

An Invitation to Wisdom and Grace

Week 2—DISORDER: Dark Night of the Soul: Wilderness

Experience as a Challenge and Gift, Different kinds of darkness

Living along the Arc of Life

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Presuppositions for this series

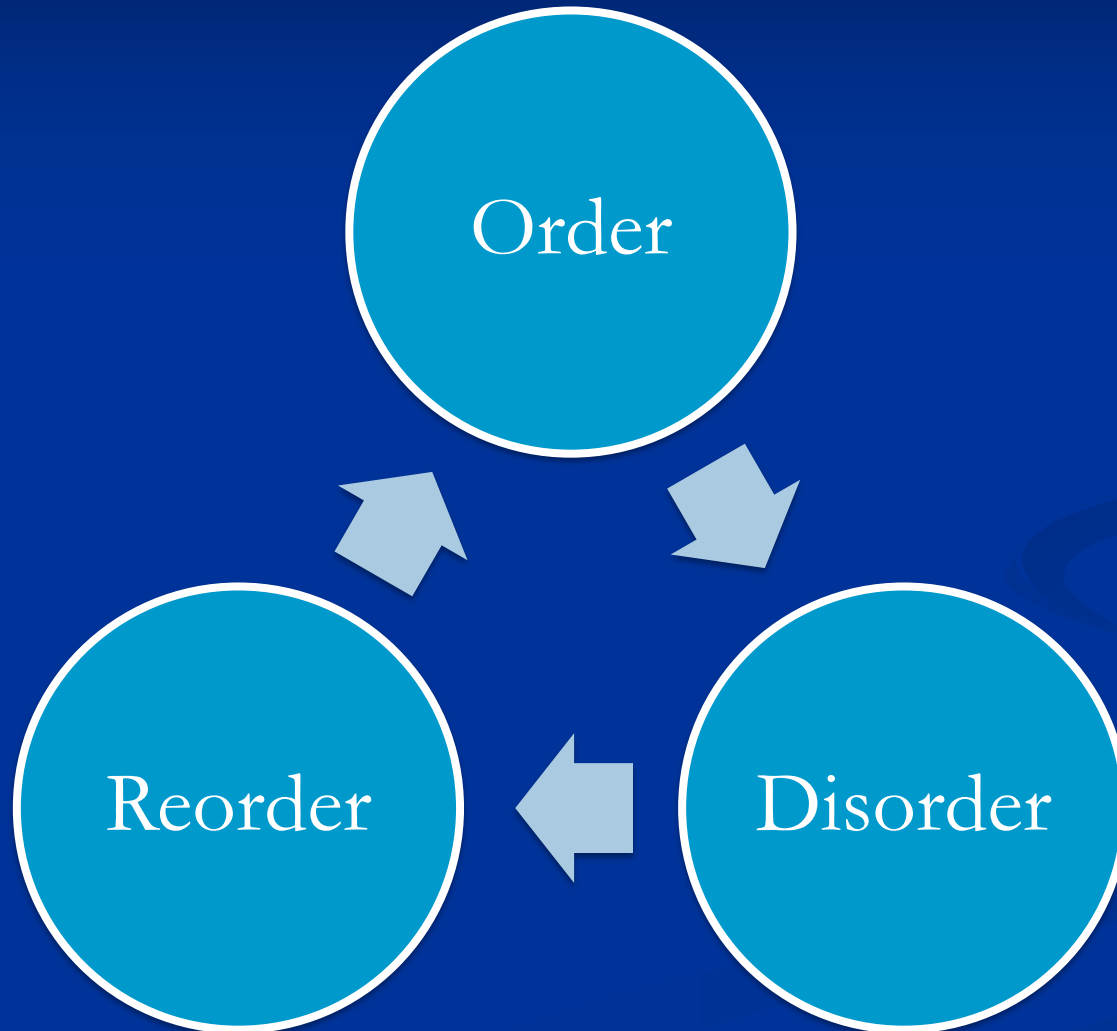
- We were created to live in union with God (Rohr: Divine Love Affair)
- Love is the Source and Goal (Ground of all Being)
 - Faith is the slow process of getting there
 - Hope is the willingness to move forward without resolution or closure
- We need all three (Love, Faith, Hope) to make the arduous journey
- Even when we feel the absence of God, we still are in the “womb of the incarnation”—preparing to be born into what’s next.
- In the fullness of time, we open/yield into union with God (mystery)—nothing and no one is irretrievably lost!

