

**Meditation: Both/And**

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**Scripture: Gen 1:1-10; Luke 23:1-49**

As the Protestant Reformation made its way from Wittenberg, Germany in 1517 throughout Europe and eventually the world, people have held for ages that at that time a clear line was drawn between those who followed the Pope and Rome and those who followed Lutheran thinking. New followers of the protestant movement believed the Catholic church to have been misguided, though not entirely wrong, in their approach to the scriptures and worship—the indulgences and what was seen as idol worship of the Catholic church were one sticking point and led to some of the most destructive moments for churches throughout England and other places, but most of the challenges revolved around the idea that individuals did not need the Catholic pope and his priests to mediate their understanding of scripture, receive spiritual guidance, and access salvation.

And yet, for all the changes of the era and all that would occur in the intermediating centuries between then and now, to say that there is clearly an either/or to Christianity—that is, that you either are Roman Catholic or you are Protestant, is a silly notion when you think about it. It is not so simple as one way or the other. In many places of our Christian spirituality, we are much more both/and, than either or. No, you don't need to go through a priest to confess to God, we don't exclude folks from Christ's table, and we don't pray through canonized saints of the church, or say the rosary. But we still take communion, follow relatively formal liturgies in our worship, and rely pretty heavily on candles and other symbols to light the way in our regular spiritual practice. Many protestants who go to seminary

will learn, like I did, that our faith tradition is not a tradition made of wholly new cloth, but was really founded on a rich theological and liturgical tradition that, though we may disagree on some key points, is not so alien to our own. If we are honest, we who are protestant can admit that our tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition are not so vert far apart. We both care deeply about the teachings of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, believe in a Triune God through whom we receive salvation, and hold at our core that caring for the least of these is essential.

And yet, for all that focus on the light of the world, throughout this Lenten season, we have spent a great deal of time meditating on the darkness. We've talked about the darkness in its metaphorical as well as its physical manifestations using the work of Barbara Brown Taylor as our guide. We've talked about the ways in which scripture seems to draw clear distinctions between the light and the dark, equating one with good and the other with evil. And yet we have visited bible stories in which the darkness was absolutely essential for the meaning of the text. God's reflection to Abraham on his descendants outnumbering the stars in the sky wouldn't be possible in the day. The pillar of cloud and fire that guided Moses through the wilderness wouldn't have been necessary without the day and the night. We've talked about the ways in which we characterize our difficult moments and challenging times as "dark," and noted how that darkness sometimes teaches us things we could never have learned without it. We've discussed caves being both scary places of mystery, and remarked on the ways in which from those same caves came both the birth and resurrection of our Lord. And we've found it noteworthy that those Dark

Nights of the Soul are necessary sometimes for the growth and health of our relationship with God.

Just as many a protestant seminarians will learn, we are not exclusively Roman Catholic or Protestant, but hold some practices and beliefs that are both Catholic and Protestant, so we have learned our faith as well our lives are not either/or phenomena, but are really both/and. The meaning of using *Learning to Walk in the Dark* to help us rethink darkness wasn't to lift darkness over light, but to point out the significance of both light and dark in our lives and faith. The entire point is that it's not either/or. It's not either light or dark, it's *both* light *and* dark. Both the sun and the moon. Both the birth and the death.

How much are we shutting out because we think everything must be a choice between one side or another? There is not a clearly defined distinction between the day and the night; there are shades of night as the sun dawns and shades of day as the sun sets. When we practice our faith in the environment of either/or, we miss so much of the richness and beauty of our historical traditions.

In our scriptures today, we have a prime example of the both/and of faith, of life, of spirituality. We have birth and death, creation and extinction, joy and sorrow, belief and doubt, day and night, light and darkness. None of these exist without the others. God didn't just call the light of creation good, God also called the darkness that already existed good. When people ask me why bad things happen—well, I usually begin with “No one knows precisely why bad things happen,”—but then I often continue with the very fact that we are never promised only happy times in life, we are never

promised just comfort and joy. But we are *also* promised that. That in all our misery and sorrow, we will also find joy and rest for our souls. There will be hard times, and there will be easy ones, too. There will be heartbreak, yes, and there will be so much love, too. We see this both/and playing out even in the life of the church: some will leave, yes, and more will come. Some sermons will miss, and others will resonate so deeply that they will change our perspective or deepen your faith. Some hymns won't reach you and others will uplift your weary soul.

We came into worship today with the joy of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and we leave with the heavy weight of Jesus's last days on our hearts and minds. In this basket, I have a collection of masonry nails, which are blunt at the tip. When I say amen to conclude the sermon, you will come forward, drop your palm leaf at the foot of the cross, and, in exchange, take a nail. You will get your palm back, they will be at the back of the sanctuary on your way out. But you will take the nail home with you, and you will place in a spot that you see every day, so that throughout this Holy Week, you are able to meditate or think about what it is Jesus is about to do... what it is Jesus must go through for Easter Sunday to happen. In doing so, we are reminded that this week we find ourselves at a pivotal both/and moment: we want to rush to the joy of the resurrection, but we know well that even Jesus in the garden knew it was not either the crucifixion or the resurrection. For the resurrection to carry such meaning, it must be both/and. So let us cast off the either/ors. Let us shake off the dust of these false choices from our feet and embrace the God who is both/and or, as the Apostle Paul wrote, let us hold fast to the one who is all in all. Amen.