

Deal With Darkness – John Marshall

What type of bargain or deal do you make with darkness in order to experience Love? We all know and feel what darkness feels like. These are dark times for many people. There is a lot of inequity in this world. There is a lot of violence. There is much prejudice and hate. There are many people who are poor in this world. There are many that are struggling financially, with relationships, with sicknesses, with loss, and even with holding onto this experience that we call love. There is such a thing as having a dark past. Things happening in a time ago that made us feel some measure of sadness and makes us sad to think about them even to this day. There is even such a thing as having a dark present. There is suffering. A friend of mine used to joke by saying, "If life is a bowl of cherries, how come I seem to get a lot of the pits?" Nobody has a perfect life, where they can say things are going 100% their way. However, don't you think, we more often than not acquaint ourselves with dark visions of the future? It is not so much what has happened in our past that stymies us. It is not so much what is happening right now that stymies us. It is how we see our future, right?

We all, whether we like to admit it or not, have shadow sides to ourselves. It is the side of us that is prone to being overly skeptical to a point that it brings us into cynical spaces. It is the side of us that turns away from light. We think it will somehow protect us if we behave in this way. We sort of take the saying of "Don't get your hopes up" as a good way of living because we won't be disappointed that way.

Well, I got the shadow knocked out of me this week. Someone hit my darkness square in the nose. Just in time for this first Sunday of the Epiphany. Someone asked me this week, "What is love for you?" Imagine someone asking that question, "what is love for you?" It made me have to think about it. I couldn't just give a standard or trite answer to a question like that. It made me have to dig deep and ask God to help me come up with an answer that was authentic to me. So, I said the best way I could define it for me was that it is that intense sense of warmness, respect, attraction, and glowing that you feel when you are drawn to a person, group, or any of God's creation, that washes over you in a way which reminds you that God is PROFOUNDLY present in your life.

So, what you do with darkness in order to get that experience? I submit that you must bring light to your heart and outlook. You have to let light in, somehow. Like in the first reading today, Genesis 1, you gotta let the wind of Love sweep over your face and let the Light present itself. Separate the light from darkness and receive the day. So, will darkness completely go away? Of course not. There is night. But, I think we let darknesses so dominate us that it dominates our whole being. We become skeptical for skepticism's sake. We become cynical as if cynicism is the thing that is keeping us alive. I don't know about you, but I do not feel alive when I am being cynical. I do not feel my skepticism is putting one ounce of real value to my life. They help me in keeping deceptions from knocking me off my path, but they by no means guide me on my path. I need light to do that. I need love to do that.

This is the first Sunday of the Epiphany for us Christians. Epiphany means "vision of God".

Webster's defines it as a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. It is an intuitive grasp of reality through something like an event, that is usually simple and striking. An Epiphany is an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure. We, as Christians, just got out of the season of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. So, it is in the Epiphany that we are to come to a perception of the essential nature and meaning of Jesus becoming present in the world. Here's a hint. "God so Loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." And how many times do we Christians have to be told that Jesus shows us the Way? It is through the life of Jesus that we Christians are to find our way to God. We are to look at His life and presence in this world and it symbolizes how we are to be on our soul's path to God. Jesus IS our Light! His very essence and very existence is the personification of Love. To us, He is the breathing Hope in our Hearts. He is the example of how our Faith should be. This is the Epiphany that we are to come to. Cast away your darkness and come to the Light. Come to the Love. When you are present to Love, real Love, you are present with God for God IS Love.

So, let's get back to my question that asked what type of deal or bargain do you make with darkness in order to experience love? Are we to ignore that darkness exists? Of course not. It does. Just like Father Narain said last week on his sermon about happiness. Just because someone can be happy doesn't mean the elimination of the existence of suffering. One of my favorite Spiritualist, Ram Dass, a practitioner of Hinduism, asked this question once to a person interviewing him, "What type of bargain do you make with suffering in order to be happy?" and I ask that question a lot to people I first meet to see what type of person they are. Now, there is no right answer to that question. I just think an individual's answer to that question says a lot about that person's outlook. I think the same is true about the question about what one does with the existence of darkness when trying to experience love. As with most things, there is no one answer, but that answer will reveal what type of outlook you have when dealing with life.

I thought the question Paul posed in our second lesson today, Acts 19, was a poignant one and said a lot about how we Christians see things. He asked disciples, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" When they said that they said no and had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit, Paul asked them how they were baptized and they said they were baptized into John's baptism, the same baptism Jesus got in our Gospel today in Mark 1. Paul then said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling them to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." What does one do when they repent? Do they not vow to turn away from their past darkness? We are told as Christians to repent and receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. In other words, we are told in our practice to turn away from our past and current darkneses and receive the light of Jesus. The manifestation of God's love for us.

So what we must do, in my view, is to be open to Love and Light, even in the face of darkness, as that is the only way in which to turn our nights into days. What we often forget is that the only reason for darkness to exist is for it to eventually be lit up. We should never wallow in our darkness. We should endeavor to see hope in it. An answer in what we cannot yet see. Darkness is not in itself bad, though we often characterize it as such. And much of the pain and

suffering we see in this world has to do with us wallowing in darkness and not doing any seeking to come out of it. Darkness, if things are right with our souls, cause us to question and seek answers. And those answers often have to do a lot with light and love. Darkness is akin to our mysteries. If we stay locked into our mysteries, pain and suffering ensues. And if your answers do not lead to light and love then you are still in the dark. Light and Love bring progress. Darkness and the wallowing in it only brings stagnation and death. Jesus teaches we Christians that where there is an end, there is a beginning. When there is Death, there is New Life. Jesus teaches us not to be afraid of death. It is a shame that many many Christian have such a fear of Death. That just shows many of us are not paying attention. That is not to say that we should seek death but we just should not be so afraid of it. This is the WAY. The WAY also has to do with love; loving everyone and everything the way God loves us. The WAY has to do with respecting everyone and appreciating everyone that God presents in our paths. It is sad that we do not appreciate the people in our lives more. We all seek love, but oftentimes we just do not appreciate it and take it for granted. We may be dark to the benefit of people in our lives and in our world at first, but we are supposed to seek the light of that benefit. Seeking for the light in our darkness so that it will be lit up. So when I take all this into account, I think my definition of love as the intense sense of warmness, respect, attraction, and glowing that you feel when you are drawn to a person, group, or any of God's creation, that washes over you in a way which reminds you that God is PROFOUNDLY present in your life, to be quite apt. So in my answer to the question about how I bargain with darkness to experience love in my life, is that I try to find light in it to get to my love. That is my Epiphany, ladies and gentlemen. What is yours?