

Learning to Move through Darkness, Part 1 of 3

by Todd Clark

John 12:46 “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”

I remember standing at the corner of 9th and O street, under the bright rays of sunshine, on a cold January afternoon in Washington, D.C.. When I looked closely, I could just barely see the outlines of dump trucks, fencing and National Army guard troops who have shut down 9th street further down, closer to Chinatown and the now cordoned off National Mall. Looking around, things felt so very different. Uneasy . . . that feeling you get on an empty street corner at 3:00am in the morning.... the unrelenting worry that something ‘not good’ might be just around the dark corner of a building, masked by the deep, penetrating shadows that work to hide late night trouble.

But its noon and so I am wondering if this might be a new, uncomfortable kind of darkness, the “in-the-back-of-your mind,” butterflies-in-your-stomach, catch your breath in the light of mid-day, type of darkness. And the question must be asked: how do we move through that feeling of impending evil and anxiety when you can see everything so clearly all around you, bright as day? In the light of innocent sunshine- when enveloping darkness is incongruous to where you are standing on a cold, yet sunny January afternoon, how do we learn to move through that?

What a freakish nightmare these days and weeks, these last 4 years, have become—plenty of light to see the familiar, but at the same time, to also be frozen in fear of the other, of the unknown, of an encroaching doom, when it feels like a very sinister and threatening shadow is creeping in to place. Something is about to happen, or perhaps it is happening now, and so what is that called and how do we move through it?



There is heavy threat in the air—threat of attacks and anger, and soon-to-be massive violence, so massive that an entire city and nation needed to brace for it. in the middle of the day, at the end of the week, at an historic, transformative moment-, during what should have been a peaceful transfer of power. The question of who had the right amount of power— to create or cease chaos- - was front and center on everyone’s mind- and in the pit of my stomach, and many others, there was still, a growing knot of tension and alarm that is ramping up, tightening its grip.

A week before President-Elect Biden’s inauguration, DC became an armed encampment. Over 25,000 troops and police were positioned behind, around and in front of literally miles and miles of rapidly installed, 8’ high steel fencing. The city readied itself for...what?

The ominous warnings were repeated in ever tightening “Breaking News!!” cycles: there was chatter that the Trump-inspired, armed MAGA fanatics: white supremacists, racists and anti-Semites were seeking to fulfill their maniacal quest to wreak insurrection and bring bloody vengeance on the Nation’s capitol, and also in state capitols around the country. And this sickening, vile threat was not imaginary or hyperbolic—in fact it was alarmingly easy to visually link rumors of a potential second attack to the awful images we watched broadcast and streamed, over and over again—the grotesque, nauseating, out -of-control frenzied attack by thousands of delusional terrorists on Jan. 6th at the Nation’s Capitol building.

And so now, after January 6 we know exactly what one type of darkness can look like, buried deeply in the angry faces and hateful chants, in the literal pitchforks, bats, batons and makeshift weapons we saw flailing around in every direction within the Capitol, striking out with excessive, determined, deadly force against what eventually became shattered doors and broken windows; beating down outnumbered police officers and terrified congressional staff, and by the ordeal’s end, leaving five dead souls in its wake.

We saw darkness in the deaths of those who died at the hands of this out of control mob, an unleashed mayhem built on a manic belief in a Big Lie about a “stolen election” that was hyped by Trump and many others, and which is now reported to be poised to return once again—and probably yet again, perhaps several times more, until they are....what?

In this city, at that particular time, we were all reluctantly, and necessarily, learning to move through this deepening darkness of both threatened and seen violence . . . trying to negotiate the unwelcome arrival of out-of-control, and out-of-town, anger and hate, and it happened not long ago--here in the bright light dead of day, not the bleakness of night. All of this toxic destruction lingering, out of our control, just beyond our reach, yet right in front of our eyes—at our very doorsteps, in every breathe we take, on every sidewalk that becomes a potential battlefield. This darkness has been thrust upon us and so we ask, how do we move through it?

And so...we waited.... for noon on January 20, the allotted time for the actual transfer of power, transfixed by the specter of promised mayhem and determined confrontation that preceded it, and might even recur during it.

Dear God, even on the brightest of days where there can still be the threat of darkness—scheming to lead us astray or leave us trembling in fear—you are more powerful than those creeping shadows and will always be the shining light to guide our way out, guiding us into peaceful, life-giving night and day.

Amen