

Title: Slumber, acedia, and Inner Light

Texts: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Testament to devotion (Thomas R. Kelly); Matthew 25: 14-30

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Introduction:

This past week has felt isolating.

New COVID restrictions, the **growing darkness** of the season **without the sense of lightness** of a December filled with Christmas celebration, singing, gatherings, meals with family and friends.

And to cap it off – ruminating on scriptures that urge us not to slumber in the dark, to keep awake, to stay motivated and to be people of light.

I felt like giving the apostle Paul... a little talking to!

He was writing a letter to the Thessalonians, a community of Christ followers who got stuck with waiting for an **external** rescue. Things were hard.

And their image of hope was of Jesus coming back, a prince on a white horse...

They were waiting and not living.

Waiting and procrastinating.

Waiting and not doing anything for the good of the community.

Waiting and not putting their gifts to use.

In the first few weeks of the pandemic in March/April 2020 - those weeks where we were **waiting** for an imminent solution so we could get back to living – those days that were filled with too much chocolate, bags of trail mix, popcorn, cider and daily episodes with Bonnie Henry.

It was during those days that I listened to an interview with Benedictine Oblate and spirituality author Kathleen Norris and read her book: **Acedia and Me**

Beginning with the Desert Mothers and Fathers, Kathleen explores the development of this condition in the human being – called *Acedia*.

What became known later in Christian tradition as the ‘sin’ of sloth, began as the condition or ‘vice’ of **acedia**. Kathleen reclaims the word *Acedia*.

She cites John Cassian and Evagrius Ponticus both monks of the 4th century, who wrote about this experience.

In Greek acedia means the absence of care. It's kind of like a spiritual morphine that numbs our inner condition with apathy.

Acedia is that condition, common to all people, and related to but not the same as depression, of restless boredom.

The experience of isolation can aggravate feelings of acedia.

Kathleen says that she recognizes acedia when it does turn up. Being forced to stay still is a breeding ground. For some, being forced to spend long hours with family can be hellish. When acedia strikes, it creates an urge to lash out. It's the feeling of being totally bored and totally restless. It's a horrible combination.

National Catholic Reporter, April 7th, 2020 sourced at:

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/feeling-antsy-morose-kathleen-norris-offers-tips-cope-acedia>

This sense of tedium can be accompanied by frantic escapism or workaholism.

But the most tell, tell sign is a sense of disconnection of others – it is Norris says opposite to love. And is a spiritual condition.

For when we try to be silent it shows up because like all things silence show what we are really suffering from, just to sit there and let the silence sink in, and that's when we discover what we are really worried about, what we are really suffering from, what our real concerns are.

The wisdom from monastics is that this spiritual condition of acedia is countered by structured rhythms of daily life and spiritual practice –

- Such as a structured daily walk
- Daily rituals of food preparation, self care, work and play
- Regular prayer rhythms or meditation and silence
- And connecting meaningfully with others.

And if Acedia is accompanied by the symptoms of depression – sleeplessness, slowing of thoughts, disturbances of eating, thoughts of suicide – then medical treatment for depression is also required.

**So, when Paul insists we stay awake in this moment – and invites us to experience our inner light – he does not tell us that light co-exists with shadows and darkness.
And that both are part of our God-given experience.**

It seems that the Matthean community (Jewish Christians who preserved the words of the apostle Matthew the tax collector) **were also** needing to explore their motivation.

In their tradition they remembered the parables of Jesus that implored them to make use of the gifts, talents, resources that they were given **but not out of a fear**.

Fear of not enough, fear of disappointing others, fear of rejection, fear of death, fear of scarcity, fear of judgement.

For surely the master in the parable is not God! For God is love and light.

What if we were motivated out of a theology of inner light...

In the 17th century George Fox founded the society of friends or quakers. A group of Christ followers whose central belief was **that God was present in every person** – our inner light.

This understanding of inner light structured all they did and the way they did it.

Their 'church' services were simply times of sitting in silence. And if a member was moved to speak, they were to do so – sharing the wisdom of the light within.

(Though some were passionate almost Pentecostal gatherings of shaking/quaking from the immanence of God's presence within).

'This Society of Friends' are everywhere in history – founders of hospitals, justice organisations, places of refuge and safety for those who are marginalised in the community. Finding ways to let their inner light shine.

Thomas R. Kelly (whom we heard read today) was himself a quaker. Dying too soon, his colleagues gathered his writings and published the work: A Testament of Devotion.

In it he explores imagery of what it means for every human being to be filled with light:

- God's light
- The very light that came into the Israelite temple – the Shekinah Glory (visible light of God)
- The light of eternity that draws people beyond death into eternity
- That light is within each one of us - the light of the Universal Christ

And friends as we enter Advent on November 29th, 2020 - the time of preparation necessary before we celebrate the birthing of light – Christ in and among us...

I encourage us, given this year of hard things to find a rhythm or continue our rhythms ... anchors that hold you steady through the dark month of December

- A daily walk
- Letter writing
- Times of silence and prayer – alone and in community
- Admiring or creating beauty through art OR
- Contemplative photography (learning in the Deep Diversity course)
- A regular phone call with someone
- Acts of Self care

Take one practice and stick to it for the 4 weeks.

**I invite you to get to know your inner landscape – the intermingling of darkness and light.
For we are full of God.**
