

Toughing Out the Bleakness

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, Norwalk, CT, December 20, 2018

Revelation 22: 1-5 and John 1:1-5

Winter is my least favorite season. If I was living someplace with milder weather, California perhaps, I might feel less adverse. Yet the reality is I live in New England and winters here are harsh. Tree limbs lay skeletal. Night is longer. Cold, bitter winds blow. Snow and ice make for treacherous commutes. Daydreams of being somewhere else becomes my means of toughing out winter's bleakness.

How often does wanting to escape become our response to the bleak, dark moments in our lives?

We get uncomfortable staying present with the dark and with toughing out the bleakness in our lives—from health issues to prejudice and oppression to losses of all kinds. We see nothing but dark, cold, nebulous blobs looming before us. We fear them. We assume they will never leave or that our conditions may never improve. We see death and despair—no way of overcoming, no way out.

And we want a way out, we want one so desperately that we try, even if momentarily, to escape the dark, cold blobs that are our life struggles, trying to understand why they're there and what they might offer us. We want to drive out them out with glitzy LED lights when perhaps we'd do better with the soft, organic glow of a candle.

We will celebrate in just four days the night when God's Light came to humanity in the person of Jesus. "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." Christ comes to overcome our darkness not with harsh light but a gentle one, one to warm our bleak hearts with life made new, Word made flesh, in humility and in very natural, human circumstances.

How might we shine Christ's light wherever we are and with whomever or whatever we encounter—including the dark, cold, nebulous blobs of personal challenges and societal afflictions? How do we stay present with our fears and trials and tough out our time with them? How do we, like Christ, use soft natural lighting to understand, then learn and grow from them?

Perhaps setting aside the urge to escape, replacing it with a desire to remain fully present, is a start. Perhaps when we acknowledge, as recounted in Psalm 139, that darkness is not dark to God but is as bright as day, we might understand that—with patience and trust in God as our light—we will pass through the dark, cold blobs of our afflictions and into the radiant fullness of life that awaits us on the other side.

Of course, that requires faith that the fullness of life God promises is indeed on the other side. It requires toughing out the bleakness.

So stay present when next tempted to escape. It is God's natural order that love and light prevail in all circumstances. And what better proof of that do we have than Christmas—God's promise that Christ's light shines in the darkness of our natural world and darkness cannot overcome it. Amen. O come, Emmanuel.