



TREASURES OF DARKNESS

REFLECTION WEEK 1 - BEGINNING

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◆ About this reflection

This reflection explores themes of darkness, disability, and spiritual discovery. You are invited to engage at your own pace and to notice what resonates with your own journey. Where possible, this is best explored prayerfully and in community.

◆ Scripture

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 he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5 (NRSVA)

◆ Reflection

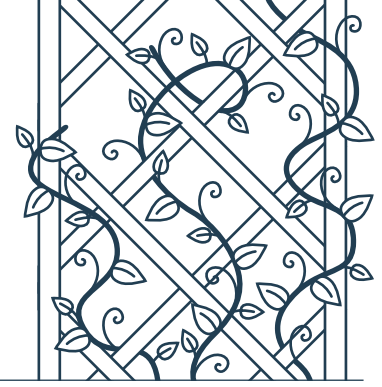
Beginning in the darkness

John Hull, a wonderful blind theologian and educator who died a few years ago, pointed out in his 2001 book of the same name, that, 'In the beginning there was darkness.' These opening verses of Genesis begin in the dark. And yet, within the darkness, is hidden all the creative energy and vision and mystery of God. The darkness that we are introduced to as Genesis opens, is not an empty darkness. It's not a desolate or deserted darkness. But rather it is a rich darkness within which the fullness of God is present/. It's not even a darkness that is crying out for light. It is not somehow incomplete in its self because of the absence of light. No, this darkness is a rich place of presence and being, the presence and being of God. Maybe it is interesting to ask, why then did God create the light? Certainly God does not need light to see or to function or to in anyway be God. But what we learn is that, fundamental to the created order that is slowly going to be disclosed, is the cycle of darkness and light, of night and day. It's not that the darkness is the absence of light. It's not that the darkness is a negative or impoverished experience compared to the positive and enriching presence of light. No, the darkness is as essential as light, in fact, maybe ultimately, more essential than the light. For, without darkness, the light would not really be an identifiable entity.



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In Isaiah 45 and verse 3, we read: *I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.*

Is there treasure in the darkness?

So the purpose of this offering over these 5 weeks of Lent is to reflect on if and how this can be true for us. Is there treasure to be found in the darkness? Is there treasure to be found in the darker and more difficult and challenging times of our lives? Just as in this opening verse of Genesis, could the darkness we experience in our lives be packed with the creative energy and vision and mystery of God. And, if so, how do we find it?

A personal journey into blindness

Many of you will know that I am blind. I have a genetic eye condition that has meant that from my earliest childhood I was destined to lose my sight. Slowly, day by day, moment by moment, my visual fields were reducing, my light perception was decreasing, and the visual world was fading. Until, at the age of 22 my eye condition was diagnosed, at the age of 31 I was registered as blind, and by the time I was 35 I had no useful sight.

At the same time though, after seven or so years of exploration, I found myself at theological college in Oxford beginning to train for ordination and ministry.

For a good number of years my understanding had been that God was outside of this experience of increasing darkness. God was outside of it, and my prayer, my longing, my plea to God was to be rescued. To be rescued from the darkness and brought into the light. I would, I thought, find God in healing and restoration of sight, not in continuing blindness and darkness. But healing didn't happen, despite my prayers and the prayers of many others. The question that challenged me at that time was: Was God absent at this time? Had God abandoned me in this empty place of darkness from which I desperately peered out towards the light, desperately peered out, longing for a hand to reach in and lead me out? Longing for a hand to lead me from darkness to light.

Opening to where God already is

Well, the understanding and revelation that grew within me during this time was that, far from reaching out towards the light, what I really needed to do was to open my eyes to the darkness. To open my eyes, or maybe really my heart and mind and hands and ears, to the darkness where, far from being absent, what I found was that God had been all along. Waiting, longing, hoping, that I would find and recognise and celebrate the treasure that the darkness held.

