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While It Was Still Dark

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WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK

BY LEE MAGNESS

*Reflections on the meaning of Resurrection morning and its light for all our dark dawns.
A choral reading for five voices.*

Reflection 1: When was sunrise?

1 When was sunrise?
2 Was it when the rows of clouds turned
rose even before the sun rose?
3 Or was it when the glory-glow of that
golden globe edged finally fully over the
edge of as-far-as-the-I-can-see?
4 Was it when the farmer squinted up at the fat
orange slice squatting on the flat fields
that run to the rim of the round-about
world?
5 Or was it when the ochre orb hauled itself
high as the deep hollow and coldly
warmed the up-for-hours woman
hanging her gray whites in the soon-to-
set sun?

1 When was sunrise?
2 When ever is sunrise?
3 It is whenever
34 ever-so-much more of the light
345 makes it ever-so-much less of the
dark.

1 Just what does it mean that the women came
to the tomb at sunrise?
2 Matthew says, "When the first day of the
week was dawning."
3 Mark says, "Very early . . . , when the sun
had risen."
4 Luke puts it, "Very early in the morning"
("at deep dawn").
5 But John says—

1 John, who half-heard enough to disbelieve
the women,
2 half-believed enough to half-run
3 to the same they've-taken-away-the-Lord
tomb,
4 on the same what-have-you-done-with-
my-Lord morning—
5 John says, "While it was still dark."

1 How could the sun already have risen (if we
Mark his words), and it still be dark?
2 Sunrise is a tricky thing. It can mean
anything from first glimmer to full glory.
3 There is a moment, a morning-moment,
when it is day or night, dark or light,
depending if you have noon in your eyes
or midnight on your mind.
4 The women came to the tomb at sunrise,
while it was still dark, and found the
tomb as empty as their hopeless hearts.
5 Which make it clear-as-day
that the Son rose while it was still dark.
1 And isn't that just like God?

Reflection 2: The Lord is my light

1 God created light in the midst of darkness.
2 "The earth was without form and void,
23 and darkness was upon the face of the
deep. . . .
2 And God said, 'Let there be light';
23 and there was light." (Gen 1:2-3)

1 God gave his people light in the midst of
darkness, a felt darkness, a three-day
darkness.
4 "Then the Lord said to Moses,
5 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven
that there may be darkness over the land
of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.'
4 So Moses stretched out his hand toward
heaven, and there was thick darkness in
all the land of Egypt three days. . . .
5 But all the people of Israel had light where
they dwelt." (Exod 10:21-23)

1 God led his people through the night by his
light.
2 "And the Lord went before them by day in a
pillar of cloud

- to lead them along the way,
3 and by night in a pillar of fire to give them
light, that they might travel by day and
by night.” (Exod 13:21)
- 1 David, deep in the depths of the shadow of
death, saw God, a light ever ready,
in the darkness ever real.
4 “Yes, you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God
lightens my darkness. (2 Sam 22:29/Ps
18:28)
5 Light rises in the darkness for the upright.
(Ps 112:4)
4 If I say, ‘Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night,’
5 even the darkness is not dark to you,
the night is as bright as the day;
45 for darkness is as light with you.” (Ps
139:11–12)
- 1 Job remembered the head–light of God,
not the way out but the way through the
darkness.
2 “In those days God watched over me;
when his lamp shone on my head,
and by his light I walked through the
darkness.” (Job 29:2–3)
- 1 Isaiah saw the Light of the World,
reflecting back, centuries from the sight,
knew that no darkness would still be as
dark, no other light would ever seem as
light, in the light of the light of God,
called on the shone–on to shine on,
not yet knowing that the Rising One
would raise one.
3 “The people who walked in darkness have
seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep
darkness, on them has light shined.”
(Isa 9:2)
4 “Then shall your light break forth like the
dawn. Then shall your light rise in the
darkness and your gloom be as the
noonday.” (Isa 58:8–10)
5 “Arise, shine;
45 for your light has come,
2345 and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
5 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
- but the Lord will rise upon you, and his
glory will be seen upon you.
Arise, shine;
45 for your light has come,
2345 and the glory of the Lord has risen upon
you.” (Isa 60:1–2)
- 1 Micah knew that wherever we knelt or
dwelt, God was, wherever we walk or
sit, God is, light in darkness.
2 “When I sit in darkness,
the Lord will be a light to me.” (Mic 7:8)
- 1 Matthew mirrored forth the light he saw in
Isaiah,
light in darkness, dawn in death.
3 “The people who sat in darkness have seen a
great light and for those who sat in the
region and shadow of death
light has dawned.” (Matt 4:16)
- 1 There it is, again, still, says John:
light in the midst but not in the mist of
the darkness.
4 “The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.”
(John 1:5)
- 1 From creation to Christ, Paul says,
the light shines not only on but out of
the darkness right where we are, he is.
5 “For it is the God who said,
‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
who has shone in our hearts
to give the light of the knowledge of the
glory of God in the face of Christ.”
(2 Cor 4:6)
- 1 “Awake, O sleeper,
123 and arise from the dead,
12345 and Christ will dawn on you.”
(Eph 5:14)
- Reflection 3: When is Sunrise?**
1 It’s just like God to lighten things up
just when, precisely when,
things are at their darkest.
2 Jesus rose for us, is risen for us,
3 not only because of the darkness
4 but in the darkness—
5 while it was still dark.

1 But it also says they came to the tomb
 when the sun had already risen
 while it was still dark.
 Just when was that sunrise of sunrises?
 2 Sunrise is a tricky thing.
 It can mean anything from first glimmer
 to full glory.
 3 There is a moment, a morning-moment,
 when it is day or night, dark or light,
 depending if you have noon in your eyes
 or midnight on your mind.
 4 The women came to the tomb at sunrise,
 while it was still dark,
 while they were still dark,
 2 dark with doubt,
 3 dark with dread,
 5 deep in the valley of the shadow of his
 death,
 4 so oily fingered, so myrrh-mired,
 they could never have lit a light.
 5 The women came to the tomb at sunrise,
 while it was still dark,
 and found the tomb as empty as their
 hopeless hearts.

1 And so do we.
 We all come to this dawn,
 in one way or another, less or more,
 2 drawn or drained,
 3 dreadful or doubtful or just plain
 darkful,
 4 in the dark,
 5 or worse, the dark in us,
 1 only to find that the Son has already risen—
 2345 Sonrise!—
 1 just as he said he would,
 and better, just when he always does—
 2345 while it is still dark.
 1 When is sunrise?
 2 When ever is sunrise?
 3 It is whenever
 34 ever-so-much more of the light
 345 makes it ever-so-much less of the dark.
 1 Arise, shine;
 123 arise from the dead,
 12345 and Christ will dawn on you.

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 College in Milligan College, Tennessee.