

**Sermon by Claudia Taylor,
Old South Haven Presbyterian Church,
October 12, 2014**

I miss Henry John Deuseldorf a lot. If you are too old or too young to know about John, he was a poet song writer environmentalist whose love of creation and the mysteries of the human soul were showcased in his engaging melodies. Even as an immensely popular entertainer he used his success to leverage his philanthropic causes. An accomplished pilot, he either died or ascended directly when the jet he was flying crashed.

And in full disclosure we were honored with performance this morning by Matt Taylor now host of Memories in Melody on WALK, carrying on his grandfather's legacy in that capacity. Jack was a household name on long island for 50 years. thank you Matt . Catch him on WALK 1370 AM 11:00 t th

The children's version really did reveal the crux of my message this morning-- there are 2 things for certain, alligators under the bed and god is nigh.

I even considered that as a title, more fun than seize the night.

So if you have something more pressing to do, you won't have missed out.

If you choose to stay please pray with me:

Precious God I confess boldly and publicly that I am human with limited human understanding. I confess that my words this morning may be only the words I need to hear. May the thoughts spoken and the reflections of those who hear illuminate your intention for us. I ask only to be the vessel of your will and love pouring it for those who hear to be challenged, uplifted to move confidently into a week of living and reflecting your love and will for us. Amen

There ARE many ways of being in this circle we call life. In this global age, Diversity-- what is different what is strange, what is sometimes hard to accept permeates life. The news graphically depicted peoples and a way of life we struggle to comprehend. Our social mores have turned on head what a short time ago were seemingly written in

stone forever-- people of the same sex can get a marriage license. cannabis is considered part of best practice medical treatment, and you wouldn't think of smoking tobacco in a public space. this is the last year that white students will be the majority in Grades 1-12. the the year 2034 Us population will be a majority of color. ALready is in If you went to Sunday school in the 50's or 60's you probably saw a Norman Rockwellish poster of a crowd seated in a church sanctuary, glowing in heavenly light streaming through the well appointed stained glass windows. The congregation featured chinese, "negroes", asians and an eskimo--all of equal glow dispersed among the caucasian children and their parents. That was diversity in the day, the many ways of being. red and yellow black and white they are precious in his site...and a poster child for what BBT refers to as full solar spirituality.--in the shortest version--If you follow the rules, have enough faith god will reward you with fulness of life and prosperity .--we will get back to that later.

Even from a child's eye view that poster image was a bit simplistic. I was suspect even then that it was an illustration from a what we now call PG rated story with a happy ending. I can see it as a Barry Rockwell painting.... revised for today's audiences with turbans and terrorists, masked men (or is it really a woman?) holding an automatic weapon. refuges of every color and representatives of all politically correct postures, and outside the lovely stained glass, villages, bombed out, dust rising and crashed planes.

My generation enjoyed growing up in the post World War II era, the longest period in recent history without a war, becoming young adults just in time to be drafted for Vietnam, My becoming of age was the civil right movement, the violence of integration. Inspired by the flickering footage of our massive tube TV with a tiny picture, my father, drove us across the country to visit a seminary classmate of his in Raliegh North Carolina who was serving a black church engaging the struggle. Because it was not safe for a white family to drive through his neighborhood, we were escorted to his home. There we encountered a pool table set against the door for security. We were sternly warned to stay away from the windows. I learned about the KKK and understood at 11

that it was more than the lack of blue sky here that was a world away from my prairie home. Jack Kennedy's assassination began our end of innocence as a nation. Social change morphed into the black panthers, war resistance and Kent state. Each event steeling the soul another notch.

Fast forward. The "news", now 24/7 not just half hour at 6:30 be there or miss it, is a sea of misery. Events around the world are the barbaric science fiction of my college years that i will not honor with words. and the frosting on the cake is our inability to civilly govern our own country. Around the globe the world isn't working. There's enough for everyone to have plenty without raping the planet. Yet how much of the world has no access to clean water and sanitation? generations go without education? Still we pour our resources into killing each other with high tech drone bombers, or simply beheading. cutting their heads off. torture first optional. Has nothing changed since the dark ages?

