



October 26, 2021

We Need Not Fear the Dark

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

Are you afraid of the dark? This time of year, the ever-looming darkness is a reminder that things are slowing down. Yet, darkness is something that often can cause us fear. We may not find ourselves like children asking for a night light, but we like to do everything we can to keep the darkness away.

Bright lights in our homes convince us there are still hours left in the day. We stare at phones, computer and TV screens well into the dark of night, even as we lie in bed sometimes, as we try to stave off the night. We feel our bodies needing to give in to sleep, but it's so easy to try to squeeze in just a little more productivity.

Why are we afraid of the dark? It is because we are a people who fear slowing down, who fear what we feel is the unknown, who ultimately fear death.

There is a reason why scary movies take place in the dark, and why Halloween activities and haunts are reserved for the nighttime hours. In the night, we find ourselves unsure of our way without a flashlight or mobile phone light. We find ourselves vulnerable. In the dark, we are reminded of our limits and mortality.

So, we turn instead to busyness and activity to keep the night away. We think that if we just stay active, we won't be reminded of our limits as mortals, as human beings.

After all, we are a society of Marthas. In the Biblical story of Mary and Martha preparing for Jesus' arrival at their home, the sisters respond to their friend Jesus in different ways. Martha is distracted by her many tasks to prepare all the food and busies herself with last-minute work, while Mary sits attentively at Jesus' feet. The contrast is stark, but Jesus doesn't condemn Martha's good work – he instead commends her sister Mary who “has chosen the better part which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). Jesus says this in hopes that it will be a reminder to Martha that slowing down, resting in God's beauty, and noticing what God is doing is even more important at times than us staying busy with activity.

In a world where our worth is often based on what we do, it is difficult to take the time to actively rest. Actively, yes, because rest is something which we must intentionally, actively, seek to do.

In these past couple of years, I have heard from many people their surprise in how quickly time has flown by. The seasons seem to come and go, and we have little time to stop and observe them. We have little time to marvel in the beauty of God's creation: the leaves changing from vibrant green to hues of red, yellow, and orange; a squirrel gathering nuts in preparation for the upcoming cold; a cool wind rustling through the trees; steam rising gently off a cup of hot coffee; and the sun setting just a little earlier each night. It can seem wrong, wasteful even, to take the time to slow down and observe small pleasures in a day.

I have noted that when I take even half an hour to read something just for the pleasure of it, it feels selfish, like I should be doing other things. There's laundry, and dishes, and phone calls, and emails, and other things that are waiting for me.

But what I've realized is that taking time to slow down and marvel in God's creation is something that God intends for us, as his creatures. God created all things and named them "good" (Genesis 1:1-31). Even God rested and enjoyed the creation after God was done creating. Taking time to rest and slow down is a way for us to both see God's Kingdom breaking in now and to be reminded that we are finite beings whose trust must be in the Lord.

As we notice the seasons changing, as nature responds around us and daylight disappears sooner in the day, we need not fear the darkness. Our Lord has gone through the darkness himself, and we know that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). So, take a moment, marvel in God's creation, and remember that God's Kingdom is breaking in, even in the darkness.