**A LENTEN LITURGY**

***Walking into Darkness***

**Using Readings from Barbara Brown Taylor’s**

***Learning to Walk in the Dark***

**by Mandy England Cole, pastor**

**Ginter Park Baptist Church, Richmond, VA**

**and Tim Moore, writer-in-residence**

**Sardis Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC**

**Lent 2015**

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**NOTES**

* **This liturgy takes liberties from the Tenebrae Service, a service of darkness that began to be celebrated at least by the 13th Century. “Tenebrae” means darkness. Originally, it was celebrated at night during the last three days of Holy Week. It included the extinguishing of candles, ending on the last day in darkness. Today, congregations that celebrate Tenebrae usually observe it as a single service on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday.**
* **This liturgy uses a seven-candle Tenebrae stand and extinguishes one candle each Sunday in Lent. The final candle may be extinguished on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. Tenebrae stands can be purchased at religious bookstores and/or publishers, or handmade. Purple candles are used in coordination with the liturgical color for Lent.**
* **The readings from Barbara Brown Taylor’s book may be read during the service, or printed in a worship guide to be read silently by the congregation. *Learning to Walk in the Dark* is a HarperCollins publication, copyrighted in 2014. Page references for quoted book passages are listed with each reading. References of other works are footnoted at the end of the document.**
* **The Confessional Prayers were written as unison readings.**
* **An alternative, or additional, faith testimony is included in the order each week along with suggested topics.**
* **The Assurance of Forgiveness comes from the suggested scripture passage, read by a worship leader. It concludes with a congregational response.**
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* **You may contact the authors by email. Mandy England Cole – mcole@ginterparkbc.org Tim Moore – ftimothymoore@me.com**

**First Sunday of Lent – Facing our Fears**

*Sermon Scripture:*  Exodus 20:1-3; 18-21

*Liturgical Readings:*

First step into Tenebrae darkness – Matt 8:11-12

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 “Courage,” [James Bremner writes], “which is no more than the management of fear, must be practiced. For this, children need a widespread, easily obtained, cheap, renewable source of something scary but not actually dangerous.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Darkness, he says, fits that bill… How do we develop the courage to walk in the dark if we are never asked to practice?... The connection between light and safety may never be fully understood… since what light can really do and what we imagine it can do are not completely different things. If we believe a bright security light keeps us safer after dark, there is not a statistic in the world with power to persuade us otherwise. (pages 37, 71)

Confessional Prayer

 O Lord for whom the night is as day, we confess our fear of the dark. From childhood anxieties of monsters under the bed, to fears of criminals hiding in darkened streets, we imagine the worst when we cannot see. We admit that our fears run wild in our minds when we feel vulnerable. Forgive us when we consciously make wasteful and hurtful decisions based on irrational fears. Grant us the courage to walk in the dark, to practice calming our fears and trusting your presence even there. Teach us to walk in faith – the conviction of things not seen – and not in fear. In the name of Jesus, who shines in the darkness and is not overcome, we pray, AMEN.

 Alternative testimony on facing fears

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing the first candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Psalm 139:1-2, 7-12, 23-24

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Second Sunday of Lent – Dreams & Night Musings**

*Sermon Scripture:* Genesis 28:10-19 & Numbers 12:6

*Liturgical Readings:*

Second step into Tenebrae darkness – Genesis 28:10-17

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 What if I could learn to trust my feelings instead of asking to be delivered from them? What if I could follow one of my great fears all the way to the edge of the abyss, take a breath, and keep going? Isn’t there a chance of being surprised by what happens next? Better than that, what if I could learn how to stay in the present instead of letting my anxieties run on fast-forward?... By day I can outfox questions like these – racing from one appointment to the next, answering e-mails with red exclamation points by them, taking the suddenly sick dog to the vet, rummaging through the freezer for something to thaw for supper. By day, I am a servant of the urgent. Nothing important has a chance with me… But in the middle of the night… I am a captive audience. (pages 74-75)

Confessional Prayer

 O God who is known in visions and speaks to us in dreams, when we are awakened in the night our worries and fears fill our minds. We are quick to turn on a light and distract ourselves. We confess that we avoid night interruptions. Forgive us for being blind to the invitation of an encounter with you in the night. Help us to stay present with our anxiety, to be attentive to our thoughts. Open us to the imagination of our souls and the insights that illuminate only in the night. In the name of the Christ, who sat with his fear underneath the night sky in the garden of Gethsemane, we pray. AMEN.

