

## A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Rev. Jimmie Scott

Sunday, Dec. 8, 2024

Good morning! So ... a thief in the night. I was listening to a radio program that I enjoy. And that's where I sort of lifted this phrase, "A thief in the night" from. It involved a lady who had graduated from high school and had gotten a job at a computer manufacturing company in Marlborough, Massachusetts. And she was 18 years of age; on the second shift, and had gone to work one day and did her job. And at 12 midnight, when her shift was over, she meandered out to her vehicle to go home and realized that the parking lot was empty, with the exception of her a vehicle. And didn't pay a lot of attention to that, but got in her car and put the key into the ignition and turned the key ... and the key broke off in her hand.

And so she was sitting there; the car won't start. And then she begins to panic and to become afraid, because all of the rest of the employees had left, and she was the only car there that she knew of. And as she was sitting there wondering what to do, she began to panic even more. And then she heard a tap on her window and looked up, and there was a man standing at her window. And he asked, "Are you okay?"

And she replied, "I can't get my car started, because my key is broken off."

And he said, "Oh, that's no problem. I can help you with that. I'm a car thief." [Congregants laugh]

So she's in a panic -- as most of us would be -- and didn't quite know how to respond to the remark.

And so he said to her again, "I'm a car thief."

And so she said, "Well, I need to call my dad." And so he said, "There is a phone booth over here near the building, so we can go over and you can call your dad from there."

Some of you may remember phone booths. [Congregants laugh]

And so they walked over to the phone booth, and she called her dad and explained to him the situation. And she was surprised to hear her father say, "All right, let the man help you." [Congregants laugh]

And she says, "But Dad, he's a car thief."

"Yeah, I heard that. But let the man help you get the car started. I know your path home, so I can kind of watch out for your safety. Just let him help you."

So, she reluctantly allowed him to start the car. He started the car without the key faster than she had been accustomed to starting it herself with the key. [Congregants laugh] And so, she's ready to go home, and he says, "I'll follow you." And she starts to panic, thinking, "This, this is not good."

And so she's resisting. And all of a sudden she decides, "Okay, well, I'll let him follow me." And she gets out onto the freeway and she starts home. And she starts to panic even more because the strange man is following her. And then, all of a sudden, she realizes she doesn't even know where she's going.

And he's following her and finally gets that she's a little confused, and so he starts flashing his lights for her to pull over. And she pulls over and he says, "Are you lost?"

And she said, "Well, I'm not sure."

He said, "Well, where do you live?"

And she told him what her address was, and he said, "Oh, you're on the right path; just keep going and I'll follow you there."

So he follows her home and gets out of the car once she gets there at the house, says goodbye to her, and takes off and goes his merry way.

So, this story is much deeper than just this encounter with a strange man. It really gets into the heart of how much we trust; how much we distrust. It gets into the heart of our fears; our preconceptions; our belief systems about who we are, and how strong we are, how weak we are, how vulnerable we are. And so, it's a chance to look inside and to find out who we truly are.

So, this story was told by a lady whose name was Betsy Cornwell and she told it to the interviewers. It happened to her when she was 18 years of age, and the day she was revealing the story she was 50 years older. And she said she still remembered the experience. And the things that she remembered most about the experience was the fact that what she thought would happen, never happened, but she got a greater understanding of who she was and who the thief was.

And she said if she could talk to that thief today, the one thing that she would tell him is that he was her hero. So, all of a sudden, a thief becomes a hero!

And there's a line in the Second Epistle of Peter, which states very succinctly and clearly, *"I will come to you like a thief in the night."* I will come to you like a thief in the night. I will come to you with stealth. I will steal close to you in the night whenever you need me.

And it's a prime example of the reality that God is always present for us. Always there to support us; to strengthen us; to encourage us; to heal us; to help us make our lives better. God is always there to inspire our interactions with other people.

And that's a challenging situation in a complex world like we live in. It's often difficult for us to see challenging circumstances outside of our level of control will take place in our lives and in our world, and feel safe within all of that, because it's so complicated.

And part of the process of spiritual training or spiritual understanding is learning how to live without distrust; to live with our fears. I heard Eric Butterworth back in the 80s make a comment that life is an endogenous process: it is live from the inside out.

And we are challenged to be able to be in that reality all the time. To trust people; to trust our lives; to trust the circumstances and conditions that impact and affect our lives. That's true whether you're stuck in a parking lot in the dark of night; that's true whether you're in a business engagement and you don't know whether you can trust your financial backers or not; it's true if you're in a marital relationship and you've got issues going on in that relationship that are giving you some trouble. It's true in every aspect of our life. And the Holy Spirit is there to support us and to make those situations better.

One of my favorite scriptural statements is, *"Be still."* Be still: it doesn't have a whole lot of complicated stuff around those two words. It's simply, *"Be still."* And then it's followed up with, *"And know that I am God."*

**Be still and know that I am God. Take on that understanding that the Holy Spirit is there with you in every circumstance and condition.**

And I know that to be the case because I've been scooting through life now for almost 83 years, and I'm still scooting. And it's because of the presence and power of God in my life. And that doesn't mean that I'm some kind of moral figure or whatever; it just means that I trust in that Spirit of God to help me at all times in my life.

