**DISTURBING THE PRESENT DARKNESS**

Have you ever watched the Northern Lights? Aurora Borealis. I recall on many occasions while growing up in Newfoundland and Labrador watching the dancing, dazzling colors reflected from the northern lights! Do you know how the Northern lights get their beauty and stunning quality? Here’s a little lesson in science for you.

As the sun gives off highly charged particles of energy, travelling at unbelievable speeds, these particles form a cloud or plasma. This stream of plasma is known as the solar wind. As the solar wind interacts with the edge of the earth’s magnetic field, some particles collide with the gases in the atmosphere and start to glow, producing this amazing spectacle of dancing columns of light. **When these particles collide with gas molecules in the atmosphere we reap the benefit of the kaleidoscope of color known as the northern lights.**

The apostle Paul declares in Philippians 3:20; we are citizens of heaven. When we collide with the citizens of earth, we should explode in an array of attractive light and attract others into the light!

We all understand the impact of light when the night is dark. One of the most powerful lessons I learned about the impact of light in the darkness happened for me many years ago in a small Newfoundland community called Too Good Arm. My husband and I had finished a day of visiting and ended up having supper with one of the corps families. Our visit lasted into the early evening and was ended when the power outage because of the winter storm that had quickly stirred up in bay. I recall trudging home in the knee deep snow, on the winding road, with no street lights and no flashlight light to guide our way. When we reached our home we carefully found our way to a kerosene lamp that we kept near the kitchen table and immediately lit the only source of light. It was amazing to watch as the light erased the darkness! The longer the light shined, the more the darkness vanished. It was as though the light was pushing the darkness away. I have never forgotten that image or experience. It was the light that disturbed the darkness.

In considering the theme for Women’s Ministries “Disturbing the present darkness” my thoughts went immediately to questions like, what does this mean for me? what is the present darkness and how do I disturb it? What is the source of strength in disturbing the darkness? I thought of the experience of the pandemic, global issues that we have become so painfully aware of in these challenging and changing days; biases and prejudices, domestic violence, mental health crisis in our communities, the hurting, the lonely, those experiencing and living in poverty, homelessness; the impact of climate change, chaos and calamity all around us, the list is seemingly endless and then comes the question we all want to answer….***How do I change this?*** ***How do I disturb the present darkness?*** Just as the lantern in our home so many years ago erased the darkness, we are called to become the lantern/light of Christ that shines as a beacon of hope and a lightning rod for change

Let’s learn from three women who in their time disturbed the darkness of their lives.

1. **DISTURBING THE PRESENT DARKNESS REQUIRES US TO SPEAK UP AS DID AKSAH Joshua 15**

Aksah was Caleb’s only daughter. She had three brothers. Caleb (grandson of Judah), was also the closest friend of Joshua.

In Joshua 15 we meet Caleb who has invited volunteers of his army to lead and destroy a certain enemy. As a reward, the victor would have his daughter, Aksah, in marriage. Joshua 15:16:

Caleb’s brother, Kenaz, had a son named Othniel. Othniel was deeply in love with Aksah. He musterd all of his ourageOthniel took all his courage and directed the destruction of the enemy and was united with Aksah in marriage.

(Ancient Jewish tradition claims that Aksah was unbelievably beautiful, so much so that most Jewish women were jealous of her).

Aksah asks Othniel to request from her father Caleb, a wedding gift and consequently receives a large piece of land. Above and beyond a field already received, Aksah asks her husband Othniel to ask his father-in-law for more than the land. Othniel does not dare approach his father-in-law. We are not sure why Othniel was reluctant to ask for more. Was it because Othniel was too timid? Or would it be because he feared Caleb? Scripture is silent on this issue. Could it have something to do with the fact that Caleb’s name by definition, meant in Hebrew, “the dog”. Perhaps it was his position of authority in the army that may have intimidated Othniel. At any rate, Othniel refuses to ask more from Caleb.

Breaking with tradition, Aksah visits her father and boldly, but respectfully, makes a request for more than the land he has already given. Aksah loved her father and had confidence that her father loved her. When Caleb’s wife gave birth to their only girl, Caleb was so joyful that he called his newborn girl “Aksah” meaning jewel.

Caleb gave his daughter much more than she could ever expect. Jewish culture, at that time, allowed for land to be given to a man, but to a woman the wedding gifts were exclusively either jewellery and / or money, never land or anything related to land. “She said to him, “Give me a special gift. You have given me the land of the Negev. Give me the wells of water also.” So Caleb gave her the wells in the high land and in the valley.” He gave her far more than she had asked for.

