

“The Darkness Can Never Stop the Light!”

Steve Ramer
March 17, 2019

Scripture

John 1 and Psalms 27

John 1:1 In the beginning there was the Divine Word and Wisdom. The Divine Word and Wisdom was there with God, and it was what God was. 2 It was there with God from the beginning. 3 Everything came to be by means of it; nothing that exists came to be without its agency. In it was life, and this life was the light of all humanity. 5 Light was shining in the darkness, and the darkness did not master it. 6 There appeared a man sent from God named John. 7 He came to testify - to testify to the light - so everyone would believe through him. 8 He was not the light; he came only to attest to the light. 9 Genuine light - the kind that provides light for everyone - was coming into the world. 10 Although it was in the world, and the world came about through its agency; the world did not recognize it... 12 But to all who did embrace it, to those who believed in it, it gave the right to become children of God... (Scholar's Version)

Psalm 27:1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. 3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident... 13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. 14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! (NRSV)

Sermon

So how many of you here are afraid of the Dark?
I can still remember vividly the moment that,
as a child, I became afraid of the dark!
I must have been only 3 or 4 and I was living with my aunties at the time.
My uncle, their brother, would also stay with us on and off.

One night I woke up and snuck into the den where he was watching TV.
It was probably some B rated sci-fi horror movie
about aliens from outer space?
Now I doubt I saw much of the movie but what I did manage to see
scared the bajeebers out of me.
And from that moment on I couldn't fall asleep
unless I was first tucked into bed with a night light left on.

Indeed there are plenty of real, as well as,
perceived things that can lurk in the shadows of night;
the boogie man, monsters under the bed,
predators on the prowl, criminals and yes, maybe.... even... aliens!
But we also know that the night can hold marvelous wonders as well!
At night much of the world's activity stops or slows down
just enough that we can begin to experience some real solitude.

Most of us stop and sleep during the night and in a matter of hours our body and mind are miraculously renewed and refreshed!

Now both of the passages we read this morning tell us emphatically to not be afraid of the dark! But that doesn't necessarily mean that there is nothing in the dark that can harm us.

And yes, there are many things that can harm us during night, but for that matter, there is plenty during the daytime as well. But if we focus our attention on the fact that God is with us and if we attend to that relationship then our fears will not take over.

This intimate presence and relationship, this source of wondrous love can and will overcome anything else. And if this loving presence can become our master, then nothing else; fear, greed or even hatred will be able to control our lives!

Now if John's introduction to his gospel sounds a bit familiar to the beginning of another book of the bible, it was likely intentional. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Our source is the same source that created everything! And if that is the case, then really, "what else should I be afraid of?" Before there was anything; water, earth, sea, or stars of night, There was something!

Technically, according to Genesis, there was: chaos, darkness, silence and most importantly, God. And when that Divine Energy and Word spoke into that chaotic and silent darkness, "Let there be light!," there was light! So you do not need to fear the silent, dark chaos of night. It has always been there and God's light always overcomes it!

Now I wonder, have you ever experienced the total absence of light? And if you haven't, can you imagine such a place? Of course we humans have done a remarkable job of eliminating just about any areas on this planet where such a condition could exist.

The only places barren of light that I can think of would be deep in a cave (I've been inside the Carlsbad Caverns) or at the bottom of the ocean (which I have not been). Or maybe under a pile of blankets? (Which I have covered under many times!)

For those who have been in such a dark place, how was it?
How did it feel to be engulfed in that utter darkness?
In a place so dark you couldn't see your hand two inches from your face?
Was it comforting? Hopeful? Happy?
Or did you feel alone, unnerved, maybe even a bit anxious?

Now most of us try to avoid the dark as much as possible.
Like when I was a child, we provide our children with night lights.
When we enter a dark room or building
the first thing we reach for is the light switch.

Of course we do, a little light can calm both our irrational fears
as well as some real dangers that might be hiding in the darkness.
Light can illuminate our way so we won't bump into
or trip over those things we cannot see.

But have you ever sat purposely alone in the dark?
Or have you ever entered a dark room
and not turned on the lights for a few minutes?
If you have, you realize your eyes do begin to adjust to the light
that you may not have realized was already present.

In only a few seconds, slowly and surely you begin to make out shapes
and objects and depending upon things like the status of the moon
or how close you are to your neighbor's flood lights,
you might, actually, be able to see quite well!
Well enough that you could, if you had to, make it across the room.

Darkness we know can also be used as a metaphor
describing an emotional, intellectual or a spiritual condition.

We also add superlatives to it, like; total, "deep" and "utter."
Since there are places and situations that can be darker than others!
And regardless if we admit it or not, every one of us,
shares the common experience that we all go through dark times!

At one time or another we will find ourselves in a dark place of emotional
or spiritual paralysis where we feel as if we cannot go on.
Events beyond our control, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a home,
betrayal by a friend, or the loss of a job can send us into despair.

But what matters more than either the depth or the source
of our darkness is how we choose to respond to it.
Too often we merely see our darkness as situational
or as just one more problem to be solved!

We just need to simply switch on the lights quicker
and just try harder to push back at the fears!
Or we keep busy and try to ignore it and it will go away.

And sometimes it does go away, but only to come back even stronger.
And just like we do not choose the time and places of our disappointments
and despair we cannot simply, by force of will, overcome it!

Indeed sometimes we must learn that the darkness can be our friend.
Mystics, from nearly all of the world's religious traditions,
counsel that it is exactly in those places of brokenness,
poverty or powerlessness, that one can begin to find hope.

And that it is in the silence and the emptiness brought on by the night
that we actually become more open to God's healing love.
According to the wise, it is often in those times of sadnesses
and pain that we find a better understanding of things.

Now of course fear, anxiety, and darkness, are certainly not the best places
for us to set up long term residency, but they can become
springboards towards spiritual maturity!

But remember this, before words can be truly heard there is often silence.
And prior to a deep abiding joy there are often many tears.
And in order for the light to pierce the darkness,
well... it has to be dark - silly!

We know that the strongest roots actual have to push through harder soil.
And typically life only becomes more precious
after we have faced squarely the alternatives.

So, my sisters and brothers, I beg of you, do not forget,
that when you do find yourself afraid in the dark;
stop, look and listen because there is probably
more light present than you at first may have realized.

And remember that in those dark times, that surely come to us all,
where we stumble about in our anxiety and fear, we are not alone,
God, the Divine speaker of light, is also there with us!

The Genuine light cannot be quenched by any form of darkness!
The light of God, my friends, always shines an ain't nobody
or nothin ever gonna be able to flick off that switch!