

-I remember as a kid watching the movie *Men in Black* (it was before I was 13, so don't tell anyone I was watching a PG 13 movie OK?) For those of you who haven't seen this film, it's a humorous movie of two government agents (played by Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones) who chase aliens that break the law on Earth. The story riffs on the fact that most of the aliens are hidden to the general public and just want to fit into Earth's way of life. However, there is an evil "cockroach-like-superbug" alien who wants to take over Earth but has to deal with Smith and Jones' "unconventional" ways of taking him down. One of the final scenes is this huge cockroach crawling around and eating people. You can image how as a younger kid, trying to fall asleep in the dark of night after a scene like this playing over and over again in my head was really challenging. The way my bed was positioned in my bedroom made me face the dark and scary closet. Even when I shut the closet doors, I couldn't get out of my head this giant cockroach coming out of the dark closet and eating me alive. Perhaps you have some similar stories of growing up and being affected by the night.

-Night and darkness are weird. In some ways, night can be tranquil and serene. Full of peace and stillness. In other ways, night can be unsettling, confusing, full of heaviness, and maybe even just plain scary.

-One of the things that really sticks out to me within the well known story of Jesus and Nicodemus is at the beginning: "Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night....."

-At first glance, this seems really peculiar. Why on earth would the Gospel of John add the point "he came at night". Why is this important?

- To maybe give us a clue, we may need to look in other places within the book of John. Perhaps John mentions night to contrast with this verse at the very beginning of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

-Light and dark play a pivotal role for John in the story of Jesus. So, Nicodemus coming at night (or in the dark), symbolizes an important struggle: a struggle that maybe each one of us face too. Maybe it's a feeling of confusion or depression. Maybe it's the feeling of being alone or the emotion of fear or anger. Whatever it is, it seems what John is trying to set up here within the tension of light and dark is the feeling or act of being separate from the Divine.

-The whole irony of this story is Nicodemus, a well respected Pharisee and teacher of the Jewish faith, coming to this Palestinian peasant Jesus for enlightenment. How does this make any sense? Yet even this guy who seemed to have it "all together" and "know it all" came in the darkness of night broken, alone, and not getting it.

-I think it can be easy for us to take be too focused on light and not enough on the night. What I mean by this is that perhaps it is too easy for us to think simply: LIGHT GOOD. NIGHT/DARKNESS BAD. It's just a simple fact that in order to be in the light, you need night to be the opposite. The only way that this pair to work is for there to be tension. Without tension, it doesn't really mean much of anything for a light to shine in the darkness.

-If you are like me, you never want to not be perceived as having your "ducks in a row". Perhaps you are on the spectrum with this, but most of us work hard to show that we are dependable, organized, passionate, and correct most of the time. In other words, our society is set up to praise those who "walk in the light" all the time. Maybe even if you feel incredibly isolated, or sad, or lonely, or angry, or in pieces, you still want to do all you can do to make others think you are walking in the light and have everything together. Maybe even if you have the courage to share a little bit with others that you are in some darkness, others are so conditioned to "help you be in the light", that they try to fix you or say things that will get you back in the light and not leave you in the darkness. These can be well intentioned, but become meaningless and continue to make you feel deep down a sense of despair.

-What if, instead of lying to ourselves that we "always need to be in the light" no matter what, we instead see Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus as a model of how darkness might be needed. Maybe we need to see the nighttime differently and stay there for a little while in order for us to be simply able to come back into the night.

- I remember after watching the movie, I couldn't sleep because I was afraid that this superbug was going to come out of my closet. After checking the closet and still being on edge I came up with a plan: OK...so if this is going to scare me... I gotta change my thinking.....so I imagined myself as director of the movie and that this "gross superbug" was actually nervous because this was the first film he had ever been cast for. I named him "Walley" and in my head had conversations about how he needed to be more "scarey". I changed the scary scene that I wasn't going to stop playing through my head again and again anyways into a series of bloopers which Walley just couldn't get right. He just kept messing up scenes and apologizing for being nervous. Instead of sitting in the dark being afraid of this big, gross, alien bug eating people (which were scenes in the film that freaked me out looking into my dark closet), I was now having conversations in my head with a Disney-like bug named "Walley" who was so excited to be in his first film that he kept messing things up. It worked and I fell right to sleep.

-The fact that I was in the dark (literally) in my room didn't change. But what did change was how I saw my fear and how I saw darkness itself. Because I was able to see the night differently, I was then able to get perspective and then come back to the light.

-Perhaps some of you feel like you are in the night right now like Nicodemus. Because of God's grace, Jesus will meet you there and I promise you will eventually find your

way back to the light. But I also encourage you to see night a little differently. Maybe you need to be in the night right now and that's OK. Maybe the night is exactly where you need to be in order to get perspective. Through it all, even when big, alien cockroaches seem to overwhelm you, know that Jesus will meet you day or night. Amen.