

“The Light Inside All Things”

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Readings

John O'Donohue in *Walking in Wonder: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*

One of my images of the divine is that it is light in some form, and that the divine light works very tenderly with human freedom. If you don't believe that the light is there, you will experience the darkness. But if you believe the light is there, and if you call the light towards you, and if you call it into whatever you're involved in, the light will never fail you. . . . Thought, creative thought particularly, is about liberating light. There is light inside everything that happens to you.

Psalm 19:3-4 from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Divine words aren't heard,
their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth:
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

It is a very human thing to seek enlightenment. The term “enlightenment” itself can be viewed in any number of ways – historically, philosophically, theologically. We might search for it in the arts and sciences, in literature, or in spiritual practices like meditation and contemplative practices. In other words, enlightenment as a concept is a rather general term which, in a vague sense, seems like the quest that pulls us up Rock Hill or has us logging on each week.

To be “in the dark” is to be unaware or to be separate from the truth. The things we long to see, hear, and know for ourselves can at times seem hidden, inaccessible, a puzzle or a riddle to be solved. For most of us, what we would call enlightenment is a lifelong quest, and often our brains become a catalogue that simply accumulates information about what it might mean to be enlightened. But information is not the same thing as transformation. To be wise is to have taken the information and lived it in a way that changes us, and through us it changes the world around us. In a

word, it's *wisdom* that we're really talking about. It's the ability to take in something as vast and as broad as we can hope to comprehend at present, and then to open ourselves to the transformation that it can offer. It's a process we might call spiritual growth or progress, and if this were not our pursuit we'd be elsewhere this morning, doing something else. But we're here, and we're open. We're quieting ourselves. As we said it last week, we're listening a new day into being.

Today we turn our attention toward "divine light," which the late poet John O'Donohue said "works very tenderly with human freedom." It is the expression of what we might call God, seen as a pure light that exists in all things and in all people. Not everyone recognizes its presence, of course, and this is why O'Donohue says that it is something to be called upon and brought forward.

Light, in the Christian scriptures, can be seen as the energy of life itself, as written in the gospel portrait associated with the Apostle John, where it says of Jesus, "In him was life, and his life was the light of all, the light that enlightens everyone who enters this world." Spiritual growth can be seen then as the lifelong practice of removing the barriers to the light that already exists within us. I often say that breath is Spirit, and Spirit is Life, and Life is the energy that animates everything; it is what breathes us and beats our hearts, and wakes us up in the morning and sings us to sleep at night.

Viewed in a quantum way, everything is energy. What appears to us as matter is simply energy that is vibrating at a lower frequency than (say) a radio signal. Since I am a theologian and not a scientist, I would leave it there for others to enlighten me, but I always find it fascinating and hopeful when science and mysticism intersect. It gives me a view of God that I can live with, a Jesus I can learn from, and a church that has something to say that isn't relegated to the realm of woo-woo.

During these last several days, the energy of light has taken on a very personal meaning for us. It was on Thursday morning that Tina Green made a post on the Caring Bridge website about Tom's journey with hospice. People were speaking of it at our Stone Soup gathering, so with the John O'Donohue reading still on my computer screen, I sent Tom and Tina a voice text and read it aloud to them, assured them of our love, and told them I would hope to see them soon. Before long I had a response from Tina asking for a copy of the reading, because, as she said, "It was one of those absolutely sublime perfect timing moments. It absolutely lit Tom up!" Since Thursday I have taken note of Tina's use of the word "lit." It calls forward the Divine Light that John O'Donohue spoke of so eloquently. And in the process of my conversation with Tina, I was reminded of something I knew, but had forgotten: Tom and Tina *knew* John O'Donohue through their enduring friendship with David Whyte. They had walked with him at one time years ago and heard him speak. And somehow on Friday, Tom called the light toward himself, and that light did not fail him. Some of his last words were "I love everybody." This, my friends, is a God-moment, a time of connectedness, a witness to the divine energy that flows through all. If we want enlightenment, then here it is, right in our midst. It is the "unspoken truth," according to the psalmist – the divine words that often are not audible. The unspoken truth is found in silence, which is why we continue to practice that silence, not just to pass the time, or to calm our anxieties and lower our heart rate (though that might also happen).

I don't do it so I can understand or believe in God, but rather so I can *experience* God, so that I can see the light in all things and in all people, even the ones with whom I might wildly disagree or with whom I find myself in conflict. Unspoken truth is spoken everywhere, even through inexplicable times with insufferable people; even in circumstances that feel debilitating or unsafe; even when bad things happen.

John O'Donohue reminds us that divine light works very tenderly with human freedom. Stuff happens. People do things or fail to do things. Some are motivated in enlightened ways, and others just want power or control that can be utilized for their own ends. There are people who want to return to a past that disrespects and disenfranchises human beings who, like all things and all people, are expressions of light. It may be difficult to imagine that there is light inside everything that happens to you, but if you can dare to imagine it, there will come a wisdom that will carry you through your experiences, both in this life and in the life to come.

I close with the poem "For Light," from *To Bless the Space Between Us*:

*Light cannot see inside things.
That is what the dark is for:
Minding the interior,
Nurturing the draw of growth
Through places where death
In its own way turns into life.*

*In the glare of neon times,
Let our eyes not be worn
By surfaces that shine
With hunger made attractive.*

*That our thoughts may be true light,
Finding their way into words
Which have the weight of shadow
To hold the layers of truth.*

*That we never place our trust
In minds claimed by empty light,
Where one-sided certainties
Are driven by false desire.*

*When we look into the heart,
May our eyes have the kindness
And reverence of candlelight.*

*That the searching of our minds
Be equal to the oblique
Crevices and corners where
The mystery continues to dwell,
Glimmering in fugitive light.*

*When we are confined inside
The dark house of suffering
That moonlight might find a window.*

*When we become false and lost
That the severe noon-light
Would cast our shadow clear.*

*When we love, that dawn-light
Would lighten our feet
Upon the waters.*

*As we grow old, that twilight
Would illuminate treasure
In the fields of memory.*

*And when we come to search for God,
Let us first be robed in night,
Put on the mind of morning
To feel the rush of light
Spread slowly inside
The color and stillness
Of a found word.*