

# Waiting in the Dark

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Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Rappahannock

Story for All Ages: [If You Are Afraid of the Dark, Remember the Night Rainbow](#) by Cooper Edens

Reading: excerpt from Henri Nouwen's [Bread for the Journey](#), Jan. 8 reflection

"Often we want to be able to see into the future. We say, "How will next year be for me? Where will I be five or ten years from now?" There are no answers to these questions. Mostly we have just enough light to see the next step: what we have to do in the coming hour or the following day. The art of living is to enjoy what we can see and not complain about what remains in the dark. When we are able to take the next step with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life with joy and be surprised at how far we go. Let's rejoice in the little light we carry and not ask for the great beam that would take all shadows away."

## Waiting in the Dark

It is so good to be back here with you all again! It is always so good to see familiar faces.

When I was a child I was afraid of the dark. I always slept with a night light and I remember being nervous the night of my first confession because the box was dark and I was worried about being in the dark. Confession boxes when I was young were small dark rooms with a kneeler in front of screen. When it was your turn, you went into the room and knelt down, waited for the screen to open. I realized there was about an inch between the floor and the door and I would be ok. I was ok. About a year or two later, the confession boxes were renovated. They installed lights and gave an option to sit down face to face with priest. How many of us go through times of being afraid of the dark? How many of us go through times of our lives that are dark and often scary?

The dark can be a scary place. Things do not look the same in the dark. It is hard to walk because we can't see all the things we could run into. If it is both dark and quiet, we hear all the sounds that are normally drowned out. The shadows and the sounds, can make the dark a very scary place indeed.

Yet it is in the dark that each of us begins. Life begins in the dark – whether the seeds of plants or an egg. All life begins by waiting, growing and changing in the dark until it is ready to come into the light. Life requires both darkness and light – it cannot flourish just in the light.

We also have times in our life when we need the darkness, we need that time of rest, renewal and to experience re-birth. One of my favorite poems is "Sweet Darkness" by David Whyte. It begins, "When your eyes are tired the world is tired also. When your vision has gone no part of the world can find you. Time to go into the dark where the night has eyes to recognize its own." In the poem the darkness is a place of healing, of renewal.

In our reading from Henry Nowen, he also cautions us against rejecting the darkness. We are cautioned against planning too far ahead, of being so busy planning our lives that we cease to live them. Nowen reminds us that we only need enough light to take the next step, to trust that there will be enough to take

the next one, and that we will continue to get just the light we need to move forward. In this he says we will be free to live in joy and surprise with less anxiety about what is coming next. For Nowen when we let go of our fear of the dark and our anxiety about what we don't know or can't see then we are free to live fully in the present.

I confess that I do not do this very well. I want to know where I am going. I want there to be a plan. I want to make a choice and stick with it. For those of you who are Myers-Briggs knowledgeable I am a J meaning I like plans and closure. I like structure. All of this is in stark contrast to being at peace with the dark and letting myself just live fully into the present. Yet I know there is great truth in Nowen's words. We can't have a five or ten year plan for our lives because we, as frightening as this is, do not have control of all the events. The last few months have brought this home to me in new and frankly very frightening ways. I have been in the midst of a time of deep uncertainty and barely knowing where my next step will take me. Many of the events have been outside of my control and the plans I had made did not work out in the ways I expected leaving me in the proverbial dark most of the time, looking for the light in all the wrong places it seems.

We are not single entities, we are connected beings to one another, to other life, to the planet. So much of our current politics and culture try to convince us that we just need the perfect plan, or the perfect item, or course, or book or workshop and then we will be in control, able to live the life of our dreams. Our culture tries to convince us that we can make it on our own, that actually to need others or assistance makes one weak. With everything uncertain and with a very real experience of scarcity, I have had to learn to ask for what my family and I need. I have had to accept that we could not make it on our own and to accept the help of others.

I have been battling the demons of darkness and worry. While the dark can be a place of healing and renewal, it is also place where our private demons come to dwell. They eat away at us with messages of: What if it never gets better? What if this is your life forever? Or that you will never be able to make this any different. I am sure many of you can relate to the critical voices that can rise up and become even louder as we walk through these periods of darkness, waiting for the light. While in the light of speech and acknowledgement, often these messages are exposed for the lies that they are, but in the dark, they seem so true and so very real.

In a culture that stresses individualism, in a political culture feeding on the very worst of our fears, we often believe the lies of isolation. That the only way to survive is to circle the wagons and trust no one - certainly no one different, no outsiders. Yet what if the answer actually lies in making the circle wider? What if it lies in welcoming the stranger? What if the light lives in our coming together? What if the answer to our fears is becoming vulnerable? Certainly that is one message of the Christmas story. God humbles God's self to become a vulnerable defenseless baby born to a poor family, far from home and on the run from those who would do harm. What if this story tells us that it is in becoming vulnerable that we find light and hope? What if in sharing our vulnerabilities, in opening ourselves to one another that greater dreams are born? What if there is so much more than we can imagine? What if the real truth is that we are stronger and can do so much more when we work together, help each other out and recognize the ways we are connected?

That is where sitting in the dark, being still may bring forth a bigger dream than we could do with all our planning. Sitting in the dark may allow us to leave room for Spirit, for inspiration, for our authentic selves to come out of hiding and show us something that the light could not. Parker Palmer when talking about

the authentic self, the soul, describes it as shy. Our authentic self after having been pushed aside for so long, cannot be chased out. One must wait, one must prove oneself trustworthy, and then the authentic self, which has so long waited, will show itself. Darkness allows for that. It slows us down. There is a natural silence and quiet that comes with the dark. It invites forth what has been hidden.

Yet too often we run. We run from our authentic selves, from our dreams, from being quiet or still for too long. It can be a frightening thing. What might we find there, in the dark, in the quiet? As I said earlier, the darkness contains healing and renewal and yet it is often where our demons live as well.

Our story today offers fanciful remedies to our fears of the dark. If you are afraid of the dark, remember the night rainbow. A night rainbow – what a wonderful image – just sit with that for a moment. What does a night rainbow look like? If night falls, use stars for streetlights. The writer invites us to imagine new possibilities if our worst fears were to happen. If you lose the keys throw away the house. If the moon gets stuck in a tree, fill the hole in the sky with a strawberry. If there is no happy ending, make one out of cookie dough.



Is the dark calling to you? Is it calling to all of us? Is it time to spend some time in the dark, listening to the silence, watching the shadows? Are we needing a time of rest, lying fallow until what is next is ready? What is waiting to be born in you? What is waiting to be born in us? What seeds are you planting? What seeds can we plant together? Are the seeds just beginning their long journey to becoming a plant or a flower or a wonderful fruit or vegetable? Are the seeds you planted almost ready to burst the surface and into the light? What is it you are waiting for in this season of darkness? What are we waiting for? What might our sharing our vulnerability, our story, opening up authentically, bring forth in us this year?

I invite each of us as 2015 comes to an end, as the season of winter and darkness is just beginning, to take the time to sit in the darkness. I invite us to wait in the dark and discover what is there waiting for us. I invite us to sit in this darkness together and see what light emerges. Maybe it is a dream long delayed or one that we could have never imagined. Maybe it will be a time of rest and renewal; a time to simply step back from the busyness and brightness of the days, to discover the quiet and rest of the dark. And remember you do not have to sit alone, being vulnerable and scared is easier when we hold the hands of others and just think how much better finding the light will be when it can be shared with those who have witnessed your journey in the darkness.

May we stop our planning for some day and plan just for today. May we look to what is needed today, right now, and may we trust that we will have enough light to take the next step.

Blessed Be!