***WE CAN BE CONFIDENT IN OUR APPROACH TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER***

* 1. The story represents the faithfulness of God in our requests, our prayers, our petitions, and our blessings. Aksah went to her father and requested more.
  2. He, our Father in Heaven is able to do much more than we could ever think or imagine.
  3. Our heavenly Father lavishes His love on us. We *are blessed with all spiritual blessings*.
  4. Some might say that Aksah is the picture of a spoiled child who wants more and more. I would suggest to you that there is a *divine discontent* that all of us should foster as we consider the darkness that surrounds us and as we seek to be bright burning lights for Christ in the midst of the darkness of the world
  5. In seeking to disturb the darknesses around us we need to speak up confidently as did Aksah.
     1. Seeking the Father’s face and favour in all our situations

1. **DISTURBING THE PRESENT DARKNESS REQUIRES US TO STAND UP!** As modeled by the daughters of Zelophehad. Hear their story.

Numbers 27: 1-7(THE MESSAGE) The daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They came to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and stand before Moses and Eleazar the priest and before the leaders and the congregation and said, “Our father died in the wilderness. He wasn’t part of Korah’s rebel anti-God gang. He died for his own sins. And he left no sons. But why should our father’s name die out from his clan just because he had no sons? So give us an inheritance among our father’s relatives.” Moses brought their case to God. God ruled: “Zelophehad’s daughters are right. Give them land as an inheritance among their father’s relatives. Give them their father’s inheritance.

Background Information: In Numbers chapter 26, God called Moses to take a census of the new generation of Israel, who were about to enter the Promised Land. Within this list are all the names of the males who were the heads of the tribes, clans and families. The women were not numbered.

Imagine this scene:

The five daughters of Zelophehad boldly approached Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chiefs and the entire congregation at the Tent of Meeting.

* This was unheard of in this day in age! Women going before the male leadership to question the law of inheritance – just did not happen.
* This took great faith and courage for the five daughters to approach Moses before the entire congregation of Israel!
* They were pushing the limits of the day.
* Once they had the attention of the leaders and congregation they presented their plea

First, they cleared their fathers’ name by declaring he was not a rebel. Numbers 27:3

They made it clear, there were no sons to inherit the father’s land and asked if they could have their father’s inheritance.

Then, Moses took their case before the Lord.

Moses listened to these women and had compassion on them. He took this matter straight to God Almighty, the creator of the universe!

The Lord declared:

***“The daughters of Zelophehad are right.”*** (v.6)

If a picture paints a thousand words, then this is a masterpiece! The power of woman’s voice! Almost makes me want to sing, “I am woman hear me roar!” *The God of the universe heard the plea of these single women and declared them to be right and gave this statute and rule for all time to Israel: “‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.” (v.8)*

1. **They used their voice**

Then they were granted the inheritance of their Father. Just like that! What a powerful picture of social justice! Something that could have gone so wrong made ‘very right.’

* Such assurance! We need to be comforted in knowing that God is a just God and hears the cries of His children. These women found their voice and stood firm with their convictions. The women took their stand on what would have been an injustice and became change agents in their world. They spoke out for what was right!
* We have opportunities every day to speak out in love, for justice and hope for the world; for our cities, towns, villages and communities. Our responsibility is to become aware and move with holy boldness and intent to shine a light on the injustices that bombard us on a regular basis.
* We can be the light that collides with the darkness when we stand up for what is so wrong
* These women were single women. They could have played the victim card and moped about being orphans with no brothers and no land. They could have gone from tent to tent complaining. They could have rushed into marriage to solve their problem themselves. But they did not. These were noble, godly women who trusted that God would provide for them and were willing to courageously step outside their comfort zone to see this happen.

1. **They trusted God’s promises of a land to come.**

These women had never seen the land they were asking for. In chapter 26, the Promised Land was being divided amongst the people. The generation that went before them were fearful about entering the Promised Land and therefore they all died in the wilderness and did not get to enter the Promised Land.

The daughters of Zelophehad believed in a land to come. They believed it was good and they wanted an inheritance there. A beautiful picture of trusting God for our home in heaven!

1. **They had faith they could be used by God to bring about change!**

These five women had the courage to approach leaders to make a change! And they did!

One final woman to consider.

1. **DISTURBING THE PRESENT DARKNESS CALLS US TO SHOW UP! As demonstrated by Esther**

Here is a story of brilliant display of light in one of the darkest hours of Jewish history! The story of Esther holds all the ingredients of a traditional short story including a dramatic beginning, a suspenseful plot, a villain, a hero, a damsel in distress and a surprising twist of event that leads to a climax where right triumphs over wrong

* Esther shows up at the right time and does not turn from helping her people.
* Her Hebrew name was Hadassah. Her Persian name Esther, meaning “Star”
* Throughout the whole story line of this short Old Testament book, we see God’s hand working to disturb the darkness being experienced by the Jewish people and Esther is very