 Alternative testimony on a gift of imagination from an unlikely inspiration

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing the second candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Joel 2:28-29

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Third Sunday of Lent – Welcoming Night Visitors**

*Sermon Scripture:* Genesis 32:22-31

*Liturgical Readings:*

Third step into Tenebrae darkness – Genesis 32:22-29

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 One of the main things that tip people toward garden-variety depression, [Miriam Greenspan] says, is a “low tolerance for sadness.”[[2]](#endnote-2) It is the *inability to bear* dark emotions that causes many of our most significant problems… When we cannot tolerate the dark, we try all kinds of artificial lights, including but not limited to drugs, alcohol, shopping, shallow sex, and hours in front of the television set or computer. There are no dark emotions, Greenspan says – just unskillful ways of coping with emotions we cannot bear… Suffering comes from our reluctance to learn to walk in the dark. (page 78, 185)

Confessional Prayer

 O Lord who laughs when we laugh and weeps when we weep, we confess that we struggle with this gift of mortality and its constant cycle of beginnings and endings. You inspire us with many hopes for the future. We enjoy so many blessings that we want to freeze time and hold onto them forever. When the moment ends, or when high expectations do not materialize, or when we realize what we hoped for will never be, we are overwhelmed with sadness or regret. It makes us want to run away. Help us to walk this Lenten journey with you, to learn to welcome the night, to embrace our sadness, doubts and grief and learn their lessons, so that when you offer us new beginnings we may receive them as one rested from a night Sabbath and not with the dark-eyed look of one who has stayed awake all night. Keep us from the futile attempt to resist the night and enable us to see in the dark. In the name of the Christ who endured the darkness, turning his face to Jerusalem and its cross, we pray, AMEN.

 Alternative testimony bearing the “dark” emotions and its healing

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing third candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Psalm 146:5-8

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent – Blinded to See**

*Sermon Scripture:*  Psalm 146 & Acts 9: 1-9, 17-21

*Liturgical Readings:*

Fourth step into Tenebrae darkness – John 9:39

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 There is…that strange thing [Jesus] says at the end of a long healing story in John’s Gospel. “I came into this world for judgment,” he says after healing a man who has been blind from birth, “so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” I always heard that as a threatening judgment. Now it sounds more promising to me. At the very least, it makes me wonder how seeing has made me blind – by giving me cheap confidence that one quick glance at things can tell me what they are, by distracting me from learning how the light inside me works, by fooling me into thinking I have a clear view of how things really are, of where the road leads, of who can see rightly and who cannot. I am not asking to become blind, but I have become a believer. There is a light that shines in the darkness, which is only visible there. (page 108)

Confessional Prayer

 God of vision and insight, we confess our fear of the dark and our aversion to blindness. Help us remember that vision does not mean insight; blind does not mean inferior; and the darkness is not synonymous with sin and despair. There are insights we can only discover in the dark. Grant us courage to explore the shadowy world. Grant us patience as our eyes adjust to the darkness. Open the eyes of our soul. Help us to learn to see the light that is most visible in darkness. In the name of the one who came “so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” AMEN.

 Alternative testimony on the patience of “Waiting on the Lord”

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing the fourth candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Psalm 23

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent – Blessing of darkness and defeat**

*Sermon Scripture:*  Genesis 15:1-18

*Liturgical Readings:*

Fifth step into Tenebrae darkness – Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 St John of the Cross’ answer is not simple, but in the simplest possible terms, he says that the dark night is God’s best gift to you, intended for your liberation.[[3]](#endnote-3) It is about freeing you from your ideas about God, your fears about God… your dedication to believing all the right things about God… your tactics for manipulating God, and your sure cures for doubting God…. God puts out our lights to keep us safe, John says, because we are never more in danger of stumbling than when we think we know where we are going. (page 145-6)

Confessional Prayer

 O Christ of the Cross, like you we live with the consequences of choices that we cannot unchoose and wounds from situations we did not choose. Forgive us when we drink the self-pity of regret or idly sit in the wasted dreams of what might have been. Open us to receive the sacrament of defeat. Empower us to walk through our pain. Liberate our future by freeing us to be wounded healers. We confess how frightening this sounds, for it is to admit we have no idea where we are going, that we cannot see the road ahead of us, that in some ways we do not even know who we are. Help us to believe that you know who we are and that you will lead us by the right road, though we may be unaware. Though we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, may we trust that you lead us to green pastures. In the name of the Good Shepherd, we pray, AMEN.[[4]](#endnote-4)

 Alternative testimony on the lessons or blessings of a defeat in life

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing fifth candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Isaiah 43:1-3a

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Palm Sunday – Twilight Zone**

*Sermon Scripture:* Mark 11:1-11

*Liturgical Readings:*

Sixth step into Tenebrae darkness – Matthew 26:36-46 (Gethsemane)

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 The twilight zone [of a cave] is the place of exchange… On this threshold between dark and light, it is still possible to go either way: farther in or back out. It is still possible to see what you are about to lose. Now that I am in the mouth of the [cave], I look back at the bright circle of the day, fringed with green vines and shot full of light… Branches creak and birds call. Turning back to face the cave again, I see only gray: gray stone, gray shadow, gray space. There is no music here, no warmth or food. But I did not come for any of those. I came for the dark, and there is plenty of that.

