

Cancer. Divorce. Addiction. Violence. We can't get away from these things in our world. We live in a culture of death and a cycle of violence that it's hard for us to not have it impact our lives. Hate or fear are rooted in many forms of darkness: racism, sexism, terrorism, homophobia, xenophobia, human trafficking, and murder. There are forms of darkness that may not seem extreme on the national or global level but are extreme to us. The metaphor of darkness can mean whatever darkness we have experienced. Take a moment to think about what types of darkness you have experienced or perhaps are experiencing right now.

It could be *any* disease or ailment, chronic pain, child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, unemployment, poverty, depression, death of a loved one, unshakable grief. Or it could be something subtle that we all experience that leads us to a darkness in our spirit: jealousy, anger, sadness, pride, not feeling good enough, not feeling accepted, or simply not getting our way. None of these forms of darkness come from God. God does not use darkness to teach us a lesson or punish us. God is the opposite of darkness; God is light.

In Exodus 13, God was the light that led the Israelites out of slavery through the wilderness. And, not just any light. Exodus 13:21 tells us that it was a "pillar of fire." This is what one artist envisioned what it looked like. At night the Lord manifested into a pillar of fire that directed them which way to go and this light became a comfort to them. When the pillar of fire moved, the people packed up their camp and followed behind it. When the pillar of fire stopped, the Israelites stopped and set up camp underneath the light. They felt comforted to be under God's presence, and it was in the center of camp at all times. God's light was

the center of their lives and was always going ahead of them to show them the way through the darkness.

This is a powerful image of God's presence in the form of light. We may feel like the Israelites sometimes as we wander around in our own wilderness. We may not feel like there is a way out because we don't see a pillar of fire over us. We may feel that we should just give up because we can't figure this thing out. We may not have a literal pillar of fire guiding us and comforting us, but we do have Jesus who said, "I am the light of the world." God walks with us through our darkness, and because we have Jesus, there IS a way out of our darkness.

We can't fully appreciate the light of Christ until we recognize our darkness and acknowledge that we're powerless against it alone. Our darkness is not always of our own making. We live in a broken world and will have trials that enter our lives. Sometimes our darkness is a result of our own actions. When we acknowledge that, as painful as it may be, we can know that being able to admit our fault is a result of Christ working within us. Once we surrender our will and recognize the darkness in our lives, we invite the light in and allow a pillar of fire to dispel the darkness. When we turn over the darkness to Christ, and Christ comes on the scene, there is light because Christ is light. We don't have to worry about how to get out of the darkness or where we'll end up. We just need to focus on following the light one step at a time, one day at a time.

I have experienced darkness in my life too. Seven years ago, when I was 39 years old, and had a 5-year-old, a 2-year-old, and a 10-month-old, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a very dark time for our family, but one thing I know for sure is God did not give me cancer. Cancer is just

part of our broken world and part of my family. Four people have died from cancer in my family, including my mother, and eleven family members, including myself, have tested positive for the BRCA 1 gene that makes us predisposed to cancer. This stupid disease, and multiple surgeries, and changes to my body that I did not want, and then survivor's guilt...all of it was a great darkness in my life, that was filled with fear, pain, anger, and grief. But, God walked with me through that time. God walked ahead of me as a pillar of fire to show me the way out of that darkness, and it was comforting to see God's light throughout the journey.

Our church family and many people in our community were praying for us during this time. I had a woman stop me on the street and say, "You don't know me, but I know your mother-in-law, and I want you to know that I'm praying for you." After a long, 8-hour surgery, doctors who had no idea of our faith came out to talk to Andy, and they told him there was something different in the OR. There was something that felt like a healing presence in the room. It may not have been an actual pillar of fire over me, but I was camped under God's presence.

That entire year of 2011 was a period of darkness and light. I've pretty much written that year off because I don't remember a lot of it. It was a long and painful recovery. It killed me to not be able to hold my baby or let my young children sit on my lap during that time. But, it was also filled with light when women from my Bible study showed up to hold my babies for me and took them to the park to play. And, I don't have to tell you about all the food that came into the house. We know how to care for each other through food! God cared for us through so many people from doctors, nurses, our church family to strangers. We

never felt alone. God's light was a great comfort to us.

Experiencing darkness can help us understand the darkness in others, so we can reflect the light of Christ to others by showing them compassion and mercy. Jesus said this *I Am* metaphor, "I am the light of the world," in John 8, right after the story of the woman who was caught in adultery. She was brought before the people to be shamed and condemned. But, we see that Jesus did not shame her nor condemn her. He bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground, causing the people to look at him to see what he was writing. Scripture doesn't tell us what he wrote because *what* he wrote is not the point. Jesus created a distraction for the people to take their eyes off of the woman to look at him instead. What a compassionate way for Jesus to show this woman that he loved her. He didn't judge nor condemn her and told the people to do likewise. Jesus asks us to do the same today.

We live in a world filled with darkness, yet also filled with light because Jesus is the light of the world. When we turn over our darkness, God's pillar of fire becomes the center of our lives and guides us out of the darkness and comforts us. God can then use us to be light reflectors into others' darkness. We are called to let the light of Jesus shine through us, so others can find their way out of the darkness.

Let's take another moment of silent meditation, so we can think about how we can be the light for someone this week. I will then close with a prayer written by Steven Garnaas-Holmes: "Do not be afraid to live among people who love the sword, who speak with iron hearts. You have been sent to make gentle this wounded world, to live in peace among those who are afraid, to bear healing to those who are captive to the spirit of pride and violence. Do not despair

*Who Do You Say That I Am:
"I am the light of the world."*

Light Reflectors
Pastor Kristie Grimaud
John 8:12-16
February 25, 2018

because of the oppressors, those who judge and despise, who will not listen, who do not know how to join with neighbors. Rejoice, for you have been given to them, to shine light into the darkness of their world. The Holy Spirit sustains you, so that you may dwell as healers among fearful people. Bear your outrage lightly; do not cling to it. Let it lead you toward compassion, not anger. Pray that you may not be defeated by vengefulness, eaten by the appetite for power, destroyed by the spirit of destructiveness. Anger is not your weapon; it is your enemy. The spirit of violence seeps into the world. But you radiate Good News, you breathe gentleness into the air that all others breathe, you establish trust on the earth. Be broken hearted. And through the cracks let light shine...the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it."¹ Amen.

¹ www.unfoldinglight.net