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I have had the pleasure of hearing Barbara Brown Taylor speak several times, most notably at preaching conferences I have attended in Chicago and Atlanta. She is a brilliant, articulate and entertaining priest in the Episcopal Church. Recently she has written an article that appeared in Time magazine, the week just after Easter. Her article is entitled “Let There be Night,” and in it, she touches briefly on themes of darkness, which she expands on fully in her new book entitled “Learning to Walk in the Dark.”

For me, her article is life-changing. And I can’t wait to get my hands on that book.

Taylor describes a phenomenon which I have always secretly believed in, but only secretly, because I wasn’t sure it stood on a solid Christian foundation. Thanks to her research, I have learned that it does...and what we’re talking about is *the necessity of darkness*, not only in the world, but in ***faith***.

It’s easy to convince you that we need darkness in the world—it is when we sleep, when our very skin sheds and regenerates, when our immune systems recharge, when our brains purge and cleanse themselves, when our earth

exhales, when nocturnal animals get their chance to grab a meal, when the Sabbath of the soul begins, always at dusk. There is day and there is night.

But it is harder to convince you that darkness is also a necessary component of ***faith***. Since the beginning of Christianity, we have placed our liturgical and biblical emphasis on light, christening light as holy and condemning darkness to hell....so much in fact that we teach our little ones to fear the dark by introducing them to nightlights and perpetuating the myth of the monster under the bed or in the closet. As we age, the monsters take on a different shape—basically whatever scares us the most becomes our adult monsters, and so we avoid them by staying up late and staring at a bright computer or television screen. The child who is afraid of the dark grows into the adult who is equally afraid of the dark. Because we mistakenly believe darkness is evil. But it's not. Read Psalm 139...*even the darkness is light to you, the night is as bright as the day.*

Sadly, we have been taught to believe that God is present only in the light, but never in the dark...fueled by certain writings from Paul referring to children of the dark being evil, but the thing about Paul is his stuff is always taken out of context and misconstrued. But in these many years since Jesus and Paul walked

on the earth, it's time to admit that it is a dark time for Christianity. The over-emphasis that the church has placed on light has worn out, because we have ignored a whole dimension of reality and existence....it's time to confront the reality that attendance is declining across all mainline Christian denominations is due to our collective inability to identify the presence of God in the dark places of this world. Post-modern people know that the world can be very dark—so where's the church that will acknowledge that, and embrace it? Post-modernists are cynical about religion, and rightfully so.

The truth is, ***God and darkness have been friends for a very long time***. Just as it's impossible to imagine a world without darkness, it's equally impossible to imagine a faith without darkness. After all, big biblical things happened in the darkness...God appears to Abraham at night and promises him more descendents than there are stars in the sky...the exodus from Egypt happens at night....God gives Moses the Ten Commandments on top of Mount Sinai in the thick darkness...Paul is converted from being a tormenter of Christians to a follower of Christ while he is blind...Jesus is born beneath a star in a nighttime sky...

Yes, even Easter has a dark side to it, that nestled between the lilies and the trumpets and the chocolate bunnies lies the glaring reality that *the resurrection*

*happened in a sealed, dark cave.* God was working to bring the dead to life right there, in the deepest, blackest darkness.

Is this then so impossible to imagine, that God can and is present in the darkness? After all, new life always begins in the darkness—a baby is delivered from a dark womb, a seed is planted underground, Noah closed in his precious sons and animals in a dark ark...new life always comes first from darkness...many mothers are familiar with darkness in a special way, as we confront dark fears in the delivery room, as pain consumes our bodies, as fear and anxiety constrict the throat, as the mother turns inward, to tap those secret reserves of strength she never knew she had.

The first time I ever really confronted my own mortality was when I was in labor with Christian. The pain that I had to bear all alone, no one could take it away, I remember thinking I would not be able to endure, that I would surely die, that my child would die...and strangely a verse came to mind from a hymn I don't even really care for, the hymn "Give Me Jesus." The verse goes like this, "Dark midnight was my cry, dark midnight was my cry, dark midnight was my cry, give me Jesus. " Christian was born 49 minutes after midnight.

And even being a minister means walking into the darkness not away from it...into the darkened bedroom where the loved one lays dying, into the dim nursing home room, into the neo-natal intensive care room, where it is always dark and the babies wear protective shades over their tiny eyes...but not only ministers walk straight into the darkness, you do it, too...and you go, not because you want to, but because you have to, because God is calling you to, because God is shepherding you into those dark places.

Darkness holds divine mystery...it must be journeyed through. Darkness cannot be avoided, in the world or in our faith. And God doesn't intend for us to avoid it! God the Shepherd leads us *through* dark valleys, not around dark valley, leads us *through* death, not around it, leads us *through* the grave, not around it. We can't avoid the darkness, so isn't it time we stop trying? Because is avoiding darkness an attempt to run away from God? As if we could.

There is nothing to fear then, dear friends...nothing to fear in life or death, in sickness or health, in dark or light, in blindness or clarity of sight, because God shepherds us through it all, his rod and staff comfort us and keep us from straying...as if we even could.