



A MINISTRY OF LOUISA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
A VIRGINIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH DISCIPLES OF CHRIST CONGREGATION

The Disciple

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Dark Night of the Soul

Rev Ruth Chadwick Moore

Our lives do not work only when everything is fully lit. If we are honest, we can't always see the light – it waxes and wanes or can go out altogether. And this journey is all about trying to find a faith that works even in the dark.

Like darkness itself, the dark night of the soul means different things to different people. Some of us use that phrase to describe a time following a great loss, or a time leading up to a difficult decision. It is always a time when the soul is severely tested often to the point of breaking or even losing our faith. No one chooses the dark night; the dark night descends. And when it does, the reality that troubles the soul the most can be the apparent absence of God.

When the dark night first falls, it is natural to spend some time wondering if it is a test or a punishment for something you have done wrong. But this is just a sly way of staying in control of the situation, since the possibility that you caused it comes with the hope that you can also put an end to it, either by passing the test or by enduring the punishment. The darker possibility – that this night is beyond our control – is often too frightening to even consider because it means your usual strategies for lightening up won't work. One of the hardest things to decide during a dark night is whether to surrender or resist. The choice often comes down to what you believe about God and how God acts, which means that every dark night of the soul involves wrestling with belief.

Do you remember the story of Jacob in Genesis when he wrestles a man in the dark? Out of the deep dark night a stranger leaps and hurls himself at Jacob and they wrestle with each other all night long. Jacob cannot see his attacker's face in the dark, but we all think he is wrestling with God. The sense I get from this struggle, and the sense I think Jacob must have had, is that the whole battle was fated from the beginning to end this way. The stranger had simply held back until the end, letting Jacob think he might win, so that when he was defeated, he would know that he was truly defeated – so that he would know that not all the shrewdness, will, and brute force he could muster were enough to win this. The bible story tells us that Jacob is struck by the stranger in a vulnerable place in the hollow of his thigh, and he leaves the place of the wrestling with a limp. This is the blessing, the gift, God gives him. Jacob, who would go on to be the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, has known success and cheated his brother for the birthright of the land God gave to



Abraham and Isaac. Power, success and happiness as the world knows them are his – and we think can be ours if we just fight hard enough – but it doesn't always turn out that way does it? Instead, the gift, the blessing that God gives us in the dark, and in our vulnerability, is love. Even if God becomes a stranger to us in the dark night of our souls, he does in the end give us everything.

The story of John of the Cross, a monk in the 16th century whose best known work is The Dark Night of the Soul, which he began when he was imprisoned in a dark cell for 11 months. Most people who read the book expect John to tell them how he got through that dark period by hanging on to his faith in God no matter what happened to him. Instead, for him, the dark night is a love story full of the painful joy of seeking the most elusive lover of all. One of the central functions of the dark night, he says, is to convince people who grasp after things that God cannot be grasped. God is not a thing. And since God is not a thing, God cannot be held on to. Jacob certainly came to that realization.

John of the Cross tells us that the dark night can be God's best gift to us – intended for our liberation from what we should believe, or do, or say. The dark night can give us the opportunity instead to ask ourselves what powers we most rely on and what is the hope that gives meaning to our lives. The dark night can free us from our fears about God, from doing and believing all the "right" things about God and from our tactics for manipulating and grasping after God. The dark night, if we allow it, can be a place of transformation.

God puts out our lights to keep us safe, John says, because we are never more in danger of stumbling than when we think we know where we are going. When we can no longer see the path we are on, when we can no longer read the maps we have brought with us or sense anything in the dark that might tell us where we are – then and only then – are we vulnerable to God's protection and blessing. And if this loss of control sounds scary to you don't worry, I am right there with you. It is scary to let the darkness manage us instead of us trying to manage the darkness.

Barbara Brown Taylor's book Learning to Walk in the Dark says: "...the good news is that dark and light, faith and doubt, divine absence and presence, do not exist at opposite poles. Instead, they both exist with and within each other, like distinct waves that roll out of the same ocean and roll back into it again. As different as they are, they come from and return to the same source." If I can trust that – if I can trust God and if I can give my heart to God – then faith becomes a verb, and it is my active response to that sacred reality.

Exodus tells us that God spoke to Moses in a dark dense cloud. Our Psalm reminds us that darkness is not dark to God – the night and the day – it is all the same to God – and God is still present and always there. And even though the angel Gabriel told Mary not to be afraid, she had to be when he told her what was going to happen. But the angel tells her that nothing is impossible with God. And so she trusts God even when she cannot see the path ahead of her.

Let us be like Mary and say yes to God even in our fear. Let us be like Jacob, who limps home in the dawn after glimpsing in the dark the face of Love. Let us be like the Israelites listening to a God who comes to them in a dark cloud. Let us wrestle together and yet not grasp for that which cannot be grasped. Practicing this kind of faith will require us to celebrate the sacraments and blessings of vulnerability, defeat and loss. But since our faith has a lot to say about losing as the precondition for finding, I think we can live with that. May it be so. Amen.

