

# God's Will in the Dark

*"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,  
Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone  
had been removed from the entrance."*

John 20:1

**Sunday, April 12**  
Resurrection Sunday  
Major Gerald (Gary) Reilly  
The Salvation Army  
Mississippi-Rideau Lakes Corps

“Late on a full-mooned Sunday night, the two figures in work clothes appeared on Highway 27, just outside the small college town of Ashton.”<sup>1</sup>

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”<sup>2</sup>

“King David was a man who knew danger.”<sup>3</sup>

We all have those lines from books, movies or television shows that stick in our minds and we often pull them out when opportunity arise. “These aren’t the droids you’re looking for” becomes “These aren’t the notes I’m looking for” or “These aren’t the shoes I’m looking for”, all said with a wave of the hand and our best Obi-wan Kenobi voice. Surely you yourself or a friend has coined “s anyone here a marine biologist” on at least one occasion. Memorable lines stay with us for any number of reason, sometimes for their humor, sometimes for their hidden meaning, at least “that’s what she said.”

There are many great lines in Scripture, and one that is pregnant with meaning is found in John. It sets the stage for the greatest act of self-sacrifice ever, and sets in motion a story that has been retold in every corner of the world many times over. Here is what John tells us at the end of the thirteenth chapter: *“As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.”* (John 13:30)

This Bible verse drips with intrigue. The Bible doesn’t say, but in my mind I picture a foggy night, a night awash with the hooting of an owl and the howling of coyotes. I picture a full moon being obscured behind a scattered shroud of clouds. It’s no accident that melodramas often use the night, or darkness, as a setting intended to heighten fear and dread. How many times have you found yourself begging the guy in the red shirt to not go into that dark room, or peer into that dark closet?

Scripture, and John in particular, uses the light/dark and day/night dichotomy quite often to illustrate the life with or without God. One commentator calls this verse most “evocative”, saying it “is in a category by itself...where “literal and spiritual levels of the image combine to produce a wrenching picture of the evil soul abandoning itself to the ultimate deed of darkness.”<sup>4</sup> Judas leaves the presence of Jesus, bent on betraying his master. His friend. His Saviour. And it wa night.

Have you ever noticed how carefully or nervously we will walk even in a familiar place, if there is no light. We just know that every chair and table leg is sticking itself out in search of a baby toe; or that the piece of lego invisible to our eyes hours earlier with be found by our foot. There are times though when the darkness isn’t so much physical as it is emotional, and or spiritual. Perhaps you are feeling a little in the dark right now. These are unusual times. There is a real fear that what we once thought to be normal is lost forever. Who would have believed entire towns, provinces, countries, would be locked down for even a day – let alone a week, month...or, that the fear, right, we don’t know for how long.

Suddenly we get nervous if someone approaches just a little to close, and we shudder at images of groups of people. Where will it end? When will it end? How will it end? During a time of great upheaval and uncertainty in Jerusalem, God spoke words of assurance to the prophet Isaiah: “Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God.” (Isaiah 50:10), or as rendered by the Message translation, “For anyone out there who doesn’t know where you’re going, anyone groping in the dark, Here’s what: Trust in GOD. *Lean* on your God!”

It's easy to have faith, to believe in God, to speak 'Christainese' into the world around us during the day; when a child is born healthy, when a loved one returns home safely, when the bills are paid, when there is food on the table and roof over our heads. But it's a little different when it is night, when we can't see what lies around the corner, or what's hidden in the dark; when we are anxious about what the next day will bring. We are living in dark times – all of us. Though the darkness is not a war, it is still dark. Darkness comes in many ways, doesn't it? Those who know the story, know that for Jesus and the disciples there will be darkness ahead. There will be those anxious thoughts, that dread of the night.

However, Scripture reassures us that our story doesn't end in darkness. A few days after Judas disappeared into the night, the scene shifts. John noting, *“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.”* (John 20:1)

Notice when Mary when went to the tomb? “...while it was still dark”. She arose, got herself ready, and headed out of the city even before the sun had peeked over the horizon. It was still very much night. Joining several others, they went to the tomb that morning in the certainty that they were going to anoint a dead body, the body of a man they had thought was so much more, but in the end, turned out to be just a man. They had watched him being beaten, carry a cross, and eventually succumb to crucifixion as darkness came upon the land. And as they went to the tomb, it was still dark.

They went to the tomb alone because the men, those who had been Jesus closest companions for three years, those who had been in the garden with upon his arrest, had run away, and were still running. They had locked themselves away in a hidden location, fearing the reprisal of the Jewish leaders, fearful that they were next. Sure, Peter had stayed nearby during the trial, but now he was a wreck – broken. Mary had never thought possible that this larger than life fishermen could suddenly seem so small—so shaken. For the disciples, all their hopes and dreams, all that they had expected, had come crashing down around them. And now for three days they had stumbled in a fog of uncertainty, knowing not where to turn, knowing not what the future might bring, knowing not if and when the sounds of swords and Roman soldiers might come pounding on the door. For them too, it was still dark.

