

## o8. Part IV Healing (pages 51-85)

### I. Night (pages 51-58)





‘Ascent is a treatise on Christian growth.

Night is descriptive, portraying that growth at its most painful.’

(page 20)

Fact: God is love = God lavishly gives God’s Self

Fact: Our response is to make space for the gift

Fact: God is making the space

‘John calls this ‘night’. We can’t see where we are being led!

John’s teaching aims to help us ‘**when the temptation to interpret matters differently is overwhelming**’ (page 51);  
when faith is threatened.

## Matthew page 52

‘The symbolic quality of “night”, a symbol which speaks before we ever try to decode it:

darkness

dreams

solitude

moonlight

fear

adventure

the unknown

owls

stillness

stars

rest

refreshment

peace

friendship

silence

romance

sleep

perception



‘If these are the resonances, then such is the journey of faith. The ‘night’ symbol suggests, not organised gloom, but that which comes upon us and is mystery, beauty, terror and new birth’(page 52).

‘When we ask John: ‘Tell us your faith story’, what he wants to say is in his poem ‘So dark the night!’



So dark the night! At rest  
and hushed my house. I went with no one knowing  
upon a lover's quest.

– Ah the sheer grace! – so blest,  
my eager heart with love aflame and glowing.

In darkness, hid from sight  
I went by secret ladder safe and sure  
– Ah grace of sheer delight! –  
so softly veiled by night,  
hushed now my house, in darkness and secure.

Hidden in that glad night,  
regarding nothing as I stole away,  
no one to see my flight,  
no other guide or light  
save one that in my heart burned bright as day.



Surer than noonday sun,  
guiding me from the start this radiant light  
led me to that dear One  
waiting for me, well-known,  
somewhere apart where no one came in sight.

Dark of the night, my guide,  
fairer by far than dawn when starts grow dim!  
Night that has united  
the Lover and the Bride,  
transforming the Beloved into him.

There on my flowered breast  
that none but he might ever own or keep,  
he stayed, sinking to rest,  
and softly I caressed  
my Love while cedars gently fanned his sleep.



Breeze from the turret blew  
ruffling his hair. Then with his tranquil hand  
wounding my neck, I knew  
nothing: my senses flew  
at touch of peace too deep to understand.

Forgetting all, my quest  
ended, I stayed lost to myself at last.  
All ceased: my face was pressed  
upon my Love, at rest,  
with all my cares among the lilies cast.

Play 'Upon a darkened night'  
(Loreena McKennitt  
'The Mask & the Mirror')



Upon a Darkened Night (Loreena  
McKennitt 'The Mask & the Mirror')

Upon a darkened night

The flame of love was burning in my breast

And by a lantern bright I fled my house while all in quiet rest.

Shrouded by the night and by the secret stair, I quickly fled

The veil concealed my eyes while all within lay quiet as the dead.

Oh night thou was my guide. Oh night more loving than the rising sun

Oh night that joined the Lover to the beloved one

Transforming each of them into the other.

Upon that misty night, in secrecy, beyond such mortal sight

Without a guiding light than that which burned so deeply in my heart.

That fire 'twas led me on and shone more bright than of the midday sun

To where he waited still. It was a place where no one else could come.



Oh night thou was my guide.  
Oh night more loving than the rising sun  
Oh night that joined the Lover to the beloved one  
Transforming each of them into the other.

Within my pounding heart  
Which kept itself entirely to him  
He fell into his sleep  
Beneath the cedars all my love I gave.

By the fortress walls  
The wind would brush his hair against his brow  
And with its smoothest hand  
Caressed my every sense it would allow.



Oh night thou was my guide  
Oh night more loving than the rising sun  
Oh night that joined the Lover to the beloved one  
Transforming each of them into the other.

I lost myself to him  
And laid my face upon my lover's breast  
And care and grief grew dim  
As in the morning's mist became the light.

There they dimmed amongst the lilies fair



‘What resonances did John find in the symbol ‘night’? We could highlight these: blessedness, and mystery’ (page 54).

‘John seems to have composed these stanzas in the peaceful months after his escape from Toledo; but they come charged with what he learned there’ (page 54).

So dark the night! At rest  
and hushed my house. I went with no one knowing  
upon a lover’s quest.

– Ah the sheer grace! – so blest,  
my eager heart with love aflame and glowing.

1. It is a ‘lover’s quest’
2. It is experienced as a ‘sheer grace’
3. His eager heart is aflame with love and glowing.



Surer than noonday sun,  
guiding me from the start this radiant light  
led me to that dear One  
waiting for me, well-known,  
somewhere apart where no one came in sight.

Dark of the night, my guide,  
fairer by far than dawn when starts grow dim!  
Night that has united  
the Lover and the Bride,  
transforming the Beloved into him.

1. In this night the light is within, surer than noonday,  
fairer than the dawn
2. It is the place for encounter, for transformation.



‘Night carries all the weight of the Lord’s Passover’ (page 55).

‘Night signifies that which comes upon us and takes us out of our own control; it announces that as a place of resurrection. A God who heals in darkness –this is John’s word of hope in a destabilised world.’

(pages 55-56)

‘Contemplation: prayer where I am no longer a tourist, where sense has shifted to spirit – where plenty of insights and aspirations have given way to a less picturesque, more total form of togetherness with God’ (page 56).

‘Contemplation is nothing but a hidden, peaceful, loving inflow of God. If it is given room, it will inflame the spirit with love’ (Night I.10.6).



## Dark Night II.5.1

‘The dark night is a certain flowing in of God into the human creature, which purges it of the ignorance and imperfections belonging to its very nature. God teaches it in a strange, secret way, educating it to perfect love.

He does this himself;  
all the creature can do is be lovingly attentive, listening, receptive, allowing itself to be enlightened without understanding how.’



## Letter to Dona Juana Pedraca

‘It is a great grace from God when God so darkens and impoverishes the soul that the senses cannot deceive it. And that it may not go astray it has nothing to do but to walk in the beaten path of the law of God and of the Church, living solely by faith, dim and true, in certain hope and perfect charity, looking for all its blessings in heaven; living here as a pilgrim, a beggar, an exile, an orphan, desolate, possessing nothing and looking for everything from God.’



- ‘Night: God’s love felt as pain’ (page 57) – widening, purifying, making space. God gives Himself. God makes space for Himself. This is the Night in which what is felt is my resistance to losing control, to letting go, to being consumed.

‘Night assures us: that there is somewhere to go

that only God can take us there

that God does intend to take us there

that God takes us there in darkness

and that darkness must be lived in faith’ (page 57).



The poor, the inarticulate, the disempowered are less likely to resist losing control. We watch Jesus' closeness to the poor and broken.

'Night is taking us,  
not to some soirée for the self-preoccupied élite,  
but to the heart of the world's suffering.  
It declares the world's wounds to be spaces  
through which God may graciously enter.  
John's poem touches a universal chord;  
it is the song of the poor Jesus on Easter morning' (page 57).



## The Easter Vigil Exsultet

“This is the night  
when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death  
and rose triumphant from the grave ...  
The power of this holy night dispels all evil,  
washes guilt away, restores lost innocence,  
brings mourners joy. It casts out hatred,  
brings us peace and humbles earthly pride.  
Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth  
and we are reconciled with God.”