Be gentle with yourself

Overview of the Series

- March 13—ORDER: Overview, Models and Paradigms, Belovedness, Stepping out in courage
- March 20—DISORDER: Dark Night of the Soul: Wilderness Experience as a Challenge and Gift, Different kinds of darkness
- March 27—REORDER: A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life in a Wounded World

Models (heuristic guides, not straightjackets)



- Applied by Richard Rohr for spiritual journey
- Adapted from Walter Brueggemann
- Applies not just to Faith Development, but also Scripture, Politics, and Systems

Limitations/Dangers inherent in the Model

- Postmodern experience: the meta-narratives aren't there to provide answers in the first half of life
- There is no direct route from Order to Reorder (must go through Disorder experience)
- Some have such low sense of self that the wilderness experience can be trigger to pathology (different kinds of darkness)
- Religion has often been used as abusive tool of subjugation (more next week)

Disorientation (Disorder, Wilderness, Desert)

- Human experience is not simply an articulation of the circumstances in which we find ourselves (static)
- There is inherent movement (flow, change and being changed)
- Brueggemann: two principle movements in life:
 - Out of settled orientation into a season of disorientation
 - Move from disorientation into new orientation (can we see it as a gift from God?)
- Not a one-time experience, but spirals of change in life
- We often may not realize we are in the wilderness till we are coming out of it into new orientation

This paradigm is counter-cultural, subversive

- Modern western culture holds fiercely to three realities
 - Dominant ideology holds fast to continuity and success as supreme values
 - Real surprise is not welcome (curiosity okay as long as control is maintained)
 - Avoid pain, hurt and loss at all costs
- Gospel mandate: lose one's life in order to save it... (the world reckons it as foolishness)

Oscura vs. Tinieblas

- John and Teresa use “oscura” as the obscure darkness in which things are hidden (la noche oscura = dark night of the soul)
- Tinieblas is different—more sinister (evil), things are not hidden, one is blind to the attachments and delusions that inhibit life
- Ironically, the dark night of the soul (oscura) is working to heal the tinieblas (blindness) of our lives

Distortions of Life

- We are all born with a desire for God and the fullness of love (most of us are unconscious of it)
- Complication: Western individualism convinces us we can achieve perfect satisfaction on our own
- We can't fully apprehend God through empirical evidence so we find proxys (good, beauty, truth) that relate “of-Godness” to us
- We habituate on these experiences—not bad unless they become attachments/compulsions (we no longer choose them)
- If they are especially unhealthy/destructive, we call them addictions

Periodic Table of the Intoxicants

F ⁷⁷ fool	Sx ⁷⁸ sex	Rl ⁷⁹ relationships	Cd ⁸⁰ dependency	Gm ⁸¹ gambling	Cu ⁸² cults	Pf ⁸³ performance	Sh ⁸⁴ spending	Rg ⁸⁵ rage	Mi ⁸⁶ media
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Distortions of Life

- We all have attachments and addictions, which can become our idols—misplaced love
- But the disruption of life that comes in the wake of addiction often becomes the *la noche oscura* that awakens us to another way (*oscura* vs. *tinieblas*)
 - Pit of Chaos helps us awaken to the desire for change

The dark night...

- Here's the challenge: it is only in the dark night that we are able to release our attachments and addictions (movement, change, awakening to new orientation)
 - Tinieblas—blindness to our being enslaved to attachments and addictions (a poverty of love)
 - Oscura—disorienting darkness that awakens to new possibility (freedom for love)
- It will never happen in the Order phase
- In this way, the dark night becomes a totally loving, liberating, life-giving process (even if it doesn't FEEL that way at the time)

Tandem conversation

- Do you find this distinction between oscura and tinieblas helpful? Can you think of situations in your life when you were blind (tinieblas) to the attachments in your life? What happened?

The invitation to wisdom and grace

- The invitation to wisdom and grace that comes in this way is a gift from God, calling us into new life
- John of the Cross: in worldly matters having good light matters in finding your way; in spiritual matters, it is precisely when we think we know where we are going that we are most likely to stumble.
 - God “darkens” our awareness in order to keep us safe
 - “guiding night” and “night more kindly than the dawn.”
- The night is dark for our protection—when we cannot chart our own course, we become vulnerable to God’s protection
- God “takes” us where we would not or could not go on our own

Kenosis and Sacrifice

- Kenosis—self-emptying of one's own will to become receptive to God's will (for a purpose)
- Liberation, whether experienced as pleasure or pain, always involves some loss, relinquishing something no longer present (invitation to frame it as sacrifice--set apart as sacred, holy)
- Transformation is the release into freedom for desire (not from desire), but the desire is authentically to love as you were created to love.

Transformation—from dark night into new dawn

- Offers three precious gifts for the human soul:
 - The soul's deepest desire is satisfied—freed from attachments, one is able to love God and others and self
 - The delusion of separation from God and creation is dispelled
 - With the newfound freedom to love and realization of union, one can actively participate in God (gentle with self as beloved, compassion and mercy for others as God is, the world changes)
- Contemplation of this wonderful gift is not “thinking on it” or meditating; it is con-temple: aware that you stand on holy ground

Writing Exercise

- The mystics were unabashed in the erotic imagery of their writings about the spiritual journey. If you were to write a love letter to God, what would you write?

Next Week

■ Reorder:

- A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life in a Wounded World
- Toward an Economy of Grace

Homework:

1. Reflect and journal on what struck you in tonight's class
2. Give thought to times you've been in the wilderness and how things unfolded.

Selected Bibliography

- Gerald May, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*
- Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*
- Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*
- Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace*
- Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life in a Wounded World*
- *Writings of the Mystics: John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Julian*

Questions,
Comments,
Conversation