

June 7, 2020  
First Sunday After Pentecost,  
Trinity Sunday, Year A  
Genesis 1:1-2:4A  
The Rev. Jakki R. Flanagan  
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church  
New Haven, Connecticut

*“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”<sup>i</sup>*

Maybe \*this\* is the problem.

Perhaps this has been the problem for a very long time.... even from the beginning of biblical writing,  
that we have misunderstood the terms “darkness” and “light”

Since at least biblical time –  
“darkness” has been associated with bad.

It's mind bending, at times, how often we humans can get things wrong, even under the best of circumstance with the best of intentions... let alone, for all those *other* times of intentional cruelty and decimation.<sup>ii</sup>

We've subconsciously – and consciously – been taught, for millennia, that darkness is a thing to avoid.

“Darkness” implies:

~ignorance  
~fear  
~being lost  
~hopelessness

When did we forget, that the night holds the stars  
That being in the dark can bring about new opportunities for creativity  
That darkness brings sleep – comfort – rest  
That from a place of darkness, the womb, comes new life.

Why and when did fear override all the grace and beauty in the dark...  
In the Black.

Let's hear that part of Genesis again

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

You know, I wonder...

If Light is so great – why didn't God make Day...Light... 24/7?

Truly – if it was the end-all and be-all, why is there Darkness *at all*

Maybe this excerpt from Genesis calls "Light" – "Good" simply because it was new.

As we understand these first four lines of the Bible,  
God – in the beginning,  
didn't call "Darkness" bad...  
it simply pre-existed "Light."

Yet somehow over time, \*we\* distorted "Darkness."  
And with it, "Black" was distorted:  
~Black Sheep  
~Black Death  
~Black Male

Often fear can be the seed that brings about distortion.  
Distortion of words/thoughts/ feelings/people

~ Fear for what was before  
~ Fear of what creates new life

Fear can - rot - into inferiority complexes...  
Inferiority complexes can propel dangerous behaviors and systems  
Especially the fear of losing positions of power/entitlement.

Lately, we see it all the time – in the news, on our streets, in our institutions, but some of us have seen it their whole lives, and in the lives of their ancestors.

I wonder about this Genesis excerpt – and if we missed the point entirely.  
And if missing that point has infected significant portions of our thinking over the millennia.

Maybe what God wanted us to know, from the beginning,  
is that change is good.  
Certainly God changed a lot of things in those 6 days.

Perhaps, even though change is good...it is also tiring – even for God.  
Perhaps God is also telling us that darkness is good –  
**God \*\*saved\*\* the night,**

for rest/creativity/introspection/rejuvenation/new life

I wonder if we could replace the word “Light” with the word “Change” and the word “Darkness” to the word, “Rest”

and how that might alter the feel of this passage:

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and rest covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be change”; and there was change. And God saw that the change was good; and God separated the change from the rest. God called the change - Day, and the rest - he called Night. And there was Rest and there was Change, the first day.*

A bishop in the Episcopal Church,

**\*\*the First Black Woman to be Elected a Diocesan Bishop in the Episcopal Church – which only happened in 2016\*\***

**The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows**, stated this in a post, this week:

*“In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic analogies were made that this is a marathon, not a sprint. As we confront, wholesale, the impact of multiple pandemics (Pandemic of racism, transphobia, poverty) I’ve been describing it as a multi-stage relay race....Back in 2014 and 2015, I led a few Ragnar Relay teams for the Diocese of Chicago... A team of 12 runners and a couple of van drivers ran about 197 miles from Madison, WI to Chicago, IL in one case, and {from} Logan to Park City, UT in another. Each effort took about 30 hours with a diverse group of individuals in terms of race, fitness, and age. What we had in common was the desire to get to the finish line. The way Ragnar works is that each runner (in a team of 12) runs 3-legs of varying distances in succession to the finish. While Van 1 has six runners covering a distance, Van 2 is resting, eating, grabbing sleep if they are lucky—basically getting ready for their turn to cover the miles. At the major exchanges the van members get to see each other as a hand off is done allowing Van 1 to rest and refuel, while Van 2 runs. The runners leap frog in that fashion all the way to the finish.*

