

## **ADVENT WEEK THREE**

**December 16, 2019**

### **Shadows**

*Acts 5:12-16*

*...so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. Acts 5:15*

If you Google the word "shadow" you will find related quotes from such profound thinkers as Tolstoy, Rumi, and Shakespeare. In modernity, "shadows" have often been associated with that which is evil, ominous, sad, or threatening; whereas light has been affiliated with that which is pure, good, nurturing, and empowering. These metaphors and the language used to describe them have been used in very harmful and destructive ways because they have been transferred and applied to racial and ethnic peoples. If light (white) is pure, good, etc. then by comparison, shadows which are cast in the absence of light are akin to evil, darkness, and despair. The use of terms like black magic, blackballed, and the dark side, are insensitive and painful and perpetuate racism and oppression.

A dear friend recently reminded me about the restorative and nurturing qualities of blackness. She indignantly asked, "What about the darkness of the womb where life is conceived and takes shape? What about the rest and renewal that happens at night in the absence of light that repairs our wounds and restores our minds? How convenient it is to ignore the positive dimensions of blackness!"

Our world is buckling under the oppressive effects of racism and we are longing for a way forward. This biblical passage recasts the term "shadow" and thus offers some advent hope to a broken world. In verses 15 and 16 the "shadow" is the source of power. It is the shadow that has the capacity to heal. The author of Luke/Acts utilizes a similar idea translated as "overshadow" in Luke 1:35 in reference to the Spirit's visit to the unwed Mary and in Luke 9:34 in relationship to the Holy's presence during the transfiguration story. Clearly, for the author of the text, the shadow is the mysterious manifestation of the divine.

During this Advent season, may the lengthening of the night hours remind us that it is in the absence of light that life has its origins and it is during the hours of darkness and sleep that renewal transpires. And most of all, may the God of advent hope cast a shadow upon us and our world bringing about the healing we all so desperately need.

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Dean of Students