

SEE HOPE  
Genesis 1:1-5,31; John 1: 1-5

Professor Ursula King who was President of Catherine of Sienna College from 2002-2015 wrote a text on the Christian Mystics from which I taught a class several years ago. Indeed, mystical thinkers have included philosophers, poets, painters, and others. The poems of English poet and Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins imagined the world as it, but pictured it being filled with the grandeur of God. Evelyn Underhill, a lifelong Anglican, wrote texts on mysticism with most of her work centering on a powerful experience in the presence of Christ. German Carmelite nun Edith Stein, born a Jew, converted to Christianity after encountering Teresa of Avila's autobiography. Her life took a dark and tragic turn in 1942 when "she was seized by the Gestapo and taken, with her sister Rosa, to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, where both women were killed." [*Christian Mystics*, Ursula King. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998, p. 196-197.] Even African American theologian Howard Thurman has been described as a modern mystic and prophet. Mystics choose words with great descriptive power, and their vision of the world is less Norman Rockwell and more Claude Monet or Salvador Dali. Our world is blessed with people who see things differently. And many paint pictures with words that offer hope out of hopelessness. Today let us consider what John, the writer of the Gospel, did with the opening Creation story in Genesis one.

As our world moves from autumn to winter later this month, with the shortest day of the year known as the "Winter Solstice" on December 21, let's look at these changes in nature and in light through the lens of Genesis and John. Genesis describes the creation of light and darkness; John interpreted them. Our latest chatter two weeks ago was about those who were happy about, and those who were not happy about, returning to Standard Time from Daily Savings Time. The discussions

had to do with more light at night, or more light in the morning. Clearly, darkness can be fearful and light hopeful, but neither means the absence of God. David proclaimed to God in Psalm 139:12, “Even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as day; for darkness is as light with you.” Clearly David knew the Creation story in Genesis when God created everything. God said: “Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness, Night. And there was evening and morning, one day.” Day is of God; night is of God; light is of God as is darkness. Throughout Scripture, light is often used as a metaphor for Jesus, which might lead us to believe that light is good and darkness bad. But as we learned from Psalm 139, God is present in both. In her book called *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Christian teacher and author Barbara Brown Taylor “became increasingly uncomfortable with our tendency to associate all that is good with lightness and all that is evil and dangerous with darkness. Doesn’t God work in the nighttime as well...[she asked?] Through darkness we find courage, we understand the world in new ways, and we feel God’s presence around us, guiding us through things seen and unseen. Often, it is while we are in the dark that we grow the most.” [New York Times Review]

In today’s world, filled with commentaries and criticisms, we turn to a New Testament example of creation: a Christocentric view of creation that we might never have had without the writing of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. That’s how he humbly referred to himself. There is no reason to read anything into that description except being loved like a brother. The Greek word in John 20:2 is *ephilei-* from *phili-* “like a brother.” This is how John felt about Jesus, but he clearly also perceived other-worldly qualities and groundings in him. Genesis started: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John started: In the beginning

was the Word-*logos*. What a strange beginning. But John explains in his mystical fashion: “The Word was with God, and the Word *was* God.” What a huge proclamation, that the Word—whoever or whatever that is—should be called God! What are we to make of that? The mystic John ties everything together in verse 14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” John’s description of creation includes the Word—the Son—at the beginning with the Father and Spirit too! Creation became alive as God spoke. Speech, wind, and spirit are the same word in Hebrew, the language of Genesis! John tells us in so many words, “Let’s not forget Jesus in the story of creation, but also in the story of re-creation! He brings hope to the world.

The great preacher Phillips Brooks from the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Philadelphia had visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 1865. One of our guides to Bethlehem for one of our own pilgrimages posted on Facebook that he was ready to guide pilgrims during this special month, but Israel as gone on lockdown over the next two weeks, so the little town of Bethlehem is all but deserted. When it was a bustling town in 1865, Brooks visited it and wrote the words to “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Here is one line from that carol: “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” Darkness meets light; hopes intertwine with fears; and we look forward to the birth of Christ with faith, hope, love, and joy. Let us prepare for the dear Christ to enter in.

*Let us pray: Creating God: you know our fears about our health, our income, the safe travels for family members. Fill our hearts with hope instead, giving us the ability to see beams of light in the midst of darkness. Amen.*