Resources: Learning to Walk in the Dark by Barbara Brown Taylor and Secrets in the Dark by Frederick Buechner.

THE 7 HABITS OF EFFECTIVE DISCIPLES



WORSHIP

gathering around the body of Jesus as a community to hear God's Word, respond to God's grace with offerings and praise, to be equipped and sent in the power of the Spirit into our everyday lives with hope and the Good News of God's promise. Psalm 150:1-6; Colossians 3:12-17



BIBLE STUDY

Spending time reading and exploring the scriptures in order to know God's ongoing story of a promised and preferred future and discern how we fit into that story in our everyday lives. Read: Romans 15:4; Psalm 119:11, 105; Hebrews 4:12



PRAYER

holding a conversation with God, both individually and corporately, listening to the Spirit's voice and speaking praise and requests in the expectation that God listens and responds. Read: Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 6:18



VITAL RELATIONSHIPS

investing in significant relationships with others in our spiritual community for the purpose of accountability, encouragement, and sharing in God's promise for the world. Read: Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14



SERVICE

using our unique mix of gifts and talents to contribute to the needs of our neighbors for the mutual good of all. Read: Galatians 5:13; John 13:12-17; 1 Peter 1:12



GIVING

setting the needs of others as the priority in our lives, giving of our time, talent, and treasure to benefit the community. 1 John 3:17-18, 22; 2 Corinthians 9



SHARING MY FAITH

reaching to the community around us that may be different, even uncomfortable, and sharing the love and peace of God in mutual love and service with a goal of sharing in God's promise for the world. Read: 1 Peter 3:15-16; Matthew 2

Back to Church Sunday



September 19

9:00 am
11:00 am

**Building
Community
Together**

Sunday, September 19 is Back to Church Sunday. We encourage everyone to join us in worship and fellowship. We would love to see you in person* at either the 9:00 AM contemporary service or the 11 AM traditional service. If you can't join us in person, we invite you to join us online at the 11 AM service.

Share this invite with your friends and neighbors.

*With the uncertainty of the Covid-19 spread, we encourage each person to take note of the guidelines at the time of the service and make the best decision for their and their family's health. At the time of this publication, LCC asks individuals to mask as they travel around the sanctuary and within the church building. Masks may be removed when seated. We are maintaining distancing within our sanctuary and Sunday School classes.



LET EVENING COME

BY JANE KENYON, 2005

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn,
moving up the bales
as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn.
Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe
abandoned in long grass.
Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down.
Let the shed go black inside.
Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch,
to the scoop in the oats,
to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will,
and don't be afraid.
God does not leave us comfortless,
so let evening come.



This is the day
the Lord has made



HAPPY

BIRTHDAY!

Nora Jane L.	Sept. 8
John Jerl P. III	Sept. 10
Greg S.	Sept. 12
Kenny F.	Sept. 14
Debbie W.	Sept. 16
Theresa W.	Sept. 18
Mary M.	Sept. 19
Wilson P.	Sept. 19
Maxine S.	Sept 20
Milton A.	Sept. 21
Sarah C.	Sept. 22
Donna C.	Sept. 22
Joe H.	Sept. 22
Dwayne K.	Sept. 22
Faye C.	Sept. 27
Sheryl E.	Sept. 28



Fill the Freezer

The Outreach Ministry will be hosting a second "Fill the Freezer" day on **September 18th at 9:30am**. Come by to enjoy fellowship while we prepare 3 dinners with a main dish, 2 sides, and desserts.

You can help by being present in person, providing a gift card donation for supplies, or filling part of the grocery list.

If you are planning on being present in person, please let Penny Best know your intention so that she may properly plan for the day. Have questions or need more information? Please feel free to contact Penny at 540-748-9048 or email at PBest2Runners@gmail.com.

Elder & Deacon



All Elders and Deacons are encouraged to plan to attend the luncheon **after the 11 AM service on September 19th**. Let's join together for a time of fellowship and renewal.

Sundays in September at 9AM

(Contemporary Casual Worship Service)



Join Us for **OUTDOOR WORSHIP**

Inclement weather will move the service into the LCC Fellowship Hall.



STUDY GROUP

All Bible studies are held in person as well as continuing on the Zoom platform.

Wednesday 10:30am

Thursday 7:00pm

Contact Pastor Vincent to get the Zoom information.



Board Meeting

Tuesday, September 14 At 7:30pm



Men's* Fellowship Group

Men of the community are invited to join this group for outings, work days, and fellowship. This group meets occasionally and on no specific schedule. Please contact Pastor Vincent to get added to the list for notification of activities and events.

*This group is not exclusively men. Anyone with interest in the activity planned may join the group for the activity, but it is planned by men with the hope of having a time of fellowship.