Psalm 139 says: *even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

God does not only operate in the light. God is not only present in the light. But God is as active, as real, as present, as dynamic in the dark as in the light. For: *even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

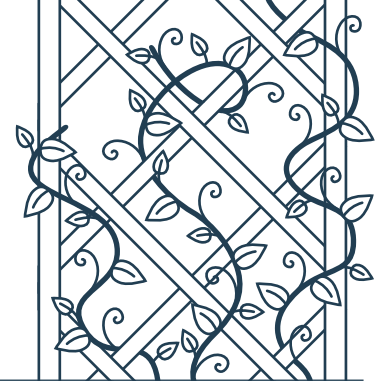
The gift of disability theology

Disability theology is a discipline that explores what it means to be human and in



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relationship with God, through the lens of the disabled experience. It is not a niche area that is only relevant to disabled people, but rather a perspective that seeks to bring the breadth of the human experience, disabled and nondisabled, together in a way that enriches and expands our understanding of what it means to be human. And all of this begins in Genesis 1 at the moment when God declares that humankind will be created in God's image, male and female. It begins by asking the question: what is the image of God? Because the God in whose image we are made is not an embodied God. God is not walking around the unformed universe with arms and legs, body and head and blood coursing through veins and arteries. No, the God we meet in Genesis is fundamentally other than human and does not share in our human embodiment or functionality. In fact, God moves, but without legs. Touches, but without hands. Sees, but without eyes. Hears, but without ears. Thinks, but without a brain.

Probably because of the Greko-Roman obsession with the perfect body, the church managed to focus the idea of the image of God, the *Imago Dei*, into the idea of a healthy, strong, fully functioning human body, with bodily, sensory or mental impairments falling short of the image. But what the idea of the otherness of God tells us is that all forms of embodiment reflect something of the *Imago Dei*. And maybe even that those whose bodies or minds are judged by society to be impaired in some way bring even more sharply into focus the God who moves with no legs, touches with no hands, sees with no eyes, hears with no ears and thinks with no brain.

So in fact, part of the treasure that I discovered in the increasing darkness of blindness is that, far from this separating me from God, this gives me a shared experience and solidarity with God, our God who sees with no eyes. A quality and characteristic of God that I believe I can then reflect out into the world, just as other disabled people can reflect more of the richness and diversity and 'otherness' that are all part of what and who God is.

Resting in the darkness

For me, the sightless world in which I live has not proved to be an empty or desolate place. Rather it has proved to be a place of rich encounter and mutual flourishing. Rich encounter and mutual flourishing with the God who sees with no eyes. But I have to say that the treasure only became evident when I stopped longing for the light. When I stopped reaching out for the light. When I stopped telling God what God should do and I began to explore the darkness. When I began to feel my way around and found that God was right there in the centre of it all saying, I knew you would find me. Come and rest in me.

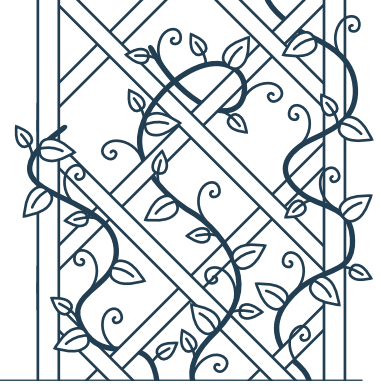
In the words of one of my favourite hymns, by Horatius Bonar:

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.*



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*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till travelling days are done.*

When darker times come

We will all come to what seem to be darker times in our lives. Times of illness or loss, of brokenness or despair. But what our faith promises us is that these times are not times of God's absence, but rather times of God's increasing presence. Times when God seeks to unpack for us the treasures of darkness, the riches stored in secret places. Given to you that you may know that our God is the Lord who summons you by name.

Closing poem

I'm going to end with a poem by Edwina Gately. This is called: Whatever happens.

*Whatever happens to me in life
I must believe that somewhere
in the mess and madness of it all,
there is a sacred potential-
a possibility for sacred redemption
in the embracing of all that is.
For in the unfolding of my journey,
in all its soaring delight
and crushing pain,
I may be sure that God is there -
always ahead, behind, below and above,
encompassing all that befalls me
in a circle of deep compassion.
And there,
above the darkness
that wraps me round
the bright wings of the Dove
hover and beat
in gentle healing love
and invitation to
New Rising*

John Beauchamp, 24th February 2026