Notice too though, that even though it was still dark, the stone had already been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb – the language actually suggesting that it had been picked up and set down beside the tomb. One might say it has been defiantly set aside. While darkness had enveloped the city of Jerusalem and caused the disciples of Jesus to cower; even while they spent perhaps a sleepless night wondering and watching (something they found hard to do just a few nights ago), the stone could not contain the one they knew to be dead. And all that happened while it was still dark.

You see, even while it was still dark – the tomb was empty. Even as Mary and the others walked quietly and somberly to the cemetery; even as the disciples trembled behind locked doors – Jesus had risen. The dark doesn't alter or prevent or drown out the glorious news – that even in the dark, He is risen. No amount of darkness can overcome the light. No amount of darkness can rob us of the assurance we have because He is risen.

Perhaps you are watching over a family member whose health is failing. It may be you are deeply concerned for an elderly parent whose home is on lockdown due to an outbreak. It may be that a child had been born, but there *are* complications and little to no answers to your questions. Maybe you are one of the brave and tired frontline workers who has put in many

long hours, and despite potential of catching this illness and passing it on to those you love, you faithfully shown up at work each day to serve others. Yet the days ahead are full of the unknown – and it is dark. Perhaps your now out of work for the first time, and you have mouths to feed, a mortgage to pay, bills that demand attention, and though the cheque is in the mail or assistance is coming through the wires, it is still dark.

The night in our lives takes on many shapes, falls upon us from many directions, and in the dark it is always hard to see – perhaps that's why we are reminded that we walk by faith, and not by sight. It seemed dark to Mary too, but the darkness could not and cannot alter the reality that – Jesus had risen from the tomb.

One of the Psalms that brings people great comfort is the 23<sup>rd</sup> – The Shepherds Psalm. Near the end of his book, Lt. Carey Cash points to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, the verse which gives his book *A Table in the Presence* its title. Cash was a Marine Corps Chaplain affixed to the “Fightin’ Fifth”, troops who had been at the vanguard of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and it was a battalion from the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines Regiment who endured intense fire when ambushed heading into Baghdad. These soldiers had endured in real life and death, what a majority finds entertainment on an Xbox. Yet, in the midst of battle and upon reflection of his experiences administering the sacraments on the eve of battle; counselling young soldiers distraught over the death of close friends; praying beside mortally wounded Marines—Lt Carey Cash chose this passage as one of great import.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.

For the psalmist, the most likely time to be in the presence of an enemy was in battle, or at the least, during a conflict. Something those Marines understood very well. An enemy was someone who desired to do you harm; to be victorious over you, your people – your family, your comrades. But it is there, in the midst of such trying times, that the Lord prepares for us a banquet. As Cash notes:

In the end, those words are not just poetry to be memorized or part of a beloved Psalm to be read at funerals. That simple, ancient portrait of an unlikely feast is a promise to be believed and a bedrock upon which we can build our lives. King David believed it. A battalion of U.S. Marines experienced it. And its power is offered to us all, who in the midst of our trials, and even when surrounded by enemies can find that relentless courage, that reckless faith, that undying hope we need to look unto God—and believe.<sup>5</sup>

It may be night, and the darkness may not yet have lifted – but He is risen! The light *will* shine and the darkness *will* be dispelled. Jesus has defeated our most feared enemy – death. It is not our circumstances, nor sin, nor a virus, nor darkness that will have the final word. For as the Prophet says: “For anyone out there who doesn’t know where you’re going, anyone groping in the dark, Here’s what: Trust in GOD. *Lean* on your God!”

I pray this Easter, especially this Easter filled with such uncertainty and anxiety, that you will receive from the Father “treasures hidden in the darkness— secret riches...so you may know that [HE is] the LORD, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name.” (Isaiah 45:3) God’s will is no less real in the dark as it is in the light. That first Easter morning is not only something to be celebrated each year in remembrance of the resurrection of our Lord, it is also a reality to be anticipated in the future. Jesus is but the first-fruits of the greater harvest that will one day rise to meet Him in the air. Hallelujah! Jesus is alive!

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Frank E. Peretti, *This Present Darkness*, 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary limited edition (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), 9.
- <sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 425.
- <sup>3</sup> Lt. Carey H. Cash, *A Table in the Presence* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2004), XI.
- <sup>4</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III., eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 595.
- <sup>5</sup> Lt. Carey H. Cash, *A Table in the Presence* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2004), 237-238.