

First Sunday after Christmas—Year A  
Isaiah 61:10-62:3  
Psalm 147:13-21  
Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7  
John 1:1-18

I've been thinking a lot about the **hero's journey** this **Christmas**. It may have something to do with the release of **Episode 9: The Rise of Skywalker**, the last of the movies in the **Star Wars** saga that began **42 years ago** when I was **12 years old**. Don't worry, no spoiler alerts—I haven't seen it yet, and please don't tell me *anything* if *you've* seen it. But in preparation for the eventual seeing of this movie, our family rewatched **Episode 8: The Last Jedi** which, of course, arises out of **Episode 7: The Force Awakens**.

And here's what we know from **those two episodes**, and really from **the whole saga**—*characters are always a mixture of light and dark*.

The **great Luke Skywalker** has to confront his **desire to rewrite the narrative of his relationship with young Ben Solo**, and finally has to own how **his own fear of the dark he saw rising in young Ben** pushed *him, Luke*, to **almost commit a horrific act in his desire to vanquish that dark**. *And Luke's fear set in motion a chain of events that does lead Ben down a dark path indeed*.

In **Episode 7**, we see how **the former Imperial Storm Trooper—Finn**—a figure we would associate with **the dark side**—*tasks off his mask revealing his light*, even while we see **Ben Solo put on his mask** and transform **into the really complicated dark figure of Kylo Ren**.

And who can forget the **conflicted figure of Darth Vader**.

These movies are always **weaving the threads of light and dark together**. *Every figure of light can also choose the dark, and figures consumed with dark still hold sparks of light*. What makes these movies so compelling is that most of us can relate to these **dilemmas** and **choices**. The **forces of dark are strong**, but still, we **refuse to give up hope in the light**. And honestly, *trying to send the darkness to the outer darkness never works anyway, neither in Star Wars, nor in us*.

This morning's **gospel** is also **epic**. The **opening paragraph** rings out in **verses 1-5 taking us all the way back to creation** itself. And just like **Star Wars** has that legendary script that crawls at the beginning of every movie, so too this text that sets the stage for everything to come: **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**. And then, bringing **all that soaring language and power of creation itself all the way down and locating it in our flesh** in **verse 14: And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth**.

And on this **particular morning**, what jumps out to me in high relief is this **interplay of light and dark**. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*. There is **no notion that the darkness should not exist; it does, and it has since creation began**. There is **no sense of trying to vanquish this darkness and send it away; there is no desire to do away with it, only the deep understanding that there is a light that shines in it and the darkness did not, has not, will not, cannot overcome it**.

*This Word spoken in the beginning, through whom all things were created, this Word then spoken into our very flesh, this Word is not afraid of the dark, which means it can simply shine its light in it and invite that dark to find its own light, even in the hidden places far out of sight from that light.*

I think this is what Jesus does his whole life long. He is not afraid of the darkness that he encounters, *neither in the demons, nor in the despairing, nor in the lost, nor in the arrogant and proud and self-sufficient.* He invites people to confront whatever is dark in their lives, in their structures, in their souls and to bring it out into *the light* where it can be reconnected to the whole. *How does he do that?* Well, because **he is the Word made flesh who spoke both dark and light into being in creation itself, and he's been mediating between the two, showing them how to dance together, ever since.** And let us not forget that Jesus did his wilderness time where all the forces of the dark tried to woo him down a different path. He danced with the dark, both in that wilderness and in Gethsemane; he had to make his choices, choices that held the power and light they did for *him having played out and not chosen other possibilities.*

And we won't be 12 days out from this **bright light of Christmas** before **Herod casts his shadow over Bethlehem in his murderous rage.** The Christmas light is bright, but we all know that **deep darkness doesn't give up without a fight.**

In due course, this **Christmas journey will lead us all to Calvary,** and the **dark will again descend, swallowing up this light** we celebrate today. *But even on that day,* with arms outstretched, yielding and **embracing at the same time,** in the mystery of all mysteries, it **will be the light that swallows all that darkness in a love the darkness can't begin to fathom.**

From there, **Jesus will go to his tomb,** and *tradition holds,* **descend into hell,** and if Cynthia Bourgeault's intuitions are right, in that **truly godforsaken place of darkness,** *Jesus will gently reconnect all that has been lost,* all those *pieces of our false selves that go to dark places,* *Jesus will gently reconnect all these pieces to the whole, and raise them, and us, up with him on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.*

So, if you are well acquainted with the dark, in this war torn and conflicted world that we live in, if you are well acquainted with the dark in someone you love, or in your own soul, *this morning's passage is most definitely for you: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it, not in the beginning of creation, not when the Word was made flesh, not on the cross of Calvary, not now as 2019 draws to close.*

This Word who is light and life has been made flesh, pitched the tent of divine Presence right in our very skin, forever inextricably tied to our human condition with its ever present mixture of light and dark. *Don't be afraid of either—Jesus knows what to do with both.* With him to guide you, you will make your own hero's journey until you come to understand *how to shine, even when the dark is overwhelming.* Amen.

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December 29, 2019