

Lent 2A The mission of Christ and Lenten Clearing

John 3:1-17

Opening Prayer

God of amazing compassion,
lover of our wayward race,
you bring to birth a pilgrim people,
and call us to be a blessing for ourselves and all the world.
We pray for grace to take your generous gift
and step with courage on this holy path,
confident in the radiant life that is your plan for us,
made known and given in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Revised Common Lectionary Prayers © 2002

Hymn: There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus

*There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus.
No, not one! No, not one!
None else could heal all our soul's diseases.
No, not one! No, not one!*

Refrain:

*Jesus knows all about our struggles;
He will guide till the day is done.
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus.
No, not one! No, not one!*

*Was e'er a gift like the Savior given?
No, not one! No, not one!
Will He refuse us a home in heaven?
No, not one! No, not one! [Refrain]*

Johnson Oatman (1895)

*There's not an hour that He is not near us.
No, not one! No, not one!
No night so dark but His love can cheer us.
No, not one! No, not one! [Refrain]*

Window of Wonder

"At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done--then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago."

— Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden

Creative Response: Lenten Clearing

Spend a few moments as you clean and clear this week on what you might put away, set aside or take up this season - to make room for hope and new growth.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, preaching good tidings to the people,
proclaiming release to the captives, setting at liberty those who are bound:
We adore you.

Lord Jesus, friend of the outcast and the poor,
feeder of the hungry, healer of the sick.

We adore you.

Lord Jesus, denouncing the oppressor,
exposing the hypocrite, overcoming evil with good.

We adore you.

Lord Jesus, pattern of gentleness,
teacher of holiness, prophet of the kingdom of heaven.

We adore you.

Lord Jesus, dying to save us from our sins,
rising to give us eternal life, ascending to prepare our heavenly home.

We adore you.

Ehillschurch.com

Devotion - The Mission of Christ

Today our passage speaks about the mission of Jesus Christ. What was it that Jesus came to earth to do? According to verse 3, Jesus came to earth in order to set up God's kingdom on earth - God's rule of love and justice, and the way that people see, or enter this kingdom is through what Jesus called a new birth, or to be "born again."

What then does it mean to be born again? As Jesus put it, as flesh can only give birth to flesh, so the Spirit of God can only give birth to spiritual life and beings. Christ tells us that we do not have the inner resources to face the problems, frustrations, futility, and crises of life alone. We need new resources that he alone can provide through His Spirit.

And Jesus freely gives us his Spirit when we invite him into our lives so that he may begin a new spiritual life within us. This new birth or life given by the Spirit of God is as mysterious as the wind itself. It cannot be predicted, measured, controlled, or manipulated by any standing or works that Nicodemus as a Doctor and Professor of the Law may possess.

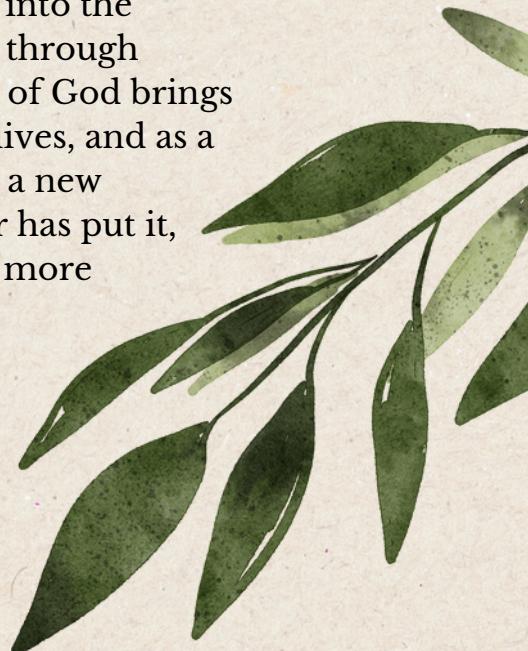
The story begins with Nicodemus coming to Jesus under the cover of darkness and night. In John, this may be symbolic of the contrast between spiritual light and darkness, which is at play in this story. Of course, Nicodemus may have used the cover of night in coming to Jesus, simply as a means of not being seen by others, since he was after all a ruler of the Jews and a teacher of Israel. This might not have gone down too well with the Jewish Sanhedrin.

