

We can't see light itself. We can see only what light lights up, like the little circle of night where a candle flickers—a sheen of mahogany, a wine glass, a face leaning toward us out of the shadows. When Jesus says he is the Light of the World (John 8:12) maybe something like that is what he is saying.
Frederich Buechner

Christmas, 2024

Dear Family and Friends:

I'm longing for light this year, perhaps more than ever. This morning I watch dawn approach—illuminating giant oaks, dark branches architectural, in silhouette reaching toward the sky. And then, a streak of sun fulfills the promise that no matter what, the sun comes up in the morning.

I can't wait for Natalio to put up the outdoor lights as he does every year. I need them, to light up my life—my exterior and my interior. For at times I feel daunted by the way the world is now. Perhaps it is age, the “life review stage” that psychologist Erik Erikson describes as integrity vs despair. Developmentally on target I'm remembering a lot from my life. Discrete childhood vignettes, random. Me as a little girl. A child singing “brighten the corner, where you are”—then only a peppy chant, accompanied by a bouncy piano melody. Or I am in an arch of light, the littlest one among parents, aunts and uncles. We are singing Christmas carols. Aunt Tootie's hands cover nearly all keys, from bass to treble, robust! The voices, in tune, harmonize sweetly. I am happy.

Now it's early morning, a Saturday before Christmas. Bob and I commune from our bedroom perches, he in his favorite chair, me propped up in bed. He's got on his boxers, a favorite T shirt and the fur throw covers his knees. We are hair mussed and clutching our first cups of coffee. Outside the oaks are still black shapes, dawn approaching, nearly Winter Solstice. A table lamp beside him shines silver on his hair. His handsome face in partial shadow. Yes we have Christmas plans for this day. But just now there is simple peace, comfort, a slow awakening.

Then my mother. Bent over a stove in whatever kitchen making gravy, undaunted. So many skills, so much sorrow. So much keeping on. A widow at 47. I understand her deeply now. Have great respect for her courage. Once she told me her favorite verse of Scripture was 2 Corinthians 4:6, King James Version: *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Beauty. Grace. Perspective. A day at a time. I am heartened.

Oh and Natalio comes tonight! He twists lights round and round the nearest oak again. He and I have a humorous repartee as usual. Me in my broken and elementary Spanish, he in his emerging English. He brightens my “corner”. And I pray to brighten his. I understand the song's premise now. I pray to brighten *all* my corners, actually. To be large of heart, quick to learn, to love, to give grace. Outdoor light casts subtle golden gleams in my family room. Dare I say there is a holiness about it, a reminder perhaps?

This Christmas may our dark times, our shadows be infused with Advent light.

With love and gratitude for you all...



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