One could get turned off to the great unsolveables and in fact over the milenia many have.

If you were up too early 3 Saturdays ago you may have heard an hour dialogue on NPR --the haven't people felt this way since the days of Socrates conversation. Recounting the nihilists, nothing matters philosophy, DaDa everything is in vain, it's just da da meaning stupid and for nothing and comparing it to the apathy of today. They sealed their case by quoting what Jason enlivened for us this morning from the book of Ecclesiastics, the lament of one useless day after another.

It may have ever been so, the perception that humanity is making some very bad choices and the world is going to hell in a hand basket, that human nature can never be different and things will always be the same. Therefore nothing matters. But certainly the evidence is also there, that so it has always been-- the human need to connect with what is greater than I, that surely this magnificent creation, the immeasurable abundance of the universe, is beyond my ability to comprehend or control. The awe of something beyond me.

So it has always been the human need to be still and know God, the great I am, yaway, allah, om or whatever word for that bonds with your spiritual senses. The rituals for doing this go back, way way back-- so far back and so lost that we begin to see the rituals as the truths rather than the truths they represent. We start using the ritual truths as walls to separate "the other" confusing religion with righteousness and causes. The politics of God is on our side is alive and well in this country and around the globe.

We started out all talking about the same thing. exploring, explaining the awe. and now humanity on too many levels seems like tiger chasing tiger tail spinning around, dizzying, like nicholas needlefoot voila, a book from my childhood, a terrible fight ensued and suddenly everything went black (the black page)

My favorite books have always been the ones you can turn upside down, start from the other side and see a different point of view. So now turning the book upside down and reading from the other side...actually a different book this time, but another view.

In her book learning to walk in the dark BBT explores our attitudes towards darkness-- the literal dark places, night, caves, closets, outer space and connotations of darkness of the soul. She concludes that our relationship with literal darkness reflects our comfort in dealing with inner darkness. that our intolerance for sadness sets the stage for depression. "after being taught that the way to deal with painful emotions is to get rid of them, it can take a lot of reschooling to learn to sit with them instead, she says.

She helps us to appreciate darkness of the soul not as a sinister character or raven days croaking one after another, but a counterpart to enlightenment which she coins endarkenment. En-dark-en-ment.

She explains quoting carl jung-- one does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light but by making the darkness conscious. that sleeping in soul wilderness can teach you what those who always sleep in comfortable soul houses may never know.

No surprise the cloud of unknowing has not been a best seller. Today's seeker seem more interested in getting god to turn the lights on than in allowing god to turn them off. Her descriptive term full solar spirituality is so much more attractive. If i'm faithful with prayer, if i never question my faith, god will reward me with favor and keep the good stuff rolling. God will keep life predictable and pleasant.

She continues paraphrasing Ken Wilber's book ONE TASTE on the two fold function of religion.

the first he calls translation offering people a new way of translating, interpreting, the world around them so that their lives take on more meaning. as in the beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall inherit the kingdom of god,, blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.. strengthen the believer's sense of self, holds out the promise of contentment and that the self may be preserved..somewhat aligned with the full solar theory...

But the other function, transformation, exists not to comfort the self but to dismantle it. according to Matthew Jesus said "those who lose their life for my sake will find it. the word for life here in the greek is psyche-- breath, life and soul, the modern term ego being applicable. Transformation requires losing the self. Discomfort in the unfamiliar. Where real transformation is concerned the self is not made content, the self is made toast.

If this is endarkenment no wonder the line of seekers is so short. even the crowds around Jesus vanished one it became clear where he was headed .

so it is in the dark, It is in bed as it were, that we encounter what really matters. BBT says "By day I can outfox questions like these--racing form one urgency to the next. By day I am a servant of the urgent. Nothing important has a chance with me. I am too consumed with the things that must be done to consider whether or not doing them even matters. But in the middle of the night the dark angel knows right where to find me. I am a captive audience. In bed in short is where you face your nearness to or farness from god. Whether you are in pain or not, anxious or not, religious or not--bed is where

you come face to face with what really matters because it is too dark for most of your shallow distractions to work. and turning on the artificial lights only postpones the encounter.

