

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

March 10, 2018

Community Prayer Service

Ephesians 2:1-10

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One of the things I have valued since moving out to Goochland is the night sky – that endless expanse of stars that seem to go on forever, stars that sparkle and that are only made brighter by the surrounding darkness. I have lived in cities for most of my adult life and had become accustomed to light, lots of light. Once night fell, there was always a street lamp on or a neighbor's porch light. Rarely could you look up at the sky and see the depth of the stars. Sometimes, you could catch a clear outline of the big dipper but at best, it was muted by the neighborhoods well-lit sidewalks. In fact, it was so light that eventually, you forgot how to navigate the darkness all together. The darkness became a scary place where something dangerous was surely lurking just around the corner.

When I think about the night sky, it makes me realize how much we try to avoid dark places. We add a flood light or two outside. We put night lights in each bathroom. We pay our electric bills to feel a little more secure, a little more at ease. But as a result, something interesting has happened. We have forgotten how to walk in the dark.

But we all know, life isn't so one sided.

Barbara Brown Taylor, one of my favorite authors, writes, "To be human is to live by sunlight and moonlight, with anxiety and delight, admitting limits and transcending them, falling down and rising up. To want a life with only half of these things in it is to want half of life..."

I started thinking about what it means if I only embrace half of my life...if I embrace the good and push aside the bad. If I only acknowledge my strengths and ignore my weaknesses. If I allow shame and doubt and fear to be the enemy as though my life can only be a well-scripted and expertly curated vision of success. A perfect façade so that no one need know about the insecurities, mistakes, and bad decisions that I have made.

As though we could ever achieve such a one-sided existence. Because no matter how hard we may try, we are going to fall down. The darkness will make us stumble. And then I thought... maybe we should spend some time in those dark places, walking around and getting familiar with the obstacles.

Taylor talks about those dark places when she describes a beautiful scene of learning to walk on her farm at night, from the barn to the house. At first she stumbles and falls on sticks and logs, in holes. Bruising herself. She probably let out some expletives along the way but she kept walking, every night. And as she walked the path more and more, she began to see life in a new way. She noticed the trees through the moonlight, more nuanced than in the brightness of the sun. She noticed the sound of animals, louder and more distinct than in the sounds of the day.

Without the darkness and the light she would have only known her world half way.

After a while, a remarkable thing happened...she no longer stumbled but walked with confidence along the path that grew in familiarity with each passing evening.

I have often wondered how our lives would change if we were able to walk in our own darkness, to allow it to help us see ourselves in a new way, through new eyes. Not has broken human beings but as beloved children of God. To see our weaknesses as opportunities for growth and renewal. To find within our mistakes a chance to realize God's unconditional love for us. And over time, discover that God's love is bigger and brighter than we ever imagined. Like the night sky, the depth and brightness of the stars only get more brilliant when we allow them to shine fully in the midst of darkness.

Thanks be to God. Amen.