

„... what if God creating light isn't a proclamation against darkness? What if it was a celebration of the canvas on which God created the cosmos? “

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The Wonders and Gifts of Holy Darkness

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the Earth, the Earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

What if, beloved, what if God created dark first? What if, instead of “Let there be light?” God said, “Let there be darkness?” I’m sure someone’s created some alternative reality in which this is true. But...what if? What if the recorder of this creation story missed a critical detail? What if God called the darkness good, too? At the very least, what if God creating light isn't a proclamation against darkness? What if it was a celebration of the canvas on which God created the cosmos? I ask this, Beloved, because I believe the value of darkness isn't to teach us to crave the light. God has given darkness its own inherent wonder and through it leaves us unique gifts.

The Church has tried to stuff so much meaning into these first verses of Genesis, that if we examine too closely, we will see in some places, the seams have burst. For example, we have decided that these verses tell us when creation was made, how, and in what order. We have even decided that these verses, which seem at points to contradict themselves, tell us what was - or wasn't - here when God began to create. Biblical scholarship, science, and reason suggest that we may be missing the point. These verses aren't designed to be a perfect proof of how all things came into being. To be clear: these verses do not tell us when the world was made. Any attempt to date the universe using the Bible is as easily disproved by the literary devices employed as by science. These verses aren't really here to tell us that after the creation of light was the creation of sky, then land, then the sun and moon and stars. These verses were written to respond to the creation stories the Hebrew people encountered in their conflicts and conversations with other cultures.

The ancient Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, which the Israelites likely encountered during exile, when scholars think this creation account was recorded — *Enuma Elish* is a story of chaos and violence, the world and its creatures eventually being created out of the corpses of warring gods. You can imagine the Israelites hearing the

story and saying, “Nope. YHWH is not like that,” before weaving this tale that showcases God’s intimacy with creation and desire to create an ordered cosmos where life could thrive.

An order that begins, presumably, in darkness. Yes, in the Bible there is plenty of darkness - a plague of darkness over Egypt, and the sun being blotted out in order to instill fear. By the time the New Testament is written, darkness becomes a metaphor for ignorance. But darkness is also symbolic of the deep and unfathomable mystery of God. Abraham and God have a moment - or a few moments - in the darkness of night. God graces the dreams of many biblical heroes. In the Exodus, God is present in the light of the pillar of fire *and* the darkness of the column of cloud.

It is a shame then, that this story’s beginning, where God creates light and separates it from the darkness has come to create a hierarchy where light is *preferred* over darkness. In the ways only humans can do, we stretch light and dark to become white and black, inside and out, us and them. We seem to confuse the Christian story with Star Wars - making the whole Christian journey about avoiding “the dark side.” This isn’t to say we should sin, but that we ought to wonder about the idea that darkness and blackness equals sin. There are a whole host of things that masquerade as the “light” but are simply human systems with the same tendency for sin. There are a whole host of things that we call “dark,” but which may yet leave us gifts when we encounter them. Furthermore, the idea that light equals good and dark equals bad is hurting the body of Christ. Because we’ve stretched and stretched and stretched that metaphor to include race, and then, somehow, we’ve just never found the time to dismantle that. And that’s wrong.

When I read this story, one thing that strikes me is God’s initial intimacy with the primordial darkness. When God began to create, Genesis says, a wind from God moved over the waters. God works in the darkness as well as the light. When God says “Let there be light,” it isn’t a condemnation of the darkness, but, perhaps, a bid for diversity. Perhaps it was God knowing the full expression of life in the cosmos God was creating would be both light and darkness, peace and anxiety, joy and sorrow, plenty and want, white and black and the whole technicolor spectrum of melanin, gay and straight and bi, cis and trans.

Like the ancient Hebrews, when we hear this story overloaded with meanings that suggest hierarchy, points systems, and power grabs. When we hear this story invoked for the sake of anti-intellectualism, anti-science, anti-art - I’m sure there are better terms for that, but bear with me. When we hear this story - or any Biblical story - invoked in a way to create enmity, we can join our voices with our ancestors, who when hearing the story of creation by violence said, “No. God is not like that.”

Let me be clear, especially in the wake of this week’s violence, especially when the Black Lives Matter protests were met with urges to just wait things out. Let me be clear. As Christians, through our baptisms, we have a clear and irrevocable call to be what my

mentor and bishop, the Right Rev. Marcus Lohrmann, said: we are called to be signs of and participants in God's in breaking reign. In the face of unrestrained violence, we are to be the hands that work for peace. In the face of injustice, we are to be those who work for fairness and equality. In the face of fear and distrust we are called to "believe more boldly still."

Amen.