*Unlike a marathon—which is its own challenge taking most runners many hours to complete—a relay race requiring runners to traverse nearly 200 miles on foot, requires planning, communication, clarity about gifts and skills, and care of the team. You have to have enough food on the van to eat when not running; first aid kits in case of accidents; sleeping bags to catch some Zs; and pocket money to grab food during a rest stop. But more than temporal provisions, teams need to know how to communicate with each other about what they need; when they need to rest or be encouraged to push the pace. Often a van will pass their teammate who is out running alone on a challenging stretch of road and that presents an opportunity for the van-mates to get out and shout words of encouragement to the runner. Sometimes, a runner falls ill and can’t cover their miles so another teammate may run extra miles to cover that person’s mileage on top of their own. Every now and again a runner will get lost or the van will get off track causing worry and chaos for the team requiring everyone to pull together to make sure the **\*\*entire\*\*** team is accounted for. Some folks love relay races but can’t run so they often come along to drive the vans and provide other supports. And when it is time to don the headlamps and run in the darkness through suburban Wisconsin or rural Utah, a team-mate may get on a bicycle to accompany the runner who feels like running alone in the night is too vulnerable. Truly, there is a role for everyone.*

**And it all falls apart if someone isn’t doing at least **\*\*some\*\*** of the work.**

*At the end of the race, as the finish line is in sight, all 11 teammates will converge on their runner so that the team runs to the finish as one—all together. And the finish line is typically one big party of exhausted folks celebrating not who won—but that everyone made it to the party.*

*I have to believe that dismantling white-supremacy while trying to survive a viral pandemic **\*\*is\*\*** possible – if we declare it our finish line. We all have to want it and bring our varied gifts and resources to the task.*

*It won't happen in a matter of weeks—this work will take the whole of our lives. This is an enormous undertaking so if you are feeling overwhelmed with it all—whether you are white or Black, Indigenous, LatinX or Asian or some combination—start by getting your team together and figure out what it will take to get you all to the finish line where anti-blackness and systemic racism are trampled underfoot allowing true beloved community to rise up. Then keep putting one foot in front of the other and don't let up until you get there.”<sup>iii</sup> {emphasis added}*

We **\*can\*** alter this world, for the better. Many are the actions/reforms that need to take place to do so. Protests, contacting legislators, reparations, voting, holding police departments accountable, yet not only police departments, but **\*all\*** institutions and systems, accountable for the **\*\*just treatment\*\*** of Black people.

Yet we also need to *hear* what our repetition of old tropes, does to our psyches. How interpretations of the past have been set – for far too long – by White Men. It's not only what we hear in the news or in our schools...it's also what we hear every Sunday and how it has been cast over the millennia.

We can create change – together, with our many and varied gifts.

We don't each have to do **\*all\*** of it – but we each need to do some of it, and those that can do more, must do more.

Just like the Ragnar Relay – as we heard – we can rely on each other, take care of each other... take turns with our teams, **\*\*our community\*\*** in the work and the rest.

This work – **which \*includes\*** – breaks for sustenance and rest – because rest is part of what sustains us **on this journey of change.**

**Community – Change – Rest – a \*\*new\*\* version of the Trinity.**

*“And on the seventh day God finished the work **\*\*that We had done\*\****

*and We rested on the seventh day from all the change and changing that We had done.*

*So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the change...*

*the work that We had done in creation.”*

---

<sup>i</sup> The Bible, Genesis 1:1-5, NRSV

<sup>ii</sup> “Decimation” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decimation\\_\(Roman\\_army\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decimation_(Roman_army)) (Latin: *decimatio*; *decem* = “**ten**”) was a form of Roman military [discipline](#) in which every tenth man in a group was executed by members of his cohort. The discipline was used by senior commanders in the [Roman Army](#) to punish units or large groups guilty of capital offences, such as [cowardice](#), [mutiny](#), [desertion](#), and [insubordination](#), and for pacification of rebellious [legions](#). The word *decimation* is derived from [Latin](#) meaning “removal of a tenth”.<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>iii</sup> The Right Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, Facebook post, June 6, 2020.