



Stories from the Body of Christ with Todd Seifert

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Darkness.

It's a word with many meanings in our world today.

Sometimes it's literal. I once was in a photo darkroom — when we still used film — when the power went out ... the epitome of darkness.

Sometimes it's a feeling, such as when you feel a lack of hope after losing a job or receiving a grim medical diagnosis.

And darkness is often used as a metaphor in our society today. People I know who have struggled with depression have described their recoveries as "escaping from a dark place."

And popular culture uses darkness in storylines all the time:

- In Joseph Conrad's novel "Heart of Darkness" he uses the word to describe the unknowns of Africa while making statements — bold for the end of the 19th century — about racism and imperialism.
- Poet Emily Dickinson, in her poem "We Become Accustomed to the Dark," uses the word to reflect uncertainty.
- Darkness in movies is used in just about every horror flick to provide scene-setting intrigue in suspenseful dramas.
- And, of course, one of my all-time favorite series of movies, "Star Wars," openly talks about the "dark side of the Force."

Some of us grew up scared of the dark. At the least, the dark makes it difficult, if not impossible, for us to see. My wife and I have, as of this recording, have a 10 month old puppy named Suzy. She's a completely black Lab-Hound mix. When I take her out just before bedtime, I take a flashlight because our yard has no fence, and I can't see her once she gets beyond the lighting of our back patio. She blends into the darkness.

Darkness is difficult for us. It's unsettling, especially because we know our world is filled with darkness. Mass shootings jar us because of the unwarranted violence and devastating results. Corruption in leadership disappoints us and causes us to lose respect for people we're supposed to be able to trust.

So, what if I told you there is a light for the entire world, one that provides a beacon of hope amid the many forms of darkness in this life.

Let me explain by beginning with a reading from the Gospel of John. You may want to follow along in a Bible. Or you can read from an app, such as BibleGateway.com or the YouVersion app for your phone or tablet — both are found in the Apple App Store and on Google Play! We're on John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. If you're unfamiliar with how the Bible is put together, this is actually the fourth book of what we call the New Testament — roughly two-thirds of the way back from the very front of your Bible. I'll be reading from the Common English Bible — I

like it because it tends to use more contemporary language, which makes the Bible a little easier to understand on the first attempt of studying the scriptures.

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.

2 The Word was with God in the beginning.

3 Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word  
nothing came into being.

What came into being

4 through the Word was life,  
and the life was the light for all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

6 A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

9 The true light that shines on all people  
was coming into the world.

10 The light was in the world,  
and the world came into being through the light,  
but the world didn't recognize the light.

11 The light came to his own people,  
and his own people didn't welcome him.

12 But those who did welcome him,  
those who believed in his name,  
he authorized to become God's children,

13 born not from blood  
nor from human desire or passion,  
but born from God.

14 The Word became flesh  
and made his home among us.

We have seen his glory,  
glory like that of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.

15 John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"

16 From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;

17 as the Law was given through Moses,  
so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God.

God the only Son,

who is at the Father's side,  
has made God known.

These 18 verses are like poetry and are talking about Jesus. You probably have heard of him, but you may not know much about him. I hope to change that, starting with this episode. There are a lot of great concepts about Jesus that we can learn from this beginning to the book of John, but for this episode I want to focus on just one, the concept of light.

The scripture we just read explores the concept of darkness being overtaken by the light. We'll look again at verses 4 and 5, where it says, "through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light."

This passage is telling us that Jesus is the light. And I love this description. Think about light for a moment. When we have trouble reading something, like for a college class, or when we have trouble seeing components, such as when we're under a desk or trying to figure out how a cable plugs into a television or computer, what do we do to make things easier for us: We turn on a light!

Jesus is described as light because His entrance into the world, into our story as creations of the living God, brought light, the brightness we need to grasp and fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

The world Jesus entered was just as troubled as the one we live in now.

People were marginalized. The poor had little hope. Oppression was rampant. The Roman government hailed for many of its practices was actually an oppressor to the Jewish people, keeping them on a relatively tight leash.

Into that world came a Jewish man named Jesus. We'll get more into his birth as we get closer to Christmas, but as an adult Jesus taught anyone who would listen to him how we can bring the Kingdom of God down to this earth. It involves us loving God so we have a better understanding of how to treat others. It involves us loving our neighbors so we can connect with not just the people who live next door to us but also people who don't look like us, talk like us, go to the same places as us.

Our world today is enveloped in darkness. Mass shootings are so common that they sometimes don't even lead the network news. Despite our celebrations about low unemployment rates, far too many people are working two and three jobs and still can't move beyond just scraping by to make the monthly rent payment and to put food on the table.

Racism remains a scourge on our society. And we fail to live up to Jesus' teachings about caring for the stranger among us, as we forget this explicit teaching from God in the name of protecting ourselves. We'll talk about that at another time.

You get the idea. Jesus came as the light to a dark world more than 2,000 years ago. And he keeps coming back — into my life, perhaps into yours. He continues to teach us that loving others means loving all people. And us showing that love sheds a little bit of light on their dark corner of the world. If enough of us share and show love to others, pretty soon the darkness fades and fades and fades.

Finally, for those of you listening who already are believers in Christ, it involves us telling other people our stories, sharing with others how a relationship with Jesus Christ has made an impact on our lives.

How has knowing Christ changed you? Or how does knowing Jesus Christ help you stay centered, to show kindness to others, to stand up for the downtrodden, to provide acts of mercy and to fight for justice.

Telling our stories can help the world become a much more peaceful, loving, inclusive, dare I say, brighter place.

In the year of the life of the church, we call this time of the year “Advent.” It is a time of expectation, of waiting with anticipation of the birth of the Christ child. We celebrate that birth on Christmas.

It’s appropriate that the symbol of that eventful moment in history is a bright star. We commemorate it with stars atop Christmas trees at this time of year.

What do stars do? They shine. They bring light. We call ours the sun. But there are millions more out there in our big, vast universe.

Closer to us, on earth, Jesus came as the light, a light so bright that the darkness can’t overcome it.

That doesn’t mean our life will always be perfect, that we’ll avoid disappointment or challenges. But it means we have an eternal hope.

We started this episode talking about darkness. Where is darkness most evident? For some of us, it’s when we notice the shadows. We never know for sure what’s lurking in there, but it can’t be good, can it?

I urge you to remember what we talked about earlier: The darkness can’t overcome the light. Funny thing about shadows: They don’t exist when there is a source of light.

The darkness is always there, but so is the light. We can take solace in knowing Jesus is always present.

Going forward, we’ll talk about how you can invite Jesus — the light — into your life and cause those shadows to first lighten up and eventually to disappear.

If you’re interested, I want to offer a simple prayer for you today:

Dear God, we are often fearful of the darkness. Within those shadows is an often-cruel world. Help me to experience Jesus this week. Help me to see the light.

Amen.