

**Testimony for the Communion for Guildford at St Mary's
on Sunday 18 August 2019 at 10.30am**

How do we respond to God's grace? Abraham put his trust in God and followed God's call to journey on, a kind of pilgrimage of trust and faith. Nicodemus came at night to enquire and to debate with Jesus the meaning of God's love. I would like us to see both responses as having integrity.

Perhaps you will permit to tell you something of my own pilgrimage of faith and my response to God's love. It resembles Nicodemus' experience much more than Abraham's.

When I was a young man working abroad in the Pacific I met peoples who had a deep Christian faith, albeit a bit muddled up with their old beliefs in ancestor worship, before the missionaries arrived.

It was strange and challenging, particularly as my own spiritual life was being radically challenged by living on the sea. For the first time I was encountering and enduring a wilderness. The strength and force, the violence and beauty of the sea demand an understanding. Being there you cannot escape the mystery and power of God's creation.

At the end of my time in the Pacific I travelled back home slowly through Asia. I saw multitudes of the world's poor, creating lives of order and meaning through different forms of religious belief. I was impressed, if overwhelmed by this diversity. Then I journeyed through the Himalayas above Darjeeling. The beauty of that wilderness was so astonishing that I was convinced that such wonder and beauty must be God given, must be divinely created.

In my thirties I had an awakening of the sense and experience of married love, both given and received. It made me even more open to receive God's love. I sought to understand. Like Nicodemus I read the Bible intensively.

And in reading the gospels, as I believe Nicodemus did face to face, I found electrifying the radical compassion of Jesus and the profundity of his understanding of humankind. I was overwhelmed by God's love, his sacrifice of self, and his suffering for humanity's sake.

In the decade of my fifties I cared for my elderly parents and my aunts and uncle. I helped them through their frailty and in their final illnesses. I sat with them as they died. I saw their struggle and their courage, and when they died I did not believe their life had ended. I was convinced they were in God's love and care.

That is how I think. That is how I feel. That is my faith in Christ. All of you will have the story of your pilgrimage of faith to tell. To be in the fellowship of the faithful, contemplating Christ's passion and death and resurrection, and striving to live a life in imitation of Christ, is a profoundly moving experience.

A life lived in faith in Christ is infinitely richer than a life lived solely in reason. For sometimes our reason and our experience would tell us there is no hope. But a life lived in faith in Christ offers us hope for this life, and hope for eternal life in God.

Amen.