

## “Out of Darkness ”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)  
Continuing a series on the Gospel of John

John 3.16-21

March 8, 2015

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that every single person who is simply entrusting themselves to him would never be destroyed, but would have a deep, lasting life. For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to rescue the world through the Son.

Whoever trusts themselves to him is not condemned, but whoever does not trust themselves to him stands condemned already because they have not trusted the person of God's one and only Son.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the cosmos, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were foul. Everyone whose deeds are foul hates the light, and will not come into the light, for fear that what they do will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

John 3.16-21

Adapted from the New International Version

One of the darkest villains in movie history . . . Darth Vader.

Murderous. Genocidal. Heartless. Faceless. Servant of the “Dark Side,” bending any and all under its power.

But then, if you're into the Star Wars movies, you learn his real name: Anakin. You meet him as a 9-year-old. He is brilliant, perceptive, talented and gifted. Then, in the next movie, he is a young man and his mother dies, murdered. Then, in the next, he is a husband whose beloved is threatened. Desperate to save her, he is twisted into Darth Vader.<sup>1</sup>

Is Vader doomed to darkness? (You have to see the movies!)

Another character of darkness: Gollum, from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Slippery and slimy, Gollum murders and thieves and betrays. He rules dark caverns, feeds on cold fish. His mind twisted, his body ravaged, he has devolved into the basest of outcasts. Like Bilbo and then Frodo (they are hobbits), we are ready to be done with Gollum, to see the death of it.<sup>2</sup> However, the sage wizard Gandalf says, “*I think it is a sad*

---

<sup>1</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darth\\_Vader](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darth_Vader)

<sup>2</sup> Fleming Rutledge says this of Gollum: “*This wretched personage is a masterpiece of nastiness. The ‘horrible swallowing noise in his throat’ (gollum) is revolting enough. Add to that the famously disgusting*

*story, and it could have happened to others, even to some hobbits I have known.*<sup>8</sup> We are grasped with “*a sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror.*”<sup>4</sup> Gollum might be me! Is Gollum doomed to darkness? (See the movies or, better, read the books!)

## II

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness. He had heard and seen enough to know God was clearly at work in Jesus. So he dropped in to say so. What Jesus wanted Nicodemus to see, however, was that God wanted to do work within him.

We’ve listened in on their conversation, these past few weeks, and we have seen what God wants to do in us too. It is what God has already been doing in us, because the Spirit is working long before we realize. Also, what God will be doing. We cannot predict how. For as with the wind, God the Spirit moves in ways we cannot program nor capture. Just be ready to be surprised. And trust.

In their conversation—Jesus and Nicodemus—we have seen that all of us, even the most religious (Nicodemus), we all need New Birth. We need a new beginning to us, a new making of us. A new birthing, this time by God.

We have seen that God the Spirit gives this New Birth: converting us, changing our direction from death to life.

We have seen the place where our New Birth was conceived. It was a cross. Jesus, God the Son, hoisted himself up and broke the power of Evil and its mutant offspring, Sin and Death. So the renewing and healing and merciful restoration of all the cosmos could begin.

We have seen that trust, the miracle of simply entrusting ourselves to Jesus, brings us into this New Birth. From the darkness.

## III

What darkness are we talking about? ISIS? That’s darkness. Child pornography, darkness. Death camps. Torture. Brutality. All darkness. And we can go on and on.

Notice, though, that none of that is me. You neither. I like it that way. I like darkness kept comfortably “out there.” Darkness is Darth Vader! Darkness is Gollom!

---

*baby-talk that he addresses to himself and the slimy, dark unpleasantness of his person, and we have before us a memorably creepy character. Indeed, Gollum is so loathsome that we might well hope to be rid of him. Thereby hangs a large part of our tale.”* The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien’s Divine Design in The Lord of the Rings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 26.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring Harper Collins edition. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), 71.

<sup>4</sup> This is Bilbo Baggins’ reaction when he first meets Gollum in the cave under the Misty Mountains. J. R. R. Tolkien, The Hobbit, Collins Modern Classic edition. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), 112.

Except, I know better. I know myself better. I know others, including (sorry) many of you. We are well-qualified and well-practised at messing stuff up. Other people's stuff. Our stuff. We make a mess of promises, relationships, hearts, trusts. Sometimes by accident; everyone makes mistakes. Too often, though, we make messes on purpose. We don't simply get things wrong, we purposefully do wrong.

It doesn't have to make sense. When I was a kid, do you know what we'd do when someone got a nice, new, clean, white pair of sneakers? They would proudly wear them to school. We'd scuff them up. Grind dirt into them with the soles of our sneakers, which were once nice, new, clean and white until other kids messed them up. What goes around, keeps going around. No reason. Just to mess someone up.

That's darkness. Not a lot. Small. Multiply it, though, by thousands, millions, billions. Give us real power. We get lots of darkness.

Where do we get this from? Are we born with it? Do we learn it? Does it matter? It's there! Each of us lives out darkness our own way. Many of us keep a lot of it inside, but it's still there. Darkness.

Of course, there is so much more to us than that darkness. Still, the darkness does so much damage.

#### IV

All that damage has consequences. We all live with those consequences. That's the judgement. The judgement is that we live in darkness, and do darkness, and inflict darkness, and it is destroying us. We are destroying one another, beloved creations of God. We are destroying the creation which God made us to tend and steward. Darkness and destruction . . . that's the diagnosis.

I'd rather not hear it. I like to keep my darkness well-hidden, even from myself. Try to shine a light on it, and I'll run away. But when you run from the light, where do you end up? More darkness.

The Greek word used here for "judgement" or "condemnation" is *krisis*. Crisis! A crisis is a time of urgency. *Krisis* means a point of decision, a verdict.<sup>5</sup> Something must be done.

As we've walked through John's Gospel, we've heard about darkness before. And light.

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.  
The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the cosmos.*<sup>6</sup>

That's the crisis. Not only that we are in darkness, but that the Light whom darkness cannot

---

<sup>5</sup> [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D\\*k%3Aentry+group%3D51%3Aentry%3Dkri%2Fsis](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*k%3Aentry+group%3D51%3Aentry%3Dkri%2Fsis)

<sup>6</sup> John 1:5,9.

overcome, the Light who is true and for everyone, the Light has come. Jesus' coming among us creates a crisis, a decision-point. The darkness is already all around. We seem stuck in it. Now, Jesus comes. Now what?

V

We certainly hear a note of condemnation in today's reading, but it is a low undertone. It's got to be there, because the darkness is very dark, and the damage to all God loves is severe. If God did not say a strong "No!" to the darkness that we do, then God would be a monster.

But do not let the undertone overwhelm the Song! The Song is that glorious melody, which lights and delights as nothing every has.

It is not a Song of destruction, nor condemnation, nor death. It sings of deep, lasting life. It sings of rescue. It sings of new birth. Out of such love for the cosmos, God gives the Song. Into the darkness, God shines the Light. The Song named Jesus. The Light named Jesus.

We've been in the darkness. Then, light shines. It hurts the eyes. We shy away. Or, instead, we draw closer to him.

We've been hiding in the darkness, afraid. A light appears. Who is it? Are they after us? Instinct shrinks us further and deeper into where we can't be seen. Or, instead, we trust the Light, Jesus.

It is a crisis, a decision-moment. We can stay in darkness, living by our own devices. Many do. Tragically, sadly, many do.

Or, this can be the new beginning, the new birth from God.

Your new birth, so you can live as God made you to live. Your new birth, so you can flourish as God delights you to. Your new birth, so all and everything around you can thrive. *"God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to rescue the world through the Son."* Amen!