

Friends of Silence

Vol. XXXV, No. 11

+ + + + +

December 2022

“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ Darkness gets a bad rap. In our collective imagination, nighttime brings shadows and obscures our vision. Against the vast dark, we feel our smallness, and possibly even our aloneness. So we light candles and gather around flames to keep the night at bay.

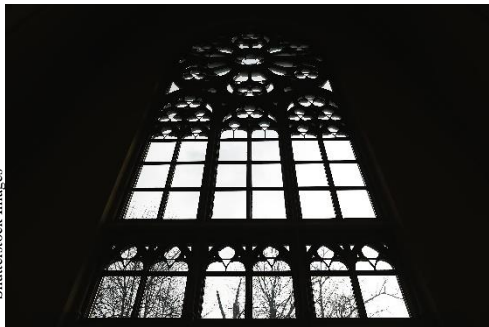
But just like the rest of us, Darkness has a complex personality. If you'll allow a metaphor inspired by my own childhood: sometimes Darkness is a Ford Country Squire station wagon conveying a family westward on a December highway well past bedtime. Oncoming headlights—like the infinite eyes of a never-ending caterpillar—shoot piercing gazes through the blackness. Pinprick stars gleam even brighter for the crisp winter night. But inside the wood-paneled vessel, all is warmth and breath: six voices belting out Christmas carols, six noses thawing while the heater kicks in, six spines tingling as cold's discomfort meets the holiday's electric anticipation.



Shutterstock Images

In other words, sometimes Darkness holds us and moves us. And always, it lets us see whatever shines with greater clarity.

This December, these are the gifts of the dark I'd love to wrap up and pass to each of you. Many good wishes for the holiday season and the coming new year! ~ Joy



Shutterstock Images

**To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.**

~ Wendell Berry, "To Know the Dark"
in *THE SELECTED POEMS OF WENDELL BERRY*

I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.

~ Sarah Williams, from "The Old Astronomer to His Pupil"
in *BEST LOVED POEMS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE*

We walked on. I could feel the cold, as if someone's icy hand was palm-down on my back. And my nose and the tops of my cheeks felt cold and hot at the same time... When you go owling you don't need words or warm or anything but hope. That's what Pa says. The kind of hope that flies on silent wings under a shining Owl Moon.

~ Jane Yolen in *OWL MOON*

To understand light you need first to have been buried in the deep-down dark.

~ Robert Macfarlane in *UNDERLAND*

**If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
And the light about me be night,"
Even the darkness is not dark to You,
The night dazzles as with the sun;
The darkness is a light to You.**

~ Nan Merrill, from her interpretation of "Psalm 139"
in *PRAYING THE PSALMS*

Dwarfed by the sky at night

These fearless mountains are nearly lost from sight

Track the hill with a harvest moon

Moving, shifting on across a winter sky

My thoughts drift away

An Illusion of light

Feel the rain in the air

Where the thin mist is hiding, shrouded

[I'm] there

~ Jenny Sturgeon, from the song "Air and Light"

On the first night God said: 'Let there be darkness.' And God separated light from dark; and in the dark, the land rested, the people slept, and the plants breathed, the world retreated. The first night.

And God said that it was Good.

On the second night God said: 'There will be conversations that happen in the dark that can't happen in the day.' The second night.

And God said that it was Good.

On the third night God said: 'Let there be things that can only be seen by night.' And God created stars and insects and luminescence. The third night.

And God said that it was Good.

On the fourth night God said: 'Some things that happen in the harsh light of day will be troubled. Let there be a time of rest to escape the raw light.' The fourth night.

And God said that it was Good.

On the fifth night, God said: "There will be people who will work by night, whose light will be silver, whose sleep will be by day and whose labour will be late.' And God put a softness at the heart of the darkness. The fifth night.

And God said that it was Good.

And on the sixth night God listened. And there were people working, and people crying, and people seeking shadow, and people telling secrets, and people aching for company. There were people aching for space and people aching for solace. And God hoped that they'd survive. And God made twilight, and shafts of green to hang from the dark skies, small comforts to accompany the lonely, the joyous, the needy and the needed. The sixth night.

And God said that it was Good.

And on the last night, God rested. And the rest was good. The rest was very good.

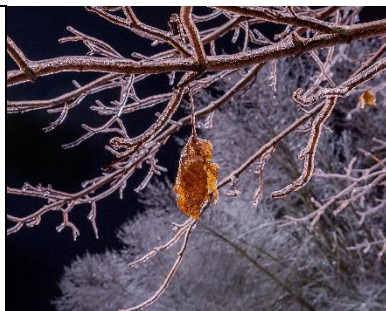
And God said that it was very Good.

~ Pdraig O'Tuama, "A liturgy for the night" in DAILY PRAYER WITH THE CORRYMEELA COMMUNITY

Put your thoughts to sleep,
do not let them cast a shadow
over the moon of your heart.

Let go of thinking.

~ Rumi



Shutterstock Images

But now and then comes an hour when the silence is all but absolute, and listening to it one slips out of time. Such a silence is not a mere negation of sound. It is like a new element, and the world is suspended there, and I in it...

~ Nan Shepherd in THE LIVING MOUNTAIN

Our disenchantment of the night through artificial lighting may appear, if it is noticed at all, as a regrettable but eventually trivial side effect of contemporary life. That winter hour, though, up on the summit ridge with the stars falling plainly far above, it seemed to me that our estrangement from the dark was a great and serious loss. We are, as a species, finding it increasingly hard to imagine that we are part of something which is larger than our own capacity. We have come to accept a heresy of aloofness, a humanist belief in human difference, and we suppress wherever possible the checks and balances on us – the reminders that the world is greater than us or that we are contained within it.

~ Robert Macfarlane in THE WILD PLACES

**Two hundred years ago Issa heard the morning birds
singing sutras to this suffering world.**

**I heard them too, this morning, which must mean,
since we will always have a suffering world,
we must also always have a song.**

~ David Budbill, "What Issa Heard" in MOMENT TO MOMENT

**You, darkness, of whom I am born—
I love you more than the flame
that limits the world
to the circle it illuminates
and excludes all the rest.
But the dark embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
people, nations—just as they are.
It lets me imagine
a great presence stirring beside me.
I believe in the night.**

*~ Rainer Maria Rilke,
"Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme"
in RILKE'S BOOK OF HOURS*



Shutterstock Images