

Darkness or Light

When Jacques Lusseyvan was seven years old, he was blinded in a schoolroom accident. In France, in those years before World War II, the blind and the disabled were swept to the margins of society and left to a life of begging. Doctors urged Jacques' parents to send him to a residential school for the blind in Paris – but they would not hear of it. They kept Jacques in his local school where he would learn to function in the seeing world. His mother learned Braille with him; the Principal of the school ordered a special desk for Jacques – large enough to hold his Braille typewriter. But the best thing his parents did for him was: *to never pity him.*

Jacques quickly learned that he was not 'a poor blind boy,' but the discoverer of a new world. Years later he wrote that barely 10 days after his accident he discovered a *light* within himself that enable him to see things he might never have found any other way:

"I felt this *light* gushing forth from every moment and brimming over. I felt how it wanted to spread out over the whole world. I only had to receive it; it was unavoidably there."

He went on to say, that the source of the *light* is not the outer world. The *light* dwells where *life* also dwells: *within ourselves.*

Jacques also came to see how the *light* changed with his inner condition: when he was sad or afraid, the *light* decreased at once. Sometimes it went out altogether, leaving him truly and deeply blind — but when he was joyful or attentive, it returned as strong as ever. He learned very quickly, that the best way to see the inner *light* and remain in its presence... was to love.

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Another story:

Karen never saw herself as beautiful or pretty. When she thumbs through fashion magazines in waiting rooms, she feels like some alien being. She cannot look at pictures of herself; she recoils from what she sees as her crooked nose, her acne scars, her short stature and skinny figure.

But that's not what Tom sees! He was immediately captivated by her smile; a smile that lit up her entire face. The sound of her laugh and the kindness in her voice brought him a sense of peace and reassurance he had never experienced in another woman before; and the first time

they kissed Karen trembled and cried with embarrassment. But as the relationship continued, she began to think that maybe she wasn't so ugly after all...

From the moment they met, Tom knew he was out of his league. He worked hard – but his prospects were not what a woman of her background and education would find very promising. He found himself struggling to keep up with her. He had nothing to offer “someone like her.”

But that is not what Karen saw! She was taken by his sense of humor and humility, his generosity of Spirit, his ability to listen patiently and support unconditionally. His easy way with his family and friends, particularly his younger siblings, was a delight to watch. His integrity and common sense were so unlike the other guys she had known. Oh! She knew how much he had to offer, and she felt like the luckiest woman in the world when he worked up the courage to propose!

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Sisters and brothers, how might these stories connect with our Gospel Reading? our Lenten “spring-cleaning-of-our-hearts”? our journey of life? our faith as disciples?

In our Gospel, Nicodemus, a Pharisee – a public religious person – is somehow attracted to Jesus and his message, but would be embarrassed and criticized by those in powers if he were to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight, ...so he seeks him out in the dark.

Jesus tells Nicodemus – and us – that if we believe and trust in him, we will have eternal life. ‘Eternal’ here does not refer to something we will live after death; ‘eternal’ is the *Life* and *Light* of God given to us today. It is the *Life of the Eternal One* – the *Light*, the *Spark of God*, the Namasté within the blind boy Jacques, within Karen and Tom, within each one of us – flowing in and through us; given to us at the beginning of our lives, reborn from above through our Baptism and through our ongoing trust in Jesus.

As we grow in our friendship and oneness with Jesus, we begin to recognize that *light* – that *eternal life* within us – and are less attracted to the idols of money, power, prestige, addictions – those false gods that we reflected on last week.

We begin to see people as Jesus sees them; we began to love people as Jesus loves them; and: we begin to see and love ourselves as Jesus sees and loves us. *Life* and *trust* – the *Light* – begins to grow and deepen in us and lead us to a transformation in God: becoming more and more the people God created us to be – which is what Lent is all about – and, transformed we can do things that humanly speaking, we could not do by ourselves:

Love our enemy, forgive and forgive ... indefinitely, be with the poor and weak, become compassionate as our God is compassionate.

Jacques described that it was the *Light* within that led him to become the amazing person he was created to be: at age 17, he joined the French Resistance, helping to smuggle French POWs across the border; was arrested at 20 age, sent to the Buchenwald Concentration Camp and became one of only 30 to survive Buchenwald – which was extraordinary in itself but to survive as a blind person was miraculous. In his memoir, he wrote that it was the *Light* he found within himself that enabled him to survive.

Sisters and brothers, would Jacques have discovered that *Light* within, if it wasn't for the love and courage of his parents and school principal who circled him with *love* and *light*? If he was rejected and discarded, as was the custom in those days, might he have lived and died in darkness and fear and despair...?

Tom was the *Light* which enabled Karen to break through the darkness of her life, to discover who she truly was; Karen was the *Light* which helped Tom see the *Light* within himself.

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Sisters and brothers, I'd like to conclude with some questions that might be helpful as we continue our Lenten journey of the 'spring-cleaning-of-our-hearts:'

1. How bright is the *Light* – eternal life – deep within you? What 'stuff' in our lives is helping to keep the *Light* shining and what 'stuff' in our life might be diminishing that *Light*? How can I nurture the *Light* – the *Spark of God* – in me?
2. How am I helping the *Light* to shine in those whom I love: my partner? children? my family? friends? my community? Or: how might my actions, attitudes, etc. diminish that *Light* within those I love?
3. Jesus teaches us over and over again, as his disciples, that that *Spark*, that *Light of God* is in every person and all people, no matter how deeply buried it might be by sin; no matter how deeply it may be stuff down by injustice and oppression and violence and prejudice; no matter how deeply hidden it might be by depression, fear, doubt, mental illness, despair... No one is hopeless, no one is irredeemable. The call of the disciple is to recognize and ignite that *Light* in others... that's what discipleship is all about.

4. Finally, one of the most dramatic but unfortunate experiences of utter darkness is suicide. Bishop Cunningham, in announcing 2018 as the “Year of the Family,” stated in his Pastoral Letter: “We all have a basic need to love and be loved. When this need is not fulfilled in the family and through our Church, then our young people turn elsewhere: drugs, alcohol and, even suicide.” This coming Wednesday at 7 PM in our church, as part of our Lenten Journey, our LGBT Taskforce, along with the Sisters of St. Francis, is sponsoring a Presentation entitled: “Shifting the Dialogue: Toward a Common Goal of LGBT Suicide Prevention.” LGBT youth are three times more likely to report thoughts of suicide. Actual suicide attempts are significantly higher in lesbian and gay adults than their heterosexual counterparts. Kevin Elphick, who has worked in the field of suicide prevention since 1992 and a member of Assumption Parish, will be the presenter. I encourage all to attend.

Let us pray:

God,

Author of Light and Love;

Source of compassion: may we embrace the perspective of faith and attitude of hope your Son revealed to Nicodemus.

By your grace, help us to transform our darkest night into the morning light of hope.

By your wisdom, help us to transfigure our Good Friday despair into Easter joy.

By your compassion, heal our broken spirits into hearts made whole.

I invite all to join in singing:

“This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine!

This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...

Let it shine... let it shine... let it shine!”

Amen!