

Wednesday in Holy Week  
Meditation  
Rough Draft

Each of our Churches have beautiful liturgies and prayers for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Then, of course, Easter, the Queen of Feasts. I'm glad for those celebrations, being a priest, I love it when my community comes together to pray. But we also really are brothers and sisters in Christ across denominational lines. So it is especially good that we take the first three weekdays of Holy Week to come together as a larger community. We leave our own worship spaces and create a common space, a space that belongs to us all for a couple of hours these three days. And before we go on into our own traditions we come together and pray. These three days have been especially important for me this year. I am beginning to feel in my heart what a unique community I am privileged to be a part of.

We all want to thank Lynn and Laurie and all the faithful of Rumble Presbyterian for your hospitality to the rest of us the past three days. What we're doing seems important to me. More important than ever. We live in uncertain days. We've seen how disaster can strike our friends here at home and folks living far away. Coming together eases our pain, magnifies our ability to help each other, and reminds us that the Church is so much larger than any one denomination.

So here we are again on Holy Wednesday, halfway to resurrection.  
Jesus has come to the holy city,  
been greeted with palms and hosannas.  
We have watched as tensions have mounted.  
As we have been placed under the microscope of the love of God.  
We have gone up to the Temple and heard his last teachings.  
Today is the day we remember Judas and the betrayal.

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me."<sup>22</sup> The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.<sup>23</sup> One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him;<sup>24</sup> Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.<sup>25</sup> So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot.<sup>27</sup> After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do."<sup>28</sup> Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.<sup>29</sup> Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor.<sup>30</sup> So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 13:21-30). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

And it was night.

John can be so wordy sometimes when compared with the other gospels. Jesus has great long speeches in John's gospel that don't appear in the other three. But John can also poignantly focus our attention in a very few words throughout his gospel.

"And the word was God."

"Before Abraham was, I am."

"Jesus wept."

And here at the moment of Judas' decision, "And it was night."

This is the hour of darkness in John's gospel.

It turns out John has had a lot to say about this darkness.

Earlier Jesus spoke of it saying:

"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."<sup>2</sup>

and,

"Those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them."<sup>3</sup>

John introduces us to the darkness when he says,

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.<sup>4</sup>

It would appear as if night is all around. But John gives us more than warnings about darkness, he also claims there is reason to hope in the midst of darkness. Hope is woven into the very fabric of the universe which God has made. . . right from the beginning; In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.<sup>5</sup>

We all know darkness, its various types and shades. We see it in sacred story and we see it in our story:

the darkness of confusion,

the darkness of denial,

the darkness of betrayal,

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<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 9:4-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>3</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 11:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>4</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 3:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>5</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 1:1-5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

of possession,  
of abandonment,  
tragic loss,  
injustice.

We are walking with Jesus through his last week, walking together as a community.  
By faith we claim solidarity with our Lord, with his story.  
By faith we believe he walks with us through our stories.

At one time or another, maybe today, we have looked around us and within us and with John said, and felt, in a deep way, “It is night. All I see is darkness.”  
In that moment of despair we are challenged to believe there is hope,  
to believe there is a light that shines in the darkness which the darkness has not overcome.

I’ve been wondering a lot about the word “belief” in recent years. It’s really a beautiful word when you look into its history. It comes to us through Old English and at its root it means “to hold dear.” It’s not a thinking word, a head word, but a heart word. It means to hold to one’s heart. It doesn’t exclude the thinking/analyzing mind, it surpasses it. Heart knowing is more powerful than head-knowing.

The belief John invites us to hold to our hearts is that there is a light that shines in the darkness which the darkness has not overcome.

I’m not much of a technical person. I’m not sure what a blog is. But when I googled “And it was night” this blog from [idesoftoby.blogspot.com](http://idesoftoby.blogspot.com) came up.

The blogger said,  
The night is real when a close companion sells you to your mortal enemies.  
The night is real when your closest friends in the world fall asleep when they should be begging God to save you.  
The night is real when they all run away.  
The night is real when the whole world is really against you.  
The night is real when you are preparing yourself to suffer the absolute wrath of Almighty God for people who could care less.  
The night is real when you realize that the agony of your suffering shuts out the light of the sun, and turns the moon to blood.

It was his refrain “the night is real” that moved me.  
We all know that.  
We might even add to it.  
The night is real when someone we love is ill or suffering, or has died.  
The night is real when my sin finally catches up with me and cannot be denied.  
The night is real when. . . what might you say?

The invitation of Holy Week to me is to be honest about the how dark and scary life can be sometimes. And then to choose to believe in God, believe in each other, and believe in ourselves, right there in the heart of the darkness. We need each others help and prayer and presence to make that courageous step into belief when all around us looks like darkness.

For me there have been times when I could not see the light, but you could. Then it was your faith that carried me see, that helped me stumble along until things got better, wounds healed, sins forgiven.

I am beginning to realize how important you all are to me. We love Jesus at slightly different angles. So if I stumble you are there to keep looking at his face, to keep bearing witness to his light, to keep holding him to your heart until I can see the light of Christ again.

It seems enormously important to me that the story of Jesus marches on; through the darkness of betrayal and abandonment, through the darkness of torture and execution, through the darkness of burial and the sad day after burial, to another morning, the morning when the whole universe is changed forever, the morning of the seismic shift into light, hilarity, and everlasting joy which begins to shake the gloomy world.

And how beautiful in John's gospel the enormous light begins when it is still dark.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.<sup>6</sup>

Christ comes when it is still dark.

But it's important not to get too far ahead of ourselves. It's still just Wednesday. We have a long and difficult journey ahead of us which we have begun together.

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<sup>6</sup>*The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Jn 20:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.