

The Disorienting State of Uncertainty
Rev. Brian Merritt
January 7, 2018
Isaiah 60:1-6

If you live in the country, you know darkness. Not the darkness that we have in a city like Albuquerque, with its light pollution that obscures some of the stars. It is the type of dark a Nebraska boy knows happens when one walks on a dirt road well before dawn on the side of a lake with only a flashlight. Every noise is heightened, and every part of the environment seems ominous.

This was clearly illustrated to me when my daughter was a small infant and we decided to take a camping trip to Acadia National Park in the depths of Maine. Our campsite was inhabited, but we were definitely in an isolated part of the world. Away from streetlights, gas station lights, exterior house lights or car headlights.

I have never been one to “love” camping in tents. Having grown up in a working class family, I was constantly taking vacations in tents because it was cheaper than staying in a hotel, and was reportedly “good for us.”

I remember the visit to the Sandhills of Nebraska and setting up the tent in my great, great aunt’s front yard because there wasn’t enough space in the house for young guests. My sister, Lindy, and I had bedded down for the night, snug in our two sleeping bags for the night. My dad poked his head into the tent. I thought he was merely going to say goodnight, but he was coming to give us advice.

“There are a lot of rattlesnakes out here kids. Have a good night!” He said as he zipped down the front of the tent.

It was from that day that I held to the axiom that camping didn’t make sense because it seemed like an insult to the homeless. Plus, I have always argued that my people had to camp under the stars in covered wagons so many years ago as pioneers...so that I don’t have to.

Unfortunately, my wife did not share this perspective on camping. Hence the reason I found myself, with an infant, in Acadia National Forest camping.

All was well on this trip, until night fell. My daughter, used to living in somewhat rural Rhode Island, still was not accustomed to “total” darkness. At first we thought her to be sick when she inconsolably cried throughout the night. But as soon as the Coleman lantern turned on, she quieted and fell asleep. It was not only her fear that grew over the night. As parents, we had to sit in the darkness, listening to a terrified infant that all we wanted to do was comfort. After two nights of thinking she would get used to the darkness and the death of the Coleman’s battery, two exhausted parents gave up and took down their tent to return to Rhode Island. In that experience, I learned the eternal truth: any state of uncertainty is completely disorienting.

What is the darkness that covers the earth?

We could make the darkness which Isaiah talks about in much more abstract terms, yet maybe disorienting. We could talk about snide tweets about thermonuclear destruction that would decimate then lives of millions, if not billions. We could talk about the uncertainty of the earth’s future with the destruction of entire species and poisoned water supplies. We could talk about the uncertainty of the economy and whether there is another bubble about to burst. We could talk about all these uncertainties and they are certainly disorienting, but I suspect that we have enough uncertainty right here, in our midst. We don’t need to look to macro to see micro issues that throw us off our steps.

Well, since we are as only as sick as our fears, let’s take them head on. I am a firm believer that naming our fears will help in beginning to deal with them. Unfortunately, we often lie to ourselves, obfuscate or project them onto something unrelated so that we don’t have to deal with them. I know that is how I function and I suspect that I am not unique.

Here is a list of fears that I know is not complete:

How will I die?

Will I get cancer, struggle and be a burden on others?

What do I do with all this stuff I have accumulated?

How will I survive financially?

What do I do with this resentment I have for my spouse?

Will my mentally ill...brother, daughter, mother...survive?

How can I forgive myself for the things I have done?
How will this church survive?
What do I do with my resentment for the previous minister?
What if there are no children at church?
How will all the work of the church get done with aging volunteers and tired people?
Where will the money come from?
What if the church is not what I am comfortable with in worship?

I know these are only some fears that I have heard, but they are real fears, but may not all will be reality. I am not in the business of giving the answers to people capable of working out their own faith with fear and trembling, I wouldn't insult your faith. I can however give you an insight into our hope.

What is the promised light? Epiphany!

We are promised light. No matter how dysfunctional, broken or dark our days seem, we are promised light. Our light tells us that if we are a mess, that is exactly the type of circumstances that they came to be in the middle of for wholeness. The great physician must be illuminating the surfaces that need surgery so that healing can occur. Our light is Jesus Christ, and that is what epiphany is all about. It is the star in a dark desert that gives us hope that we will find the manger. I can't tell you the solutions to our fear except point toward the light. We won't grow in faith as a community if we have the best business plan, hired the most handsome pastor, raised the most money or made to feel the maximum guilt for circumstances if we are not united in faith that our answers lie in Jesus Christ. This does not mean we will agree on the vision of that person who makes us their disciple, but it will mean that we will follow the star together toward our only hope in this word. Thanks be to God.