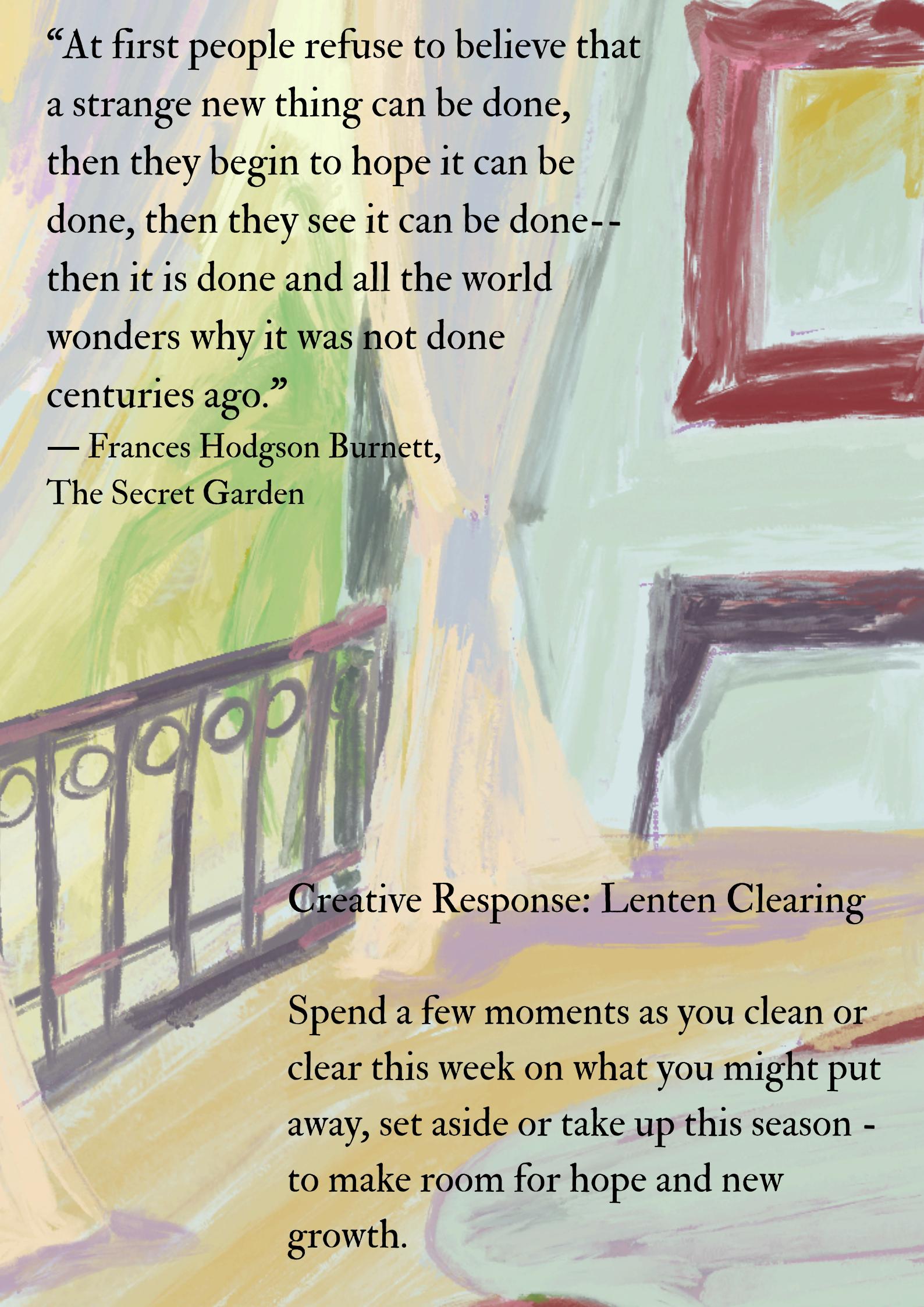
But what was Nicodemus really reaching out for when he said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him?” Probably, he was asking the question “Who really are you?” “Are you the Messiah that we have been looking out for, for such a long time now?” Then Jesus replied in verse 3, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God, or the purpose for which I was sent, unless they are born again.” Therefore, Nicodemus should not be surprised by Jesus’ saying, “You must be born again”, because the kingdom which Jesus now brings is a spiritual kingdom, which now applies to everyone. According to Jesus, Nicodemus had not even fully understood his own Scriptures about the new birth or the need to enter God’s light and kingdom in this way. This is exactly what happens when we are “born again” by God’s Spirit.

In thinking further about this truth, I am reminded of the story told later in the bible when Saul of Tarsus – someone who had persecuted and killed Christians, was born again spiritually, and was renamed Paul. When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was made blind for three days, and lived in darkness (Acts 9:9), until his sight both physical and spiritual, was restored by God’s Spirit. And then he received his ministry from Jesus to deliver people from darkness into God’s most wonderful light (Acts 26:18).

Finally, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but rather to save the world through him. The new birth is good news for everyone. The Spirit of God brings the truth of God’s sacrificial love home to our hearts and lives, and as a result, we experience a new way of seeing, as well as enter a new Kingdom, as well as find a new reality. As the hymn writer has put it, “There is life for a look at the Crucified One - there is life more abundant and free.” Amen

Rev Dr Ted Woods.





“At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done-- then it is done and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago.”

— Frances Hodgson Burnett,
The Secret Garden

Creative Response: Lenten Clearing

Spend a few moments as you clean or clear this week on what you might put away, set aside or take up this season - to make room for hope and new growth.