***seize the night. finally settled on this title because too much of it was written when I hope the rest of you were sleeping. For me the process of preparing a Sunday morning message is always like a revolving door. you enter with intention of coming out the other side, and usually you do, but not without going around and around until you are dizzy and have had a long pause of please god does any of this make sense. .

Picture for a moment that it's 4 am. my burning eyes closed as the fingers tap the keyboard,...So that's it? Endarkenment? The function of religion is to lose the self? self made toast? That's a real upper.. oh the attraction of full solar spirituality. or the idolatry of certainty. How convenient and far more comfortable to be agnostic and know that humanity's musing with this god stuff is for the intellectually, emotionally insecure. Of course any rational conventional agnostic worthy of their own certainty would have to consider the well referenced peer reviewed evidence that the brain does not create consciousness. It merely filters out the barrage of information surrounding us, confining usually to the 5 senses with which we are familiar, sight sound smell taste and touch, so that we are not so utterly distracted by the sheer volume of it all that we cannot function effectively in our flesh-needs survival. If cave men spent the day contemplating the saber tooth tiger would have come out on top for sure. Only more recent civilizations have had the luxury of supporting contemplatives

Again I (with a small i this time) am feeling like human swiss cheese. so full of error, limited and misunderstanding with a strong aroma of humility. and in the darkness of night I see how the nihilists , the dadas and just plain apathy got there.

Suddenly everything goes blank. the blessing of brain silence...pause. silence...I hear the creepers filling the dark night. comfort. surrounded by creation. the breeze rustles the tallest branches reaching for stars beyond. I am a part of all there is... and the

dicotomy between indifference, apathy on the one hand, and on the other faith and trust, births a crack of sunrise in my mind. Sensing dawn I begin to fill with gratitude for the immeasurable abundance of creation, that all there is is part of me, flowing through me sustaining me. the measure of blessing pouring constantly into my overflowing cup, spilling over me, around me, beside me beneath me behind me before me beyond me to and through others and back to me. Great gratitude for all there is and a chance for life at all.

I know that love is seeing all the infinite in one.

in the brotherhood of creatures, who the father who the son. You're never alone. the spirit fills the darkness of the heavens. It fills the endless yearning of the soul. It lives within a star too far to dream of. It lives within each part and is the whole. it's the fire and the wings that fly us home.

Seize the night. Seize the inevitable endarkened periods of your life Be still and know that I am God. be silent, alone, empty before god. say nothing. *Let god look upon you with an enormous love.* quiet , still, be.

Seize the night, the inevitable endarkenment of many shades-- unresolved problems endlessly visible in the world or brokenness so deep inside you cannot define it. embrace what cannot be let go of, mistakes which cannot be redeemed, tasks left undone, purposelessness. Embrace each as an opportunity to welcome new experiences, new people, new energy for change that could not have otherwise happened. life is an exercise in loss anyway--nothing stays the same. set your spirit free to the night. It will return like a homing pigeon in the morning fresh and pure and sinless in god's holy eyes.

We are god's people . we pray for a world of peace

Eternal God,

Whose image lies in the hearts of all people,

we live among those whose ways are different from ours, faiths are foreign to us, whose language is unintelligible to us.

Our instinct too often is to separate ourselves from those we do not understand.

We build walls of division and create misunderstanding.

We pray for the courage to tear down those walls
and for the imagination to see in all people a partner for peace.
Help us to remember that your great love is for all people and that all religion is an
attempt to respond to you,
and that the yearning of other hearts are much like our own.

Help us to recognize you in unlikely places and faces, in acts of kindness words of truth
, the beauty that surrounds us.

Make us newly aware of the power of love, that hatred has no place in a world created
for the well-being of all, a world rich in resources enough to nurture everyone.

Teach us the way of justice, show us the path of peace.

We pray for your healing power to come upon the brokenness in our nation's life, in our
religious institutions and most of all in our world.

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Lord hear our prayer