

“Both Darkness & Light”

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Exodus 14:19-31

Matthew 18:21-35

*And [the angel of God] came between the camp of the Egyptians
and the camp of Israel;*

*and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these:
so that the one came not near the other all the night.* Exodus 14:20

Let us pray... O God,

Help us not to be afraid of the dark, but to be open to your forgiving grace,
and to let your glory shine through us.

Amen

This passage we heard from Exodus this morning is best told
using the King James Version of the Bible;

The King James Version translation was meant to be read aloud and
though other modern translations are more accurate,
they don't necessarily retain the poetry and beauty of the text –
especially this one...

It speaks of God – or rather the angel of God, as appearing to act with both
darkness and light simultaneously.

A cloud of darkness blocks the approach of the Egyptian army
while the children of Israel were comforted by its light – a night light!

I wonder how many of us here were afraid of the dark
growing up as small children?

I remember that – as a kid, I was comforted by looking for the hallway light
shining under my door.

I also remember a certain kind of ‘night light’ made out of clear plastic,
triangular and rounded, that my parents could just
plug into an outlet close to the floor.

I don't remember what I was afraid of about the dark,
but that just a little bit of light did the trick,
to calm me down to nod off to sleep.

This is a subject that Barbara Brown Taylor has written about in her latest book –
Learning to Walk In The Dark and she begins by looking at assumptions
we make about darkness that are usually negative,
like it is a place of danger or the unknown.

However, she pursues the idea that darkness is also the place of
self-discovery and spiritual development,
especially because it is the place of fear.

Willard, p.2

She explores this through various real life situations –
including one where she goes to a cave with experienced guides.
At one point she is told to go ahead and when she found a place
where she felt comfortable to stop, to then turn off her light.
Right before this she found a piece of rock on the ground
that glittered like it was filled with diamonds.
She picked it up and put it in her pack – then turned out the light...
It was utterly dark like the kind where
'you can't see your hand in front of your face.'

I was reminded of what I have read about the caves of Lascaux in France
with their ancient cave paintings of bison and elk –
and how they may have been used to help initiate cave people
the darkness of Mother Earth like a womb.
I am also reminded of Randy Robertson's talk here
about similar caves with paintings being not a place where cave people lived,
but where they came to worship.
He then made the connection with the catacombs of Rome
where the early Christians came to worship in secret and safety.
Later when Christianity finally became acceptable,
he showed us the paintings by Giotto that cover the walls
of the Scrovegni Chapel in Italy, which tell the life-story of Christ.
It just so happens that Randy Robertson will be hosting Barbara Brown Taylor
at a week-long retreat in Winter Park this coming January.

Jesus was not someone who was afraid of the dark;
Right after the awe-inspiring vision of Heaven opened at his baptism,
the Holy Spirit pushes him out into the desert,
a place without shelter from sun or wind.
There, he confronts his worst fears and learns not only to how to choose the good
but also to speak for himself.
He comes out of that formative event empowered
to help others confront their dark side and find healing.
Forgiveness is the most important tool he has given us
for this work of self-discovery and spiritual development...

As people, there is a mix of both darkness and light within us
and we run into trouble when we try to separate the two,
thinking we can be only one or the other.
Only God can be 'good' that way – only God is beyond opposites,
Not even 'nothing at all' can be the opposite of God.
Only God is perfect, but we need forgiveness – to forgive ourselves and others,
to enter the dark territory of our lives and
find the light that is within us, too.

Willard, p.3

Not everybody is ready or even willing to do this work,
and Jesus does not seem to waste much time with those who
have made up their mind and hardened their hearts.
He used parables like young people today use rap music –
Jesus sought to enlighten the insiders to keep them in
and confuse the outsiders to keep them out
until they made the effort to turn around and venture into new territory.
We are a mix of light and dark – and need both to help us make sense of life,
to help us learn and to grow as human beings,
to gain self-knowledge and to accept others on their own journey.

What we find is grace and glory –and to borrow from something Picasso said,
grace is about those moments of insight that help us find
the meaning of our lives through the gifts we have been given from God;
and glory is in finding ways to give those gifts away by putting them to use
just like God through Christ...

When, Barbara Brown Taylor came back from exploring the cave,
she found that piece of rock again, in the bottom of her pack.
However, she was disappointed to see it was only a chunk of gravel –
but then she got an idea and turned out the lights.
She turned on a penlight and suddenly, that little chunk of gravel lit up
like a midnight sky in the country, full of stars...

I'll close with this quote from another spiritual author, Marianne Williamson:

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.*

We ask ourselves,

'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?'

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking

so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,

we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,

our presence automatically liberates others."

– Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"*

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17297.Marianne_Williamson

Amen

*Though the language of the King James Version may sound old-fashioned,
it was meant to be read aloud and today's lesson from Exodus 14:19-31
is one of the most eloquent and dramatic examples...*

- [19] And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel,
removed and went behind them;
and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face,
and stood behind them:
- [20] And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel;
and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these:
so that the one came not near the other all the night.
- [21] And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea;
and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night,
and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.
- [22] And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground:
and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.
- [23] And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea,
even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.
- [24] And it came to pass, that in the morning watch
the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire
and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,
- [25] And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily:
so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel;
for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.
- [26] And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea,
that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians,
upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.
- [27] And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea,
and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared;
and the Egyptians fled against it;
and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.
- [28] And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen,
and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them;
there remained not so much as one of them.
- [29] But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea;
and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.
- [30] Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians;
and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.
- [31] And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians:
and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.

Matthew 18:21-35[CEB]

[21] Then Peter said to Jesus,

“Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?”

[22] Jesus said,

“Not just seven times,
but rather as many as seventy-seven times.

[23] Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like
a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

[24] When he began to settle accounts,
they brought to him a servant who owed him ten thousand bags of gold.

[25] Because the servant didn't have enough to pay it back,
the master ordered that he should be sold,
along with his wife and children and everything he had,
and that the proceeds should be used as payment.

[26] But the servant fell down, kneeled before him, and said,
'Please, be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.'

[27] The master had compassion on that servant, released him,
and forgave the loan.

[28] “When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants
who owed him one hundred coins.

He grabbed him around the throat and said,
'Pay me back what you owe me.'

[29] “Then his fellow servant fell down and begged him,
'Be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.'

[30] But he refused.

Instead, he threw him into prison until he paid back his debt.

[31] “When his fellow servants saw what happened, they were deeply offended.
They came and told their master all that happened.

[32] His master called the first servant and said,
'You wicked servant!

I forgave you all that debt because you appealed to me.

[33] Shouldn't you also have mercy on your fellow servant,
just as I had mercy on you?’

[34] His master was furious and handed him over to the guard
responsible for punishing prisoners, until he had paid the whole debt.

[35] “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you
if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”