

I'm fascinated by the dark this time of year.
As someone with children, I don't get out in the dark all that often.
 We cook dinner,
 eat dinner,
 do homework,
 enforce bedtime,
 rinse and repeat.

 Surrounded, as I so often am, by the lights of a warm house,
it can seem a little wrong, driving around in the dark.
 So when it gets dark so early,
 when going to the grocery store after work
 can leave you getting home in the pitch dark,
 I feel a bit out of sorts.

We'll often walk home from a friend's house.
 My children are always a little afraid,
 living so much of their lives in the daytime,
 and with the lights on.
 So much about the world is different at night, in the dark.
 Street lights humming,
 Cars in the distance you can hear but can't see,
 What is probably a cat rustling in the bushes,
 become a terrifying creature of the night.

The night can be a frightening place.
It can also be freeing.
 Like playing hide and seek in the dark.

Frightening and freeing, and all for the same reason.
 Because in the dark, you can't see anything.
 It all looks like a black nothing.

Nothing

It's a word we hear often.

“What are you upset about?”

“*NOTHING!*”

“What's got you so happy?”

“*Oh, nothing.*”

The meaning changes based on the situation.

Comedian John Mulaney points out that when we are children,
the conversation goes like this.

“What did y'all do this weekend?”

“*MAN, WE DIDN'T DO NOTHING!!*”

And when we are adults, it sounds more like this,

“Hey, what have we got going on this weekend?”

“*Nothing, we've got nothing to do at all!*”

Nothing is NOT what most of us have going on this time of year.
It seems like there's always something...

Why is that?

When did we decide that Christmas started in mid September
and debt was a fair price to pay for all the gifts we must give?

That's just the culture that surrounds us I guess.

A culture afraid of showing up empty handed,
as if we aren't gift enough?

A good friend of mine talked about our culture and our fears like this:

“We are an anxious people;
it shows in our lifestyles and in our worldview.
German philosopher Martin Heidegger,
in a lecture on *Angst – Dread*, however you'd like to translate it,
asked, *what is it* that fills us with dread?
What is it that makes us anxious?
Time and again, asked what is wrong, we will answer:
Oh, nothing, really.
That, says Heidegger, is just the point.
In our lives we are confronted with little *nothings*
that shake our faith in life's reliability,
that make us suspect, fear,
that down under the layers of our personality,
we are really *nothing*.
That underneath the structures of society
and the forces of nature,
there is *nothing*.
What makes us anxious? *Nothing*.
What fills us with dread? *Nothing*.”¹

We are confronted with our *nothings* all the time.

These might be, as my friend suggested, little nothings.
A reminder here and there,
that we really don't control very much.

Or we might be confronted with the ultimate nothing:
an untimely, unexplainable death.
Death of a loved one,
death of a love you were so sure would last.

An event for which there is no splendid sense to be made.

¹ Ard, Roger. Proper13C04. Preached at St. Peter's in Rome, Georgia

Why do we try to make sense, even in the face of senseless loss?
 Why do so many people show up in hospital rooms with answers,
 when there are none?

Nothing.

We are afraid of *nothing*,
 afraid that if we don't show up with *something*,
 then we will get swallowed up in all the *nothing*.

I guess sometimes a bad answer can feel, for a short time,
 like better than no answer at all.

We are afraid that the darkness might take all our light,
 no matter how many times the book tells us otherwise.

***The Light shines in the darkness,
 And the darkness did not overcome it.***

Or in the words of my friend again,

“To God, *Nothing* is not a threat.
 In the beginning, there was only emptiness, a void.
 Just Nothing, and God.
 And God says, *Let there be light.*
 And that sets energy and matter in motion.
 That's all everything is:
 what God pulls out of *Nothing*.”

If all we do come to *nothing*, so what?
 Paul says that when we are baptized,
 we are lowered into death,
 into *nothing* with Christ.
 And then we are raised to New Life.
Nothing is not a threat to us,
 because Christ went into
 the grave, that black hole that would swallow up our life,
 and in that darkness,
 made light of it, and rode it back.”²

² Ard, Roger. Proper13C04. Preached at St. Peter's in Rome, Georgia

Nothing is not a threat to us.

Yet we are so afraid of our nothing.

What is your nothing?

What is the empty dark nothing that has you running scared?

Sure that you will die,

sure that you will stay dead,

sure that all is darkness,

sure that light could never shine again?

***The Light shines in the darkness,
And the darkness did not overcome it.***

We will be saved,

***The Light will shine in all our nothing,
And the nothing will not overcome it.***

We will be saved,

“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,

with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

Salvation is not a list of rules,

not some singular event to which we can point.

Salvation is not a list of rules or a decision that we can make.

Salvation is the singular purpose of God Almighty.

The truth?

Salvation is everlasting, ongoing.
God started out with nothing,
and made everything that is.

Whatever mess we have made of things,
whatever mess has been handed to us,
none of this is a threat to God:
not our sadness,
or our obstinance,
or our loss,
or even our dreary apathy.

The truth about salvation?

God joins us,
is with us
right down here
in all our *nothing*.

*“Here is your God...
He will come and save you!”*

The truth is that nothing we do
will ever threaten the love that God has for us,
not death, not failure, not loss, not fear,

not nothing.