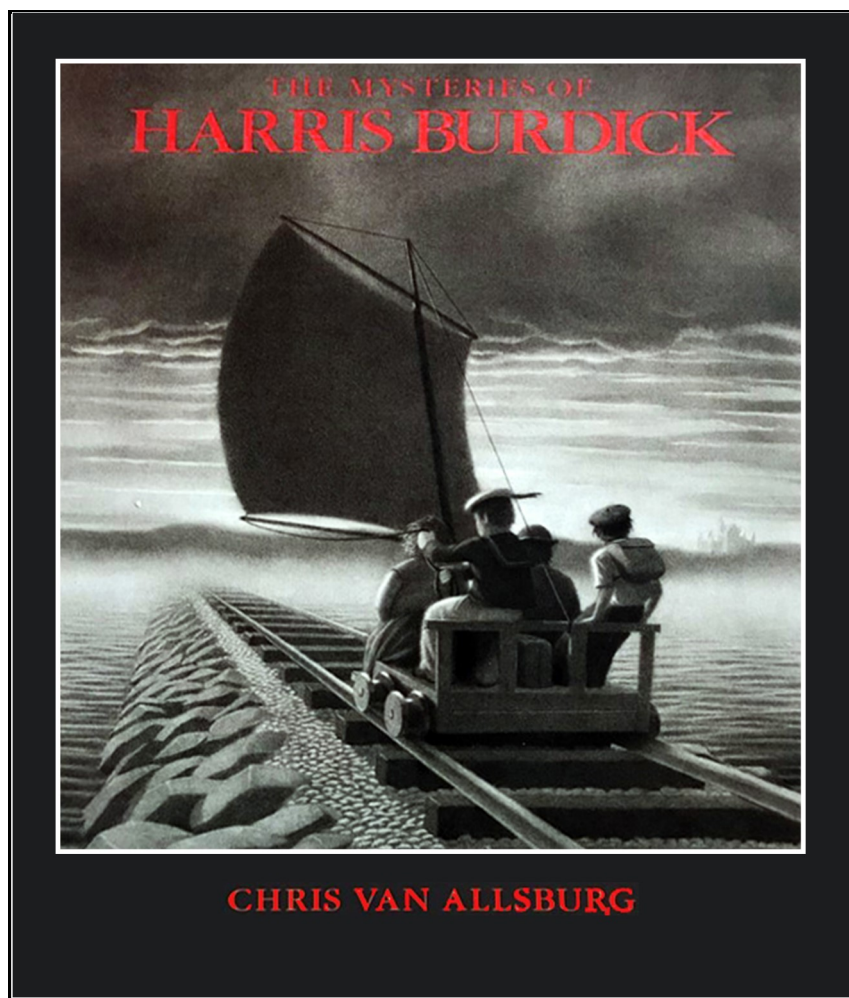


Living Grace

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT
CYCLE B

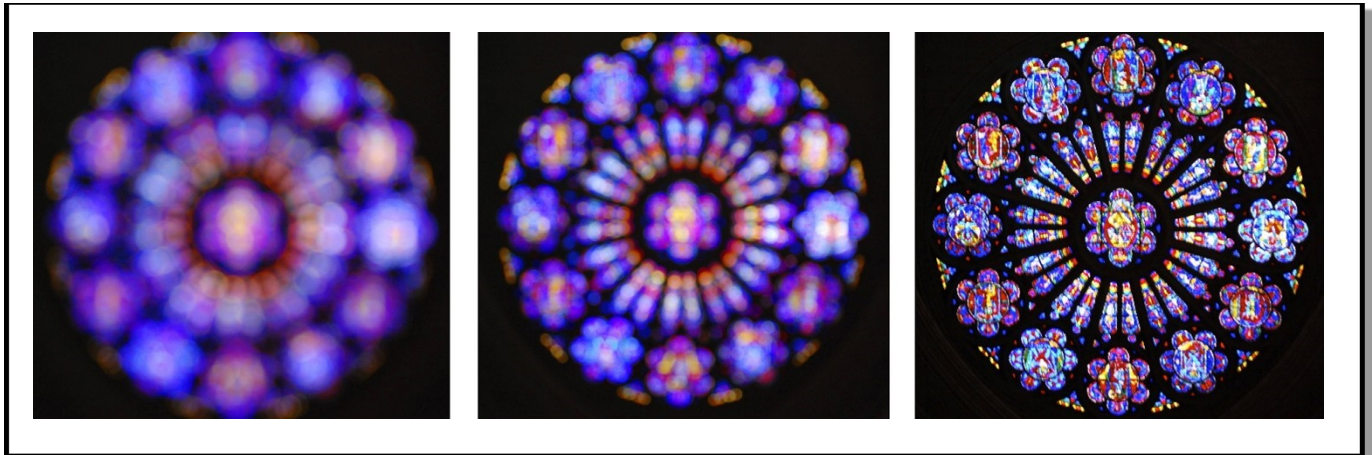
"IN OUR CHOICES WE CAN CHANGE DARKNESS INTO LIGHT"



