

‘Total Eclipse of the Heart’  
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based on Romans 12:1-8 and Matthew 16:13-20

Please pray with me:

Creating God, draw us in to the light of knowledge and truth. Reveal to us what is hidden in darkness so that we may become enlightened children of light ... not worshippers of darkness.

Unlock our closed minds; soften our hearts; and inspire within us the courage and boldness to step forth in faith. Amen.

Last Tuesday Bonnie Tyler’s hit song ‘Total Eclipse of the Heart’ was iTunes #1 top selling song; and it recorded a 503% increase in plays from their iTunes library.

I’ve always like that song. The melody, the complicated structure, Bonnie’s voice ... but to be honest, I never really listened to the words.

They are dark lyrics!

The song writer said, “The song is all about the darkness, the power of darkness and love's place in the dark.” He even admitted it was originally written as a vampire love song.

Art is art, I guess.

We have enough darkness in our world today and as Christians we claim to be drawn to the light as a way of overcoming the darkness.

If we look at the Biblical narrative as a way to connect our story with God’s story, we see from the very beginning the focus is on light.

I want to amplify two very famous scripture readings.

One from Genesis:

In the beginning (when time began) God created the heavens and the earth, (the place where the divine reside and humans dwell) the earth was a formless void (there was no order or unifying purpose) and darkness (ignorance, blindness, and evil) covered the face of the deep (the dark place that keeps humans separated from the heart of God) ... while a wind from God swept over the face of the (life-giving and enlightening) waters ... God gave birth to creation saying, “Let there be light.” (Gen 1:1-3a)

The other from the Gospel of John:

In the beginning (was the origination of God’s relationship with the place where the divine reside and humans dwell) ... and in that beginning was the Word (which many understood as the very truth about God), and the Word was with God, (indeed,) the Word *was* God. (God was both the Word and the Truth.) (Jesus) was in the beginning (along) with God. All things (on heaven and on earth) came into being through (Jesus), and without (Jesus) not one thing came into being. (In essence, Jesus (as God) co-created all that is ... on heaven and on earth ... (on land and on sea ... in the tiniest of seeds and in

the fruit of our wildest dreams.) What has come into being in Jesus was life. (And) life was the light of all people. (John 1:1-4)

Then the apostle Paul, recruited by a vivid revelation from Jesus, unlocks his closed and darkened mind and revealed the truth to the Romans he crafted this sentence:

“Do not be conformed to this world [darkness], but be transformed by the renewing of your minds [light], so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

In these readings light is the metaphor for life and enlightenment; darkness the metaphor for death and ignorance.

In school biology class we learn that if darkness blocks light for a long period of time, life can't endure; without light there is no heat or energy that sustains life.

The very scientific aspect of chlorophyll ... allows plants to absorb energy from light and turns plants into life-giving green nourishment for countless animals ... including human beings!

When darkness blocks light, that life-sustaining force is diminished and if darkness is permanent, ultimately plants die and animals and humans suffer.

Embedded in the Biblical narrative, darkness is portrayed as a predator of light and therefore takes on the attributes of evil and death.

Last week prior to the solar eclipse there were some doom and gloom prophecies being made about what the eclipse might predict. There is still, to this day ... on a far-fetched level ... a fear that a total eclipse is a harbinger of evil.

It took many eons of study and science to enlighten the world turning a frightening experience into a spectacle of wonder.

The word 'enlighten' means to reveal what was hidden or ... to unlocked ignorance or misunderstanding.

Ancient folks had to be 'enlightened' to science and the study of the heavens to remove the fear of an eclipse and replace it with wonder.

We learn to fear the dark very early in life.

Dark skies; dark moods; dark motives ... are ominous and evoke unpleasantness.

Hate is a dark word. Hate has the power to stifle compassion and snuff out any desire to accomplish acts of mercy. But as Christians we believe what hate can never do is overcome the power of love.

... and if Jesus teaches us anything it's that God's love cannot die; God's love will never be snuffed out; and the co-creator of heaven and earth is the epitome of light and love.

But that doesn't stop darkness from trying to overcome light.

Darkness is its own evil propaganda machine.

Propaganda has the power to eclipse the truth ... but it never has the power to totally eclipse the heart in a permanent way.

The Biblical narrative about how our human's love story connects with God's love story begins with the creation of light.

Jesus takes that light and shines it on our hearts and minds exposing us to the truth revealed through the power of grace.

Jesus' story 2000 years ago touches our hearts today enlightening us and revealing to us that Jesus' way is not an ancient story line ... but a living, breathing, evolving way for us today to bring love and compassion and mercy to a dark world.

When we live enlightened to the ways of Jesus, we are free to be compassionate. Compassion is born out of enlightenment, not the ignorance of darkness.

When we live enlightened to the ways of Jesus, we are compelled to act with mercy; and work to achieve justice; and live humbly and generously.

Even a naturally occurring eclipse of the sun doesn't last forever. Light always ... always ... prevails.

And as we saw last week light prevails in stunning and spectacular ways.

The lives we live as disciples of Jesus are lives that are not only surrounded by light ... but light should shine through us.

I want us to teach our children to walk in the light. It will not be enough to use words like light and dark; good and evil.

We will have to show our children what it means to have compassion; to be willing to engage in acts of mercy; to confront injustice; and to love indiscriminately.

But I also want them to know how to use light to overcome sadness, depression, addiction, loneliness, or anything that threatens to obscure them in the darkness.

Nelson Mandela was a man who overcame great darkness. Despite all that confronted him in his life, he still believed, "No one is born hating another..."

... and if anyone had a right to hate, Nelson Mandela was one. Yet he chose to live in the light ... no matter the amount of hate that surrounded him.

What a great role model for our children!

Nelson Mandela could have probably written 10,000 speeches and sermons ... but it will be his legacy of nonviolent resistance in the face of evil for which he is most remembered ... and most emulated.

Let us continue to pray that our children come to know the goodness and mercy of light by our lived-out example and not fear the total eclipse of the heart.

Our children need to know even in an eclipse of the heart, Jesus would never allow the heart to be forever obscured by darkness; ... as long as there are disciples like us to help usher in the light.

Jesus is giving us the keys to the kingdom ... what will we unlock? What door do we want to open to shed light into darkness?

Jesus gave Peter the keys, just as he gives to us today ... he essentially says:

"I will give you the knowledge and wisdom that knows the difference between light and dark; good and evil; compassion and hate. But it is up to you to unlock the door. And when you do," ....

"I give you the power to withstand a total eclipse of the heart."

May it be so in our lives, in our families, and in the life of this church. Amen.