

March 12, 2017

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

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Learning to deal with the dark is a universal human experience, and it's a pretty big challenge in the beginning.

❖ I've been reminded of this in recent weeks when Everett's woken up in the night to go to the bathroom, and been upset to find the whole house dark.

❖ Now of course being more wary in the dark is good and natural because it makes our surroundings less certain, which is clear to me every time I step on a Lego with bare feet.

❖ But what's really left Everett sobbing is that "he couldn't find us," even though our bedroom isn't far and the door is open.

You see, when we don't know how to navigate the dark, it's disorienting and isolating, and that's true of our deeper, emotional darkness as well.

❖ When we say that someone's in "a dark place," we mean that no matter where they are or who's around them, they feel alone and don't know where to turn.

❖ Life brings us all to places like this at some point, and in today's gospel lesson John is showing us the light in any darkness that gives us hope.

In relating a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, one of Jerusalem's religious elite, and John especially points out that he'd come to talk to him "by night."

❖ Throughout his gospel, John frequently uses the contrast of light and darkness to describe Jesus' coming into the world.

❖ Sometimes can relate to good and evil too, but what John's really doing is pointing to darkness as the period before light, almost like a preparation.

Darkness always *gives way* to light, the way night always gives way to dawn

❖ What John wants us to see is that no matter how deep our darkness is, Jesus is in it with us, and so it will always give way to light.

❖ If we can see this in even my own inadequate example of rushing to be with Everett, how much more must it be true of an all-powerful, all-loving God?

In a poem describing the soul's journey to union with God, St. John of the Cross shows how freedom from fear turns the way we see darkness upside-down.

❖ In the poem, the soul is a lover, "fired with love's urgent longings," but unable to go to his beloved.

❖ It's only at night, when the house is dark and still that he's able to slip out unnoticed to meet his beloved.

❖ Because the darkness is where the lover meets the beloved, instead of being an occasion for fear or anxiety, he calls the night "*glad*" and "*more lovely than the dawn.*"

We see this pattern with Nicodemus too.

❖ He's found Jesus compelling and *has* to talk to him, but he has to wait until his house is dark and still before he can come to him.

❖ As a ruler of the Jews, to try and come during the day would've caused an uproar among his peers that would make the kind of deep conversation he wanted impossible.

We often have similar struggles in trying to have an intimate conversation with Jesus.

❖ Our lives are filled with other duties and obligations that demand our time and energy.

❖ And, when we do pray, the voices of various cares and concerns are always interrupting.

But Lent is an opportunity to slip away with our beloved.

❖ Fasting and abstinence still our houses, quieting all the voices that compete for our attention,

❖ while extra prayer or spiritual reading are the ladder waiting outside the window.

So no matter the darkness, don't be afraid, be bold – go out into it with the fire of love, for you are not alone.