

Isaiah 61. 1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126

1 Thessalonians 5. 16-24

Luke 1. 26-38

Luke 1. 46-55

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ON A CARDINAL CLIMBING DOWN A MANHOLE
TO RESTORE POWER TO 450 HOMELESS PEOPLE

We were almost used
To living in the dark,
To being powerless,

That day you quietly
Pulled the lid off the sky
Of a world below

And snuck down, strange
Inside that stale air,
To flip the switch,

Subverting power structures,
Sparking gasps of joy
In us who could not pay

That suffocating debt,
Your dirtied hands declaring,
“Let there be light.”

Michael Stalcup, 2020

Power blackouts are not a very common occurrence in our time now, but can you recall that leap of joy or cry of relief when the lights come back on, the fridge starts to run again, everything is back to normal. The squatters in Rome had run up a substantial power bill and the City Council had shut the power off. The powerful power company had asserted their right and drawn a line. But did the powerful ask why there were 450 homeless people squatting in the first place; did they ask: what can we do about this; did they ask why is our economy not able to provide for these people – to the extent they have nowhere to make and to call home; did they ask why are our shores flooded with refugees. What can we do; what could be done?

Anxious parents unable to cook, no light under which to read, under which children might do homework, no heating. A suffocating dark; a suffocating powerlessness. And then a disciple of the gospel steps in, coming out from behind the ivory walls of the Vatican and clambering into a dirty basement, placing his own safety at risk and putting himself on the other side of the law; and flicks the switch.

He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
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Just a simple act, a simple flicking of the switch. And all of a sudden the tide is turned, the coin is flipped and a cry of joy is heard. Instead of going to the office of the power company; instead of the Vatican simply paying the bill, instead of the Pope getting on the phone and remonstrating with the mayor – maybe these things had already happened – the saint sided with the poor, crossed over and joined them in their suffocating darkness.

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Cardinal Krajewski said he took full responsibility for what he did; he was prepared to go to prison. He was prepared to let those in power know that he knew he had committed an illegal act and that he stood with the illegals in solidarity. On their side.

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TO RESTORE POWER TO 450 HOMELESS PEOPLE

We were almost used
To living in the dark,
To being powerless,

That day you quietly
Pulled the lid off the sky
Of a world below

And snuck down, strange
Inside that stale air,
To flip the switch,

Subverting power structures,
Sparking gasps of joy
In us who could not pay

That suffocating debt,
Your dirtied hands declaring,
“Let there be light.”

Michael Stalcup, 2020

Power blackouts are not a very common occurrence in our time now, but can you recall that leap of joy or cry of relief when the lights come back on, the fridge starts to run again, everything is back to normal. The squatters in Rome had run up a substantial power bill and the City Council had shut the power off. The powerful power company had asserted their right and drawn a line. But did the powerful ask why there were 450 homeless people squatting in the first place; did they ask: what can we do about this; did they ask why is our economy not able to provide for these people – to the extent they have nowhere to make and to call home; did they ask why are our shores flooded with refugees. What can we do; what could be done?

Anxious parents unable to cook, no light under which to read, under which children might do homework, no heating. A suffocating dark; a suffocating powerlessness. And then a disciple of the gospel steps in, coming out from behind the ivory walls of the Vatican and clambering into a dirty basement, placing his own safety at risk and putting himself on the other side of the law; and flicks the switch.

He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.

Just a simple act, a simple flicking of the switch. And all of a sudden the tide is turned, the coin is flipped and a cry of joy is heard. Instead of going to the office of the power company; instead of the Vatican simply paying the bill, instead of the Pope getting on the phone and remonstrating with the mayor – maybe these things had already happened – the saint sided with the poor, crossed over and joined them in their suffocating darkness.

Such an act is an act of *God with us*; an audacious, spirit-inspired act which transgressed the boundary of worthiness and sided with the poor. This act is an act in the pattern of Jesus because Cardinal Krajewski crossed over and stood with the outcast as Jesus did:

he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
 to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
 and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
... to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,

So, Jesus also crossed over the boundaries of worthiness and joined tax collectors and prostitutes, was known as a glutton and a drunkard and by his presence brought the reign of God near: God with us.

The call to mission for those who seek to be Jesus' disciples is a call to acts of standing with, of sitting in the darkness with, of feeling with, of eating with, of drinking with, of breaking bread with those who are considered to be unworthy; with those who have been told they are unworthy and have internalised society's disapproval; who wear shame as their inner mantle. When the evangel – the bearer of the good news – crosses over and stands with them, the kingdom comes close – and a cry of joy is heard: he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

These last weeks we have seen the government and the opposition struggling to do catch up – not so much up but really a race to the bottom. because the laws which had kept a certain cohort of asylum seekers in indefinite detention for years if not decades were found to be illegal by the High Court. Illegal laws. It seems there is such things: illegal laws. Thank goodness that such a thing is possible. Instead of a humble repentance, an apology we have heard the assurance – *if I had my way, I would see them all behind bars*. What has been on display is the addiction to vilification and victimization as political tool which we have seen in our own time; a system of suffocating cruelty, prosecuted in our name over the past twenty years as a means of trying to convince us we are safe in their hands.

Cardinal Krajewski said he took full responsibility for what he did; he was prepared to go to prison. He was prepared to let those in power know that he knew he had committed an illegal act and that he stood with the illegals in solidarity. On their side.

Biblical scholars talk of God's preferential option for the poor. To the powerful, to the comfortable, the notion that God might takes sides is offensive. But this is what Jesus did and brought on the disapproval, rising to enmity of the powerful. But the poor knew God with them. In this way the kingdom is birthed; the one anointed with God's spirit is seen and there is a shout of joy.

So may the spirit make us restless, make us unapologetic and courageous where we see places where that kingdom may come, as in heaven, so on earth.

Come Lord Jesus.

Andrew Boylep