

“Dar a luz.” In both Spanish and Portuguese that idiomatic phrase means “to give birth.” Literally, it means “to give to light.” I poked around a bit on a website of Spanish speakers discussing the phrase, and that the consensus was “to give light to” the baby, or “to bring the baby into the light.” Whatever else it might mean, we can certainly see that it has to do with bringing the baby from the darkness of the womb into the light of day, or the light of life.

In today’s reading from Genesis we overhear God saying in the beginning of all things, “Let there be light,” and there was the first day. It is God’s first act in the creation story, to give light, to give birth to . . . everything. Light, birth, baptism. That’s about all we’ve talked about on these seven Sundays since the First Sunday of Advent. Light. Birth. And now, baptism.

These themes are cyclical in our own lives as well as in the Christian calendar. Winter, spring, summer, fall. Planting, harvesting. Birth, death, resurrection.

Today we read some of Paul’s thoughts on baptism. In his letter to the Romans he characterizes it as dying with Christ in order to walk in the newness of life, clearly referring to Christ’s resurrection.

Dying and rising encompasses more than these examples, as we all know from our own lives. Everyone, I suspect, has at some time read “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” thinking of their own dark experiences. We find ourselves in that valley during times of personal conflict, depression, and sadness. And here we all are, having emerged from those into the light, again and again.

Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan embodies these themes. Something we miss in our seemingly baptism by sprinkling is that experience in immersion of entering into watery depths of the type in which people have died. Don’t worry: I’m not advocating that our Episcopal Church adopt such a practice, because even the baptismal tank is symbolic, and we Episcopalians understand symbolism.

In Jesus’ baptism, which we celebrate on this day every year, he clearly descends into water that engulfs him before he comes up to see the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending upon him and hears the voice of God proclaim him the beloved Son who pleases God. There we have it all—dark murky water of the Jordan, heaven-splitting light, and new life. God’s pleasure.

Our faith does not promise us a free ride—unbroken light and joy in this life—and it's a good thing it doesn't. With that kind of belief most of us wouldn't stick around very long after our first experience of the death of a loved one, or prolonged pain or suffering, whether physical or otherwise. There are people who do believe in that kind of God and that kind of arrangement, and they understandably opt out of religion when those unrealistic hopes are dashed by life's tragedies.

The central story of our faith is about a savior who is born in difficult circumstances and spends his brief and brilliant ministry being hounded by religious authorities. Finally, he is apprehended, subjected to an unjust trial, and executed.

Then he rises from the dead just as he rose from the water of baptism only three years earlier. Birth. Light. Dying. Rising.

This past week we as a nation entered into one of our darkest hours, eclipsed only by foreign invasion and wars (both abroad and in our own civil war).

During my time at Epiphany and in every parish I've served I've expended considerable energy restraining myself from declaring my personal, detailed, political opinions from the pulpit, including this virtual pulpit. And I'm not about to change now.

At the same time I've invited you and others into the spirit and values of our faith, particularly as they are reflected in Holy Scripture, hoping that those will guide us in all our decisions, including civil and political choices.

Having said that no one can rationally nor faithfully deny that our nation—this particular grouping of God's children we call the United States of America—is going through that dark valley described in the twenty-third Psalm. And not just in these the last few days and the shameful acts we have witnessed—the mob mentality translated into the desecration of our nation's capitol—but for some years now. We can, and will, arise from those murky waters to hear the voice of God reminding us, “You are my beloved daughters and sons.”

Now the light of God's love—that same love and light that called into being the first day—calls us to come through dark times to emerge into that light. And that light will lead us, as it has so many times before, into our better natures.

We, humanity, have come through before, and we will again by God's grace. Of course we will disagree about the specifics of that journey; we have always taken various paths toward God's light. We must remember that we will be shown the way.

Thinking of this recent heaviness, especially coupled with the pandemic which continues to be a real force among us, can be wearying, exhausting. But allow me to invite you into a more manageable exercise. Think back for a moment on a time *in your life* that felt like it was the end of everything, at least a situation that felt hopeless. Perhaps you're in such a moment now.

And yet, here we are. You and I together in this moment. You have come through those things, or you are coming through them. Most of us have made it through by connecting with friends, by praying, by calling on a therapist or counselor or priest. Whichever of those particular means helped you, they are all conduits of God's grace and love. Sometimes it's something that just came to us as we looked through the window, as I look at the beauty of the snow falling now; sometimes it's a thought or feeling that simply wells up in us.

You and I have come through those dark times to find that God will always "dar a luz," bring us into the light, give birth to us in that new life of which Paul speaks.

We are all right. All shall be well, our nation shall be well.  
Because we are, all, beloved by God, and by God's grace we  
will come to be ever more pleasing in God's sight.

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