**Morning Praise @ Home 1st September 2024**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Reading John 3: 1 – 6

### Reflection from John

**NICODEMUS – THE RELIGIOUS MAN BOWLED OVER BY JESUS**

Have you ever had the experience of something that changed your life, only to realize that it meant you really had to change your life?

It was like that for me when I met Jesus. I met him three times. Today I can only tell you about my first meeting. There’s much more to come.

You see this box? This is what I used to think God was like. How I grew up thinking about God. I was taught that when it comes right down to it, the laws of God are not that difficult. There are 613 of them. And they all fit into this box.

My name is Nicodemus. And I am - or at least I was - a member of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court among the Jewish people. We were priests, Pharisees and scribes of the law. If there was an instruction from God as to how our people should live, we were the ones to know. We knew the law as well as God did.

The whole of Jewish society was to adapt itself to what was in this box. And this box has sides and a bottom line and a top that can be closed, if the need arises. And it was our job to go after those who stepped outside of it.

I lived inside that box. I breathed its stale air for most of my life. I had no room for imagination. I had contempt for those who had one. There was a very narrow slit in this box for any air to move. That, for me and my brothers in the Sanhedrin, was where God lived. Inside a box that was no bigger than our narrow imaginations.

And so it was with that mindset that I went to see Jesus. I must admit I was intrigued by the man. He had become a force to be reckoned with. People were starting to listen to him, and not to the Pharisees. He was challenging the authority of the religious right. Unleashing a dangerous imagination into the people.

What was he really preaching? I wanted to know! Was he really a threat? We needed to know. After all, the Romans had given us some considerable authority, to keep our people in line, so that they would not be a threat to the state. And if Jesus was stirring up unrest, putting ideas into their heads, then he was a threat to Rome, and because he was a Jew, our necks would be on the line if he got into trouble, and we had done nothing to stop him.

I went by night. On my own. I went with some confidence. With sure knowledge that I could find him out, outwit the man and straighten him out. Clip his wings. Bring him back into the box.

“Rabbi,” I said, giving him the idea that I respected him. I would flatter him. “Rabbi, I know you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” I didn’t know what to expect, except that it was not what I got.

Jesus says to me, “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.” What kind of an answer is that? You can’t fit that into a box.

He must be mad! Obviously the man can’t think in a straight line. He doesn’t know anything about the realm of God. And he knows nothing about having babies.

“How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can you enter a second time into your mother’s womb and be born?” There, I thought, that’s got him. He can’t wriggle out of this one!

But here’s what he says to me. “No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit. Don’t be astonished when I say to you, You must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

“How can these things be?”, I asked. Then Jesus had the last word… “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

I stopped talking then, and all I could do was listen. Dumbstruck. Jesus was wandering dangerously into the wild and unexpected territory of the Spirit, into the unknown. And I had wanted to rope him in. I knew how to follow a road map. I did not know my way in the world of mystery - a world of risky faith and an unboxed God. And I did not know whether I wanted Jesus to lead me there.

You see this cup? It’s like the one that contained all that I knew about God. It was already full, or so I thought. But then Jesus just kept pouring more and more water into it until it was cascading down the sides! There was so much there that I could barely imagine how I could ever get it back inside.

Jesus was talking about God - but in a way that I had never dared to imagine. My old container was no good anymore. I knew that. Jesus had unchained God for me. The box, the walls, the traditions, the customs of religious life - they would no longer suffice. I knew that.

But what on earth could I do? There was a painful irony here for me.

Here I was, among the most learned of scholars, arguing with this Galilean peasant! How could I have expected him to change my faith forever?

I walked away from Jesus that day. My head spinning. My world turned upside down. I knew that I had a choice to make. I had to take this crazy poet seriously and risk losing everything that I knew about God, and risk losing my job and my status, and start all over again.

Or I could go back, and tell no one what had happened, and pretend to myself that it never did………..Have you ever had that kind of choice to make?

### Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

Creator God we pray for our world which seems to be forever caught up in violence and conflict. Through the media we are witnesses to terrorist violence in so many parts of the world.

Protect, O Lord, all who are working for liberty and freedom, for justice and peace. We pray for all peace-makers and peace-keepers and for all who seek to reconcile divided communities and peoples. We pray for our prime minister and for all the members of our parliament, for the president of the United States and for all world leaders, that have the capability and the will to help those stranded and in grave danger, in all those areas of the world where many lives remain in danger. As we continue to pray for peace and goodwill towards all people we also pray for the innocent victims and their families caught up in conflicts which are not of their making.

We pray for all who have become bankrupt or are in great debt and we remember the world’s poor and all who have nothing to call their own. We remember those who are in genuine need of food banks, in our own country and around the world. We pray for those in need of both mental and physical support, for the broken hearted, the broken spirited, for all who are severely handicapped, for those on life support machines and for all who are ill in hospital and in nursing homes and for all who care for them. Lord, be to them a tower of strength and love.

We pray for all children who are going to school or further education this term. We thank you that they are able to study in peace and safety. We pray that all children throughout your world be able to do the same. We particularly pray for our local Bishop Wilson Primary school at this time as they celebrate the 300th anniversary of its founding and ask for your blessing on all the teachers and assistants who work there.

We pray for those who face the pain of grief at the loss of a loved one. Help us to support all those who mourn, both with our prayers and with practical help both this day and in the days and weeks to come. We remember before God those who have died and ask that those bereaved by their passing are aware of the light of Christ which eternally shines and brings so much hope.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**