

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

Date: March 1, 2026

Location: Zion – Colby, WI

Old Testament: Genesis 12:1–9

Epistle Reading: Romans 4:1–8, 13–17

Gospel Reading: John 3:1–17



Sermon Series: Hope in the Dark

Sermon Title: When Doubt Overwhelms You

Sermon Text: John 3:1–17

Hymns:

LSB 427 – In the Cross of Christ I Glory (v.1,4)

LSB 439 – O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken (v. 4)

LSB 421 – Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing

LSB 425 – When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (v.1,4)

Distribution:

LSB 442 – All Glory, Laud, and Honor

LSB 456 – Were You There

LSB 435 – Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain

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Text: John 3:1–17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his 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 in order that the world might be saved through him.”

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Grace and mercy I pray for you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Opening – Where We Left Off

Last Sunday we stood in the strong wilderness, where temptation pressed in and God's Word alone sustained life. We looked for answers that didn't come. Lent began with the unsettling experience of standing on promises rather than answers.



That not really anything new. The prophet Habakkuk stood in that same place about 630 years before Jesus walked the earth. He trusted God's promises but still cried out, "How long, O Lord?"¹ Faith had not failed. Life had simply become confusing. This week the questions remain but setting changes. The wilderness gives way to a quiet room as questions rise.

I. Doubt Comes Quietly, Often at Night



Nicodemus enters our sphere of vision with impressive credentials. He is a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, one called The teacher of Israel. He knows the Scriptures and the traditions. He comes to Jesus at night. Darkness allows questions to be asked quietly. He has a reputation to maintain. He's being careful. "Rabbi, we know..."²

Doubt often looks like that, doesn't it? It sounds thoughtful. It can even sound respectful. Still it lingers quietly. The religious rigor even of one such as Nicodemus doesn't guarantee clarity. Beneath it all lies a desire to steady ourselves by our own: effort, knowledge, or control. Faithfulness measured by self-effort cannot steady a wondering heart.

II. Jesus Does Not Scold the Doubter

Jesus addresses Nicodemus and speaks words that cuts straight to the heart.

Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.³

New birth from above is required. Human effort cannot climb into God's kingdom. Nicodemus asks, "How can these things be?"⁴ We confess it in the Catechism:

By our own reason or strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him.⁵

Habakkuk asks the same kind of thing. He stands before God with questions he cannot yet answer, resisting the temptation to give up or walk away. He waits on God to answer.



- 1 Habakkuk 1:2
- 2 John 3:2
- 3 John 3:3
- 4 John 3:9
- 5 Small Catechism, Third Article

III. Faith Rests on Promise, Not Understanding

Jesus answers confusion with promise.

“For God so loved the world...
The Son came not to condemn...”⁶”

Our hearts want assurance in outcomes we can measure, but sometimes God gives assurance in a promise we can only receive. Habakkuk is given a promise without explanation: “The righteous shall live by faith.”⁷ Faith lives on the Word God has spoken.



IV. Christ Steps Into Our Night

Jesus speaks of being “lifted up,” pointing to the cross.⁸ That ultimately is God’s answer to every “Why?” The cross is the final punctuation for every answer from God. We just sang that in verse 4.

*The Shepherd dies for sheep
that loved to wander;
The Master pays the debt
His servants owe Him.*

If you want to know if Jesus cares, if you want to know if He listens, remember how Jesus stepped into our darkness, carrying our doubt, fear, and mess, and gave back forgiveness, life, and salvation. Weak faith still faith that receives a Savior strong to save.

Conclusion – Holding the Light Until Morning


You need to know doubt receives no condemnation from God. Habakkuk shows us faith that doubts and waits. Nicodemus shows us faith that doubts and asks. Admitting doubt is just being honest to God. Jesus carries our doubt to the cross and gives back life through His Holy Word, Holy Supper and Holy Baptism, where He meets us again and again.




God calls us to return, to remain, to listen again. That can be something that will wear you out. When Satan’s whispers keep taunting, when life’s trials keep coming. Next Sunday we’ll see how to deal with those times *When You’re Worn Out*. You will see Jesus meets the weary and warn out with living water.

Come and see. Amen.

- 6 John 3:16–17
- 7 Habakkuk 2:4
- 8 John 3:14–15



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