

Sermon for Jan. 31, 2021 by Pastor Hanberry

Ser21-5 Living with God in the Dark Tucc

There is the story of a man who too frequently wakes up in the middle of the night and cannot go back to sleep. The man says that when this happens, he turns and turns over and over in the bed till the bed sheets and blankets are wrapped around him like a full body bandage. One night his wife tried to get some of the covers back, yanking at them and telling her husband to go back to sleep.

I can't he whispered. "I think it's God that's bothering me." "Well, God's not bothering me," she said, "so get up and pray, but do it somewhere else."

We wake up in the middle of the night, unable to go back to sleep, and we can be in for a real workout. (BBT) Suddenly waking in the middle of the night can, in the extreme, bring us to a state of panic. This experience can be very frustrating. Our bed is supposed to be a place of rest and peace...not panic and anxiety and worry. its also the place where you face your nearness or farness from God. That's how Barbara Brown Taylor experiences the trouble the night can bring. In her book, Learning to Walk in the Dark, She says,

"whether you are in pain or not, whether you are an anxious person--- even, I think, whether you are a religious person or not===a bed is where you come face-to-face with what really matters because it is too dark for most of your usual, (defensive) distractions to work. You can turn on the lights if you want, but they are artificial. The most they can do is postpone your encounter with what really matters. They --- the lights --- cannot save you from that reckoning forever."

So maybe there is the real, dark night of the soul moment when God is most desiring of you...wanting you to open yourself to the transforming power of a loving God, especially loving in the time and place when you are the most vulnerable.

In our story in Mark, chapter 1, we don't find anyone in bed in the middle of the night. No, we find Jesus and the four disciples he's called so far in a meeting place on the Sabbath in Capernaum. And there's a man there with an "unclean spirit." The unclean spirit is acting out so much that Jesus "shuts him up" and gets him out this man's body. Not a pretty sight.

In our middle of the night dark night of the soul, would that Jesus might show up and "shut up" the panic and anxiety so that we can go back to sleep. Jesus might do that for us, but more often than not I think Jesus wants us to do the work of quieting our panic (or is it fair to suggest quieting our "unclean spirit.") The story says in verses 27-28: *27-28 "Everyone there was spellbound, buzzing with curiosity. 'What's going on here? A new teaching that does what it says? He shuts up defiling, demonic spirits and tells them to get lost!' News of this traveled fast and was soon all over Galilee."*

You know, quite possibly, Jesus is seen as the no. 1 Sleep specialist...and Everyone wants Jesus to "shut up" their "demonic" or we might soften the demonic to troubled, weary souls in the night. I guess in all this I am trying to equate darkness with "anything that scares me." BBT helps me say this a little better. She says for her, *"for now, it is enough to say that 'darkness' is shorthand for anything that scares me—that I want no part of—either because I am sure that I do not have the resources to survive it or because I do not want to find out."*

Then BBT says this rather radical thing: *"If I had my way, I would eliminate everything from chronic back pain to the fear of the devil from my life and the lives of those I love—if I could just find the right night-lights to leave on."*

Christian teaching seems to be obsessed with "dividing reality into opposed pairs: good/evil; church/world; spirit/flesh; sacred/profane; or light/dark. You can see that the one-half sides closer to God and the other half

farther away from God. But as one who seeks to live closer to God's side of these pairs (the God revealed to us by Jesus) then we can live in the tensions between the two of these; good/evil or light/dark. Light and dark go together. Light has no meaning without the dark. My friends as we seek to live into these tensions of our lives, we will find a sense of hope and security as we allow the dark to teach us who God is, really; who God is for us in the day and the night. May it be so for you and for me. Amen

Lucy Brady: I have a story about finding God in the dark.

I began to lose my sight when I was around 48. the Eye Dr. examined and reminded me about the pathological myopia I was born with. This began four and a half years of three-month visits with the same result, "Everything looks good."

For me everything kept changing. I could no longer drive and had many frustrations adjusting, I am a visual learner so I continued to try to read and write one day. I was writing in my journal. It was a long "what if" and "How will I?" prayer.

I got up from my desk and looked through a stack of paper. I held one piece close to my eyes and read this:

Do not fear what may happen tomorrow.

The same loving God who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow.

God will either shield you from suffering

or give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace then, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

-Frances DeSales

To this day, I have no idea where that paper came from.

As it turned out, I had cataracts and once I had surgery, my sight was restored.

I am losing my sight again and I am not as anxious this time.

Blessings as you walk this valley of sorrow even as you continue to minister to us!

Lucy