The Mysteries of Harris Burdick consists of a series of images, ostensibly created by Harris Burdick, a man who has mysteriously disappeared. An encounter between a children's book editor named Peter Wenders and an author and illustrator named Harris Burdick, who says he has 14 stories that he has written; he has brought one picture from each story with a caption. He leaves with a promise to deliver the complete manuscripts if the editor chooses to buy the books. The next day, Burdick did not show up. Burdick had mysteriously disappeared. Over the years, Wenders tried to find out who Harris Burdick was, but he never found out. Burdick was never seen again, and the samples are all that remain of his supposed books. Readers are challenged to imagine their own stories based on the images for the books.

Art & Faith

EXPLORING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



COMING INTO FOCUS

*Stained Glass ~ "Church Triumphant" Rose Window
Washington National Cathedral ~ Washington DC, USA*

EXPLORING THE ART:

Completed in 1962, the center of "Church Triumphant" rose window features God the Father, robed in a mantle of brilliant gold, holding the Lamb of God in his left hand. Surrounding the throne are symbols of the Four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Radiating outward from the center are images of angels and saints. Instead of attempting an objective representation of St. John's vision of heaven, the window articulates its expression through a formal composition of symbolic imagery and a richly evocative modulation of color. The 24-foot window, designed by Joseph G. Reynolds Jr. and fabricated by Wilbur H. Burnham Studio, contains nearly 10,000 piece of hand-blown glass.

CAPTURING INTENSE EMOTION

"The massive rose windows of the medieval Gothic cathedrals were not only marvels of engineering and artistry; they were also symbols of the well-ordered soul. The pilgrim coming to the cathedral for spiritual enlightenment would be encouraged to meditate upon the rose of light and color in order to be drawn into mystical conformity with it. What would he or she see? At the center of every rose window is a depiction of Christ (even when Mary seems to be the focus, she is carrying the Christ child on her lap), and then wheeling around him in lyrical and harmonious patterns are the hundreds of medallions, each depicting a saint or a scene from scripture. The message of the window is clear: When one's life is centered on Christ, all the energies, aspirations, and powers of the soul fall into a beautiful and satisfying pattern. And by implication, whenever something other than Christ—money, sex, success, adulation—fills the center, the soul falls into disharmony. Jesus expressed this same idea when he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and the rest will be given unto you" (Mt 6:33). When the divine is consciously acknowledged as the ground and organizing center of one's existence, something like wholeness or holiness is the result. Don't live your life on the rim of the circle, but rather at the center. Focus on that reliable, unchanging point where Christ resides." ~ Bishop Robert Barron

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



"Abide in Me" by Vicki Shuck, Esperanza

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read aloud video link:

THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK

By Chris Van Allsburg

Bonus video for detailed illustrations:

[Click Here](#)

Sunday Gospel

JOHN 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the verdict,
that the light came into the world,
but people preferred darkness to light,
because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light
and does not come toward the light,
so that his works might not be exposed.

But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

THROUGH GOD'S LOVE, WE HAVE THE CHOICE TO FOLLOW IN THE WAY OF JESUS AND BECOME LIGHT.

In this very famous gospel story, Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night. This gives them an opportunity to have a private conversation which isn't possible during the day given the growing crowds around Jesus. In this context it is "safe" for Nicodemus to approach Jesus and open his mind and heart to grow in understanding of who Jesus really is. Nicodemus comes to Jesus alone. Nicodemus is a religious leader of the opposition against Jesus, thus to be seen with Jesus would be very detrimental to Nicodemus and his "career".

We all must at some point in our lives stand alone with Jesus to choose him or not. This choice to "believe" in Jesus is one that requires reception on our part as individuals. Our parents, friends, and pastors can lead us to an encounter with Jesus. But like Nicodemus, we must reach out on our own to receive God's love in our hearts. It is through Jesus that we become people of "the light". Once we receive God's love, God's light grows within us, and we then become light-bearers for others. We shine out in contrast to the darkness (condemnation) of the "ways of the world". The world is transformed through us becoming bearers of God's light and love. Paul in Philippians writes, "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." (Phil. 2:14) As we shine like stars in the darkness as people of the way, we shine of faith, hope, and love.

Light is what it is all about here. When we live our lives in the light we have nothing to hide. That is what the essence of Christian freedom is all about. Only those with something to hide prefer the darkness. Jesus - as our way, our truth, and our life - leads us into growing light. When we really "get it" we become filled in such a way that we want to share it with others. But it's up to them to receive it - it is also their choice. We can encourage them, as Jesus does Nicodemus, to be open to God's grace, to "believe and receive", the Spirit of Jesus. For any of us, our lives can become living in the shadows, like Nicodemus, hiding in the darkness. It's all up to us, a simple action, yet a choice with profound consequences, for our own lives and for the time and world we live in.

