

Psalm 42

Let us pray – Mighty God, show forth your truth through your grace as we explore the meanings within the scriptures. Amen

Why are we afraid of the night? What do we think is there that we cannot see? And why do we think we can see “it” in the light? For me it is in the darkness, when I am relieved of distractions that I can best see. Psalm 42 is a favorite of mine. It evokes the passion within me that I have for my Divine Beloved. It also affirms for me my need for darkness ... for meditation in the night ... for contemplation ... for being wooed by my Divine Beloved.

Verse 3 says, “My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?” Have you ever longed so deeply and so completely that your tears were your food all day and all night? And while in this deep longing, have you been mocked? I have been in this place. I have lived in this place of deep longing, my thirst not being satisfied from the sustenance of my tears. My ears filled with voices saying things like, “Where is your God now? Accept that

you’re a queer and move on from religion.” and “Just repent from being a lesbian and you’ll be forgiven. Come back to the church.” But I knew who I was – so I stayed in the chaos ... in the torment of longing to be all of who I was. Especially at this time the night was my friend. Not because I was out carousing, but because the distractions were fewer. Who here remembers the scene in Star Wars ... it’s a famous scene. Luke is approaching the Death Star and he activates the device that will help him see better. It’s a computer that is programmed to help him know when to shoot. As he begins looking into it he hears the voice of Obi Wan, his teacher. “Use the Force, Luke. Reach out with your feelings.” In other words, don’t rely on what you think you can see. Those are distractions. Luke puts his computer away and everyone in charge gets upset. But Luke knows who he is ... he is destined to be Jedi.

I knew who I was. I was a Christian and I was queer. It took a long time for me to get to that point and no one was going to talk me out of it again! I stayed in the chaos. At night, when the day’s activities were over I would just feel. The numbness of the day slowly gave

way to my internal truth ... I was in pain and I was scared. There was comfort to me in that truth. The light served to distract me but it was in the dark where I found Holy Truth. It was in the dark where I found my Divine Beloved. The ache of my longing was with me all day long, and it made me act out in strange ways. But in the dark at night I could make my peace or fight it directly ... whatever I had to do that night in that darkness.

Verses 7 and 8 – “Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands her steadfast love, and at night her song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.”

At night, when the rumble dies down, I can hear the song of my Divine Beloved. This song becomes my prayer. It is the prayer that connects me with my Beloved, with the One from whom I feel estranged all day long. So much of scripture teaches us that the dark is a scary evil time. I know that I am challenging that. I'm challenging it because I found out it's not always true. What we hear in the dark may be the sound of our own souls singing ... crying ... reciting poetry.

What you hear in the dark may also be the very voice of your Divine Beloved singing to you ... crying out to you .... reciting poetry to you. I think the bulk of scripture tends to make us afraid of the dark. Like little children we are afraid. But I believe that the dark is a holy time and a holy space. God is often depicted as being Light – all light all the time. That's one metaphor, sure. But that can't be our only metaphor. It's one sided. What would it be like for us, as we live on this Earth, to have light all the time? I think it would be terrible. When would we sleep? How would the plants and animals rest? There is no balance to all light all the time. We need the dark. The dark is Holy.

Psalm 63:5 – 7 say, “My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.” There is joy in the shadow of the Divine Beloved. Joy! In the shadow we can also find protection and relief. Consider the sun, blazing hot in the middle of August, or driving east in the morning or west in the evening. The shadows are

welcome relief and protection from the burning and blinding rays. Psalm 63 has a similar passion to Psalm 42. Once again the psalmist is thirsting for the Divine Beloved. To quench that thirst the psalmist meditates on God at night on her bed. She is filled with joy from this meditation in the night!

Back in Psalm 42, the psalmist is encouraging herself. She cannot quite praise God yet, but she can make the statement that she will in the future. Twice the psalm says, "Hope in God; for I shall again praise God." This is not a psalm where we see the fulfillment of joy, but we do see the expectation. The soul of the psalmist is cast down, but at night she hears the song of her Divine Beloved and it becomes her prayer.

What is it about the dark that makes us tremble much of the time? Is it the sound of our own prayers? Could it be the song of God? Is it the power that is revealed after the noise and busyness of the day has quieted down? In verse 11 the psalmist asks her soul, "Why are you disquieted within me?" Could it be that in the quiet of the night we hear the disquiet of our own hearts? For myself, I have to answer yes to all these

questions. When the night troubles me it is usually because I need to see something – and it is in the night that I can see it. The day is too blinding. I believe the dark is a gift to us from our Divine Beloved. In this time we can feel the power of The Holy draw close.

How can it be that the power of The Holy is in the dark? I need to go to Genesis, the first chapter, verses 1 – 5. "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 was called Night. And there was evening and there was morning the first day."

What I hear in this passage is that God was dwelling in darkness. The Heavens and the Earth weren't really created until days two and three. Day one was all about light and dark. I would paraphrase it this way, "In the beginning before The Creator was creating, there was no heaven or earth. There was a formless void and

darkness covered this deepness. There was also a wind of God which danced back and forth over the face of the waters. This was how God existed. God decided to create. "Let there be light", and there was, and it was good. The Creator defined what had been against what was created. What had been was named "Darkness" and what was created was named "Light". The Creator liked the creation of Light.

In this story, our Divine Beloved existed in a dark formless deep. The wind is the movement of God – the activity of God. Light is what was created, not what pre-existed. Yes, light is pronounced good, but as something created. It is the formless dark void which pre-existed. It is also the formless dark void which frightens many people. Order, light, and substance make us comfortable. They are tangible – quantifiable. But our Divine Beloved is neither tangible nor quantifiable in this story of creation. Pre-existence is formless and dark. The Holy lived in a void. I think this is why there is such power in the dark. The essence of The Holy, of our Divine Beloved, is this formless dark moving void. When we quiet ourselves in the night this power can be felt.

The psalmist says, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" She talks about how she participated in the celebrations and festivals, leading the parades and shouting. But now she feels forgotten by God. She has enemies who are harming her. Where is the Divine Beloved for whom she danced and shouted and led the parades? In the holy darkness, where the Divine Beloved danced before light was created, the psalmist hears a song of hope that becomes her prayer.

We too can hear the song of our Divine Beloved. When the world quiets around us do we hear the disquiet in our hearts? Can we tolerate the uneasiness of our own disquiet? Can we hear the song of God and let it become our prayer? The power and holiness of the dark will guide us. In it we can find joy and hope. In it we can find our Divine Beloved.

May God bless you this week as you carry God's word into the world.