that concerns them on each one. When they are done, place the hearts between the pages of the scriptures. Request that all remain silent until all hearts are completed. Ask for a volunteer to pray for God’s guidance in the answering of these questions.

Extract

Seeker to Disciple

Ask: “Have any of you had a job to do or a place to go, maybe with a parent, and wanted to avoid seeing any of your friends or them seeing you?” Discuss. Then read the story of Nicodemus from John 3:1–17.

Nicodemus found himself in similar circumstances. He was a prominent leader in Jewish society, a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling religious council). His education taught him that the only way to enter heaven was to be obedient to Jewish laws—there were only 613. He wanted to protect his reputation with his peers, yet he recognized in Jesus the presence of God and was intrigued with Jesus’ teaching of “being reborn” as the way to enter heaven. At night, in the darkness, he made a secret visit to find the answers to questions that were bothering him.

Bible, *Seekers and Disciples*

John 3:1–17,
7:50–51, 19:39–40
Alma 5:24

What respect did Nicodemus show Jesus? What was Nicodemus’s question? What was Nicodemus’s understanding of the phrase “born again”? How did Jesus respond? What Community of Christ sacraments reflect Jesus’ command to be “born again”? (Refer to pages 36 and 37 of *Seekers and Disciples*, Herald House, 2001.)

Jesus used personification to help people understand his teachings. Personification is describing nonhuman things with human characteristics. With Nicodemus, an educated man, he used the same simple personification technique as he did with the uneducated. What is personified in John 3:8? Why do you think Jesus used this example?

Jesus also used questions to focus, to guide people to understanding, and make decisions. What was he saying when he asked Nicodemus, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?” and “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (John 3:10, 12 NRSV) Was this a challenge to Nicodemus’s reputation or provoking him to think in new directions?

Jesus provided the answers for Nicodemus and for us, and he explains why God sent him to earth. Reread John 3:16–17. In the original Greek, *agape* was the word used for love—the highest form of love described in biblical scripture. Jesus was God’s intervention in human life—God’s plan for salvation.

Nicodemus may have found some of the answers he was looking for that night but we don’t know exactly. His name appears later in the book. Read John 7:50–51 and John 19:39–40 to find more about the seeker who may have become a disciple.

John 3:16

One of the more frequently memorized scriptures is John 3:16. Ask for a show of hands to see how many already can recite the verse. Divide into pairs and review or memorize it. Then recite the verse as a class. Tape a large poster board on the wall and, in large letters, write John 3:16. Give the teens markers and tell them to write their thoughts about the scripture on the poster board.

Bible, poster board, tape, markers, 3 x 5 inch index cards, pens, paper

Peer Pressure

Nicodemus had to deal with peer pressure. Why did he visit Jesus in the dark? Adults deal with peer pressure as well as teens and children. Whoever the peers are, there is pressure to conform to the group, follow the crowd, be like everyone else.

Even Jesus had to deal with peer pressure, from his disciples saying, “Don’t go there” to the teachers in the synagogue holding him to the standard, age-old interpretation of the law. Discuss how Jesus dealt with peer pressure. Who did he turn to? Did he continue to share his knowledge of God with the hearts open to hear his message? Ask: “Can you share your beliefs with those who have open hearts waiting to hear of God’s love for them?”

Nicodemus was open to change. He asked questions and was willing to listen for the possibilities found in the answers he was given. On a 3x5 index card have teens list several peers or others they know who may be asking “Nicodemus” questions. Beside each name describe an opportunity where they can share God’s message. Challenge the teens to follow up on at least one name this week.

Being Nicodemus

Lead the teens through a guided meditation of the Nicodemus story. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine the darkness around them, the quiet streets that a few hours earlier were bustling with busy merchants, housewives traveling to and from the market, and children noisily playing. What are the scents that they might smell? How does the air feel? How does the path beneath Nicodemus’s feet feel? Imagine a gated wall along the path. Is the wall warm from the day? How does Nicodemus feel, venturing out in the darkness, heavy with the burdens of his unanswered questions, fearful that he might be seen by his peers visiting the place where Jesus was staying? Can they taste the perspiration created by his anxiousness? What would make him open his heart to Jesus? Read Alma 5:24. We don’t know exactly how Nicodemus responded to Jesus, but how do they think they would respond? Have teens reflect on this question on the paper provided.

Expand

Open to Change

Today Community of Christ emphasizes Stewardship Accounting Day. Ask: “Do we do the best we can, accounting for our time, gifts, and possessions? Are they used wisely? Are we open to change, alternative ways, better ways that will allow a more positive, uplifting life-style for ourselves, those around us, and those far away? How can our hearts be opened?” Design and carry out an “Open Heart Project” of your own making.

paper, pens

Lectionary scriptures—Genesis 12:1–4a/12:1–3 IV; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1–5, 13–17; John 3:1–17; Alma 5:23–28; Doctrine and Covenants 155:7–8