



# Nicodemus: Sister's story

**TEACHER OF ISRAEL he may be, but he is still my brother. My little brother. There's not much I don't know about Nicodemus. Or much he doesn't know about his big sister, come to that.**

Did he know that I had followed him that night? That I was there, listening? Of course he did. But we didn't say anything, not then. We didn't need to. A lifetime together meant a glance or a nod says more than a Temple scroll. Did Jesus know I was there? Oh yes. No doubt about that. Not much escapes him. Escaped him.

It was just the two of them; the others had all gone, leaving them alone. They were together for a long time, speaking quietly so as not to wake sleepers in the house. Or not to be overheard. Or both. But it was the unspoken words that rang in the dim room that night, with only one lamp throwing shadows that covered me where I stood by the door.

## **It was a sort of game**

It was a sort of game with the two of them. No, not a game, a dance. A dance done in the dark, barefoot, with sharp blades scattered around the floor, every step a careful risk. Nicodemus, with his status like a loose cloak dangling from a frayed thread, pretending he didn't understand. Jesus pretending he believed him.

Jesus telling him about rebirth as if

by Sue Latimer

he had never heard of it, and Nicodemus, wide-eyed with deliberate misunderstanding.

'And what are we supposed to do, go back into the womb? Would we fit?'

'You'd be surprised.'

How dangerous was it? Is it? Very. Jesus found that out, just as my brother feared he would. But then Jesus took it further, pushed it right up to the edge, said 'Fly' and gave it a shove. In the light, where everybody could see him.

Nicodemus stayed back, in the shadows.

Until the end. He came forward then and it's not as if it had stopped being dangerous. Anything but. He knew that and he told me, as if I needed telling, saying I was free to move out, stay with someone else, if I didn't want to be involved.

As if! I packed the myrrh and aloes he took with him that dreadful day. Wrapped it reverently in clean linen. I do wonder how many understood? Understood about the myrrh I mean. Of course it is used for burial, but that's not all. In the Temple, the old Temple, I mean, the real one, it was used to anoint the real High Priest. The Lord.

## **Some see him as a traitor**

People don't think much of my brother. One side sees him as a

traitor, and so does the other. Both sides see him as too afraid to commit himself, one way or the other. But this isn't fair to him. It's a lot more complicated than that. He's a lot more complicated than that. I should know, I'm Sister.

That's what he calls me, has done ever since he first started to speak. He thought it was my name. Not surprising really. All he heard when he was young was 'Go with your sister. Listen to your sister. Do what your sister tells you'. Even other people use it now, in the family and out.

## **He has to be true to himself**

I know Nicodemus. He has to be true to what he believes, but sometimes he doesn't know what he believes. He can see both sides of things. He has to grind it down small and smaller until he can be sure. And there was no way he was going to be sure about Jesus, not straightaway.

We walked back together, pretence dropped. We'd too much to talk about to waste time. We always do talk things through. He respects me – all those times he was told to 'Listen to your sister' left their mark on him. We don't tell that to other people. Most people are uneasy with women talking about things that really matter, having an opinion, and most of all, knowing what they are talking about. Not Nicodemus though. Especially not Nicodemus. He says he'd never

be able to make up his mind about things without talking things through with me. And it's true.

'What do you think?' I asked him as we walked home.

'I don't know' he said predictably 'He knows about it. About the First Temple. About being born again. And he knows that I know. And he knows it's dangerous to know it.' He stopped, puzzled with himself, sure I would know what he meant. I did.

'Does he believe in it?'

'Oh yes' he said, suddenly, briefly, sure. 'That doesn't mean he's right though. Just that he believes he's right.'

'But if he is – if others follow him –'

### To have angels again

And they did of course. For a while it looked as though the impossible would happen, and the old ways would come back. Not all of them, all of them would probably not be a good idea. But to have angels again . . . To have the Lady Wisdom home from her exile, back with us, so we weren't stumbling about without her to guide us.


'Nicodemus' I said, stopping so suddenly that he walked into me, 'he said that he was telling us what he had seen and done. And if he's right, think what it would mean.'

'If he's right' said my brother, but his voice was thin and distant as a mosquito in the next house. I was standing on the threshold of a doorway I had not dared to dream would open in my lifetime. On the other side strange and strangely familiar beings were moving, scattering light like sun on poured water, speaking words I couldn't quite hear, beckoning to me . . . I could go home to a place I had never been in my life and knew better than I knew the place where I was born. If Jesus was right, I could follow him there.

### Nicodemus made his decision

I can't say that Nicodemus was ever completely sure. It's not in his nature. He thought it was probably too good to be true. But oddly, when it seemed proved that it was too good to be true, Nicodemus made his decision. He stepped out of the shadows, out of the crowd. He went in public with Joseph from Arimathea and gave the broken

body decent burial. He wouldn't let me go with them, he said it wasn't safe for me but we both knew we had gone beyond that.

No night could hide us now. Not any more. 

### NOTES

'Sister's Story' (John 3: 1 – 17) was the reading for the day at Axbridge Parish Church – where Sue is a Reader – on March 16th, Lent 2.

The image of Nicodemus (*opposite left*) is a detail from 'The Dead Christ Mourned by Nicodemus and Two Angels' (c 1500) by Filippino Lippi.

### About Sue Latimer

I have been writing for years and have had some work published, but not one of my Spoken Stories. I call them this as I occasionally use them in lieu of sermons. I write them for two reasons; they make a point better than a sermon can – I have a very good precedent for that – and people enjoy them. I have written some simply because they insisted on being written, even though I had no sermon looming: they have a life of their own.

About me; I am 69, I live in Axbridge in Somerset with my Mother and an elderly dachshund. I have been a Reader in the Church of England for 14 years, and a Duty Chaplain in Wells Cathedral for eight years. Partly because of those earrings (*see photo*) I got into a TV film about cathedrals last year.

I have an unusual history which includes drug addiction, so all of this feels faintly astonishing. I have been in recovery for 31 years so it is walking about the world proof that there is life after addiction. I got into recovery by going into a treatment centre which teaches the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a spiritual programme with no named God so that anyone can join, all you have to accept is a Higher Power.

I can't say I was struck Christian and cured, as I was already a Christian and even went to church. It is just possible to be an addict and follow Christ – although probably it would be more accurate to say that Christ followed me and into some very dark places. My relationship with God has obviously gone through some strange stages, but I suspect God can cope with that.