One of the most challenging things about Scripture is understanding that they're not always morality clauses. And having grown up in the Baptist church that was pretty adamant about everything being a

subject of morality, I think that kind of consciousness gets stuck in our minds, and so that we get to see all of life through a, quote, "morality lens." It really doesn't have anything to do with morals. It has more to do with understanding who we are and trusting that we are spiritual beings. **No matter what the circumstances or conditions of our lives are, we're still spiritual beings. And God is the essence of who we are.**

When something unexpected happens in our lives, it's usually just a surprise. [Laughs] Almost that simple. It's a surprise! Carl Jung's said surprises are "meaningful coincidences." Which means that they have a foundation from something that's taken place in our lives ... and there's a continuation of whatever that was that happened in our lives to make us remember who we are.

So, one of the things we were talking about when we look at this story is about inner guidance. When we follow the guidance we receive, everything generally works out for the best. When we ignore that guidance, things start to fall apart.

And if you can move back through your memory bank and think about all the experiences that took place in your life that created havoc for you, you can see that train working through those processes. Once we know who we are, then we have to do something with that knowledge.

**Understanding the "I AM THE I AM" means that we can be strong; that we can be faithful; that we can be courageous; that we can be strong; that we can be intelligent. We can be anything we choose to be, but we have to be able to own it as our own. No thief can take that. No one can take that. No situation can take that. It's what Jesus would call a hard truth. But it's the truth for our own growth.**

Solutions: that's what we're here to find.

So, I want to tell you a little story about an old dude who was wondering if his wife had developed a hearing problem. So, one night he just kind of gently stood behind her. She was relaxing in her favorite chair, and he spoke softly to her: "*Honey, can you hear me?*" And there was no response.

So he spoke a little louder: "*Honey, can you hear me?*" And still, no response.

And finally, he moved right up behind her and said [loudly], "*Honey, can you hear me?*"

And she said, "*For the third time, yes!*" [Congregants laugh]

Assumptions! Beliefs.

Eric Butterworth said, "*Life is always present in its entirety in us and as us,*" which I believe is absolutely true.

Now, figuring out how to activate that Spirit of God in each and every situation; figuring out how to manage our health, our beliefs, our systems that kind of give us comfort and keep us going ... that's a whole different story. How do we express perfect health in every moment? How do we express perfect states of being in every moment? How do we all of these amazing things under the circumstances and conditions of our normal lives, when there's so much other chaos and stuff that's taking place around us?

And it's a big how. It's a big how. But again, the reality is that we are equipped to do that. That's what the Spirit of God is all about. This is not about religious dogma. It's not about any of that stuff. It's about understanding who we are as spiritual beings and whether or not we can accept that as a reality for us in our lives.

So ... [Phone rings] You want to answer that? [Congregants laugh]

So, life is good. It's challenging; it's inspiring; it's frustrating; it's enriching; pushes out buttons; makes us wonder; makes us have to dig a little deeper sometimes. And it seems overly trite and overly simple to say that every time that's happening in our lives, that the one most single important thing that we can do is stop and pray.

And that doesn't mean stopping and getting into some kind of preconceived position to pray. That takes place in the calmness and in the quietness of our own hearts; just being still for an instant and feeling that Presence and that Power is one of the most powerful things that we can do.

A thief in the night.

I'm a romanticist, and I see God everywhere. I see God in the sickness and death of people that I love. I see God in love. I see God in nature. I see God in polar opposites. And I just believe that God's presence is always with me.

**And I don't want to try to oversimplify the challenges of life, because I've seen every kind of challenge imaginable. But through it all, I've had to reach down deep and to ask for God's help, and I can assure you that every time it's come forth.** Elsewise, I wouldn't be standing here this morning. Nor would you be sitting here this morning if it wasn't true.

It didn't make anything simpler, it didn't make anything easier, but it's the reality we live in.

So I'm going to leave you with a brief story. I'm reading an interesting book, and the book is titled *Full Tilt: Ireland to England with a Bicycle*. This book was written by a lady named Dervla Murphy. She was born January 1963. She died May the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

She mounted her bicycle named "Roz." She left Ireland for India. She went by way of France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Along the way she narrowly escaped death by a landslide; by a wolf pack; by Taliban soldiers; and a six-foot icicle that fell off of a mountain.

She encountered people from wildly different cultures, as you can imagine, with all of these different countries: people whose boundless hospitality affirmed for her what she probably already had an inkling of before she would undertake such a dangerous journey as this in the first place.

But she had this to say after all of that stuff, and I quote. She says, "*For all the horrible chaos of the contemporary scenes that we live in in our mortal lives, this world is full of kindness.*" This world is full of kindness. The thief in the night.

**We all have opportunities, folks, to share our lives and our world and our thoughts and our feelings and our love and our angst and our anxiety and whatever it is that comes up for us every instant that we are alive and breathing. And if we're not grounded -- we're not grounded in who we are -- It's a big challenge. But when we're grounded, it's a piece of cake.**

I ain't afraid of no thief. God bless.