



Scandalous Imagination – Touchpoint for February 25, 2026

Johon 3:1-17 (NRSVUE) Nicodemus Visits Jesus

TOUCH POINT

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The 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.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

Walter Bruggeman uses a phrase that just thrills the creative life-giving parts of my heart.

He calls the idea of being born anew “scandalous imagination.” Bruggeman describes this as the capacity ‘to envision a reality, a future, and a God that are entirely different from the dominant totalist culture that surrounds us it is scandalous because it disrupts the status quo contradicts common sense and offers an alternative, hopeful reality that is considered outrageous or impossible by the powers that be.’ (ChatGPT summary)

That brings me so much joy. It is inspiration and healing to my neurodivergent brain.

In my scandalous imagination I envision Jesus full of joy when he delivers his scandalous message. He joyfully invites others to leave something or someplace and follow him.

Jesus says it will be similar to your physical birth and the newness that surrounds you. The birth is physically painful, but the new birth makes it all worth it. The way includes leaving where we were and entering a world of unimaginable wonder.

Some think Nicodemus is challenging Jesus in their late-night conversation. Without hearing inflection, I guess there are many ways we could imagine the mood of the discussion.

I like to think Jesus was being compassionately playful and imaginative. Scandalously.

Jesus' way for Nicodemus is to leave everything he'd held dearly as a law keeper. The very laws that gave him his position as a respected elder. He had more than enough money. He was safe from harm and had some kickin' digs. Yet still he has a connection with his God through the law.

But he evidently was curious about a greater life in Spirit. One that would transcend his preoccupations. But it would mean he would need to believe in something much more difficult to grasp. Something that honors his past journey yet opens up a new journey. An embarking on an adventure Nicodemus longed for by becoming a Pharisee. Real life. Zoe. The fullness of life.

So, I imagine Jesus was full of scandalous joy and imagination. Jesus is poorly treated by politicians and religious scholars, but he maintains the joy of awakening others. Anyone who is willing to follow his invitation and become aware of the life they already have. The life they've always longed for.

Brennan Manning say, "I'm convinced there is only one thing that divides us. It is not politics or religion. It is those who are aware and those who are unaware."

To live a life with scandalous imagination means you experience words that break through.

Words that are invitations deep within us.

Andrew, Peter, James and John dropped their nets and followed. The adulterous women dismissed her accusers. The man next to Jesus on the cross left his guilt-ridden mind and saw paradise.

The rich young ruler however walked away deeply sad, for he had a lot of stuff. Jesus did not chase him down. God will not rescue us from our unwillingness to awaken and be free of our ego.

Why wouldn't Jesus be a man of joy? The invitation of Spirit into the scandalous imagination of being 'born from above' is full of joy. The Spirit watches us like we're young Forrest Gump taking steps of faith, reaching an awkward sprint and breaking free.

Jesus words to Nicodemus are words that break through. They are for us as well.

We are not being offered a life we don't have. We are being invited to become aware of the unbridled life in the Spirit. The scripture says the wind blows where it chooses, you hear it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes. For God so loved the world (*agapao*/love, meaning welcomes the entire cosmos) with a liberating force of Spirit's scandalous imagination.

I had trouble conveying my inner excitement on this topic. So, let's use our imagination.

Imagine you embark on a cruise. You're guided through a tunnel-like enclosure before being welcomed aboard and shown to your cozy cabin. The ship boasts an all-you-can-eat buffet, exciting activities on the lower deck, and even a pool. "A pool?!" you say. "On a ship? Why this ship has everything I ever wanted."

During your journey, you meet someone special and fall in love, thinking this is what you've been waiting for. However, as time passes, the initial excitement fades, and the routine of floating in the pool becomes mundane. You start to wonder how to reignite those feelings.

Seeking answers, you turn to books in your cabin, immersing yourself in knowledge about different cultures, landscapes, and ocean life. Your thirst for understanding grows, and you become a storyteller and a respected source of knowledge on the ship.

One day, you venture outside onto the deck, gaze out at the vast ocean that surrounds you, and you are overcome with awe.

In that moment, you realize that the fulfillment you sought was not in external pursuits or relationships but in the profound connection you feel with the mystery we've called God and the world around you. You don't have the ocean. The ocean has you.

Amen.

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Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Lamb of God

(Salt of the Sount)

Lamb of God, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God (hear our prayer),
Lamb of God, Grant us peace (hear us pray).
This we pray.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come, O Lord, and Set Us Free

(John L. Bell, The Wild Goose Collection)

Come, O Lord and set us free. Give/Bring your people peace.
Come, O Lord and set us free. Come Lord Jesus, Come.
1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother
Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

Light of the World

(George Salazar)