The Mysteries of Harris Burdick offers a very unique opportunity to use our imaginations in regard to the choices people are offered each day. In all situations big and small, our choices are very powerful in affecting the outcome of our daily lives and the lives of those we love. The hope in this story, and that of Nicodemus, is that our youth might learn of their significance in this world and the difference their choices can make. When they choose to believe in Jesus, what a difference it makes, and not just for our own lives.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: How do you make choices every day? What are some examples? Do you make your choices with awareness, or do you just let life happen? How does becoming aware of the significance of each moment and the power of your choices make a difference?

THE CHILDRENS' STORY: In the stories in *The Mystery of Harris Burdick* can they be stories with outcomes of darkness or light? What determines the outcome?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark, why do you think that was? What would have happened if people saw them together during the day? Would Nicodemus been free to make his own choice during the day? How as they meet in the dark does Jesus offer to Nicodemus the path to the light? What choice does Nicodemus have before him, to follow his peers or to follow his heart being stirred by the truth and light in Jesus? Write the ending for Nicodemus; 1) he chooses the light and to believe as Jesus offers 2) he follows the crowd and becomes part of the group of religious leaders that condemn Jesus to death. Can religious leaders get it right and stay in the light, and sometimes like all of us, can they too get it wrong and get lost in the dark? Is knowing all the rule enough? How does choice make the difference?

Jesus asks Nicodemus to believe and to come into the light? How are you being offered the same question today?

Biblical Background

JOHN 3:14-21

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: Jesus is camping in the Garden of Gethsemane, the favored location for pilgrims from Galilee to gather during the three annual pilgrimage feasts. It is not really a garden but rather a grove of olive trees that provides shelter from the elements. This location is just to the east of Jerusalem; across the Kidron Valley. Each evening breezes increase from the west to the east as the moist cool air of the Mediterranean coast is drawn up to Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley and into the deserts beyond Jericho. These breezes are a blessing and are welcomed each afternoon. This is the source of the wind that Jesus notices moving through the branches of the olive trees. This location is perfect for a private conversation with a friend.

TERMS: *Son of Man* In David 7:13, this term refers to any human male. The meaning changes and becomes a Messianic title when the "son of man" in the vision of Daniel is given authority to rule over a kingdom that will have no end. Only God's Messiah could rule forever. When Jesus uses this title for himself, it is a clear indication that he is revealing himself as the Messiah promised to Israel.

Loved As in "God so loved the world..." In the Bible the word "love" connotes the idea of social attachment as well as emotive connection. When you love in this Biblical sense, you are attached to one another. God is attached to us, and we are attached to God. We are all within the family of God. God is so attached (so in love) with his creation and creatures, that He sent his only son to save, to make whole, and to restore.

Light/darkness Jesus compares the light of day with the darkness of the night. This comparison is amplified by the darkness of the olive grove that night. The thick branches block any light from reaching the orchard floor. Light effectively dispels the darkness and sends it fleeing away. That is how the Gospel message will act as an agent of light in the world - it will dispel the darkness.

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Nicodemus is a Jewish religious leader who is sympathetic to Jesus. Otherwise he would not have been granted an opportunity to speak with Jesus face to face in the private confines of this olive grove. He is no coward, afraid of being seen with Jesus by day. Personal and prolonged conversations were only possible in the evenings when the large crowds of the day had returned home. Nicodemus honors Jesus by calling him Israel's teacher. This is a title of great honor. Nicodemus chooses to defend Jesus in his trial later in the Gospel. He is a good man. Nicodemus asks Jesus, "How can a man enter his mother's womb again" not because he wonders if Jesus knows how the birth process works, but rather to encourage Jesus to continue his teaching. It is his way of saying to Jesus, "yes, but tell me more, please elaborate".

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: Jesus compares his plan to that of Moses who in (Numbers 21:8-9) "lifted up a serpent in the desert". The plague that the Israelites faced then was brought on by the bite of deadly viper when the stricken Israelites looked at the image of the serpent lifted up on a pole they recovered. They should have died but they were able to conquer death. Jesus will also be "lifted up" off the ground at the site of his crucifixion. Our Gospel author reminds his readers that Jesus knows what his fate will be even in the very beginning of his public ministry.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Talk as a family about a situation in your family, school or community. How can your choice bring light into the situation? How can a different choice bring darkness? Reflect as a family on the power of choice in following Jesus in biblical times and today.

CHARACTER QUALITIES: LIGHT-BEARER
CHOICE

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Together do an experiment with darkness and light. Go in a room and turn off all the lights. Sit in the dark and then light a match. What do you see? What did you miss? How did you feel in the dark? What did the light change for you? Now go back and each hold a flashlight or candle as you walk into the darkened room. How is it a different experience? What difference does it make to be led by the light? Make a commitment to choose light this Lent, and share with family members how you are going to do so.