Confessional Prayer

 Jesus of the Palms, you understand how we long for the cheering crowd, the approval of others, the simple answers to complex problems, the victory of right over might. Cure us of our desire for the elation of Palm Sunday crowds, which inevitably turn fickle. Forgive us when we fall for the comforts of full solar Christianity and ignore your call to carry our cross into the darkness of Good Friday. Help us to trust deep in our soul that resurrection only comes by way of the cross. Carry us, when we can no longer walk that path. In the Crucified Christ we pray, AMEN.

 Alternative testimony on the dissatisfaction of “full solar Christianity”

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing sixth candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Matthew 16:25-26

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Maundy Thursday**

*Scripture:* Luke 22:14-23

*Liturgical Readings:*

Seventh step into Tenebrae darkness – Luke 19:41-44

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 [Ken Wilber] makes a distinction between two functions of religion. The first function, which he calls *translation*, offers people a new way of translating the world around them so that their lives take on more meaning… The second function, which Wilber calls *transformation*, exists not to comfort the self but to dismantle it. “Those who find their life will lose it,” Jesus says in Matthew’s Gospel, “and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” …The salvation of the *psyche* begins with its own demise… Translation is being marketed as transformation, which is why those who try to live on the spiritual equivalent of fast food have to keep going back for more and more. There is no filling a hole that was never designed to be filled, but only to be entered into. Where real transformation is concerned, Wilber says, “the self is not made content; the self is made toast.”[[5]](#endnote-5) (page 87-88)

Confessional Prayer

 Our Lord Betrayed, whose bread is dipped in the wine with the one who betrayed you, we sit at your table to dip our bread into your wine. And in doing so we confess our faith and our betrayal as well. Forgive us Lord, for not seeing the things that make for peace. Help us to see in the dark, so that we may see what is hidden from our eyes, and that it may never be too late for your grace and love to transform us and make us whole. On this night when you began to give your life away, forgive us for holding onto ours so tightly. And through your Spirit empower us to learn how to give our life away in love, in service, for others, for a cause, or to you in some other way that takes us beyond living for ourselves. In the name of One who came to serve, not to be served, we pray, AMEN.

Silence

Kyrie & extinguishing seventh candle

Assurance of Forgiveness – Romans 5:6-10

Leader: Friends, believe the good news of God.

**All: In Jesus Christ, we are made whole.**

**Easter – Resurrection in the Dark**

*Sermon Scripture:* John 20:1-18 & Psalm 118

Reading from *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor

 The cave in which he rose from the dead is long gone, covered over by the huge Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem… By all accounts, a stone blocked the entrance to the cave so that there were no witnesses to the resurrection. Everyone who saw the risen Jesus saw him after. Whatever happened in the cave happened in the dark. As many years as I have been listening to Easter sermons, I have never heard anyone talk about that part. Resurrection is always announced with Easter lilies, the sound of trumpets, bright streaming light. But it did not happen that way. If it happened in a cave, it happened in complete silence, in absolute darkness, with the smell of damp stone and dug earth in the air…new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark. (page 128)

Easter Litany[[6]](#endnote-6)

Leader: Easter begins in the despair of the tomb.

 Our life, our love, our hope forever dead,

 crushed by a stone, bottled up in a cave.

All: Who will roll away the stone?

Leader: Easter takes us by surprise, early in the morning.

 The obstacles we expect to face are removed.

 Where once death and despair laid locked in darkness

 now the bright light of hope sprouts wings

 to fly from emptiness.

 It is, at first, too good to be true.

All: What could this mean?

 Where have you laid him?

Leader: Fears run wild and our feet follow,

 our first reflex is to run.

All: Be not afraid.

Leader: You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.

 He is risen; he is not here:

 see the place where they laid him.

 But go your way.

 Tell his disciples that he goes before you…

 Suddenly the realization dawns.

All: I have seen the Lord.

Leader: Rising as quietly as the sun creeping over the horizon,

or exploding like fireworks, painting the night sky with dazzle.

We recognize the One who was dead as he comes to life in us.

The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

All: Christ is risen, risen indeed!

 Alleluia!

Leader: And all who encounter the Risen One

 whether gently roused by the sunrise

or surprised by the sudden burst of joy,

 join the resurrection celebration, one by one,

 some of us singing, some of us silently soaking it in,

 and all of us feeling like dancing.

All: Alleluia! Christ is risen, risen indeed!

**ENDNOTES**

1. James Bremner, “Fear of the Night,” in *Let There Be Night*, ed. Paul Bogard (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008), p. 184. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Mirium Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, tr. & ed. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2005 & 1959). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The prayer adapts some phrases from a prayer by Thomas Merton, which was reprinted from *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956 & 1958). It is quoted by BBT in *Learning to Walk in the Dark* on page 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ken Wilber, *One Taste* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), p. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This litany is an adaption of liturgy by John W. Howell in *Touch Holiness* by Ruth Duck and Maren Tirabassi, ed., (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2012), p. 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)