

Connecting faith and daily life

We all belong

Jeni Parsons *reflects on* John 3:1-17

Nicodemus could not understand how anyone could be born twice. He seems to have missed the very truth he lived within. If his mother was Jewish at his birth, he was both her son and a son of Israel and thereby of the God of Israel. Nicodemus already has this double birth, but Jesus wants to open it wider.

It's a question of belonging: who is in this family and who is outside? Can anyone belong? The readings of the last few weeks are all about this and it is a struggle in the Bible, as it is for us.

This conversation in the Gospel is what allows those of us who wouldn't fit the previous pattern to be included, and that inclusion is wide because God is generous in affection. Our mothers may not be Jewish, yet we belong. We are not all male, yet we belong. Whatever the colour of our skin, orientation, intelligence, wealth or righteousness, we still belong.

It has taken the man from Nazareth, the one who taught and healed, loved and preached, died and rose again, for us to know that inclusion. Sometimes the Church forgets and has to repent. Sometimes the Church refuses repentance and is lost for a time, until God finds her and brings her home. 🍷

Fruits of the Spirit

– a meditation on Galatians 5:22-23

The pineapple is a symbol of kindness

by Caroline Hodgson

In Caribbean cultures the pineapple's spiky leaves are meant to deter intruders, while its sweet yellow flesh is given to guests as a sign of welcome and hospitality. In the eighteenth century the exotic, expensive pineapple was the height of style at Spanish and French dinner tables, where it would double up as table decoration and a mouthwatering dessert.

Christian kindness extends far beyond lavish entertaining. Indeed, we don't even have to invite people into our homes to extend a Christian welcome. The key is to take it out into the world. Get into the habit of "watching" your own appearance when you meet other people. When someone intrudes on your busy thoughts, do you allow them to see your spiky side? Or do you open up, soften, and greet people with a generous expression and an open heart? The secret is to practise spiritual suppleness, so we can be flexible enough to set our self aside and put the other person first. 🍷



God, you show us in Jesus that we are not condemned to be isolated from you, but held in your loving embrace as part of the family you make. In our belonging keep our eyes open for those not yet included and bring us home together. Amen.

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Hatching is in full swing now and the chicks and ducklings are popping out of the incubator in regular succession. I've also put some guinea-fowl eggs under a broody hen and the tiny ones, called keets, have hatched and are beginning to grow with the close attention of their "mum". She's really pleased with

them and is rearing them well, teaching them and guarding them.

Isn't it interesting how such tiny creatures flourish with a bit of close attention and their inbuilt instinct for survival? I don't use a prayer book any more but spend my time with the birds and animals on the holding, in wonder, love and praise. This "first scripture" of which we are a part, this natural world, this created order, is enough to cause me to sing "hallelujah" with Leonard Cohen, with massed choirs, with k. d. lang. If you haven't heard it, then give it, a listen. 🍷

“ There is no law which lays it down that you must smile! But you can make a gift of your smile; you can be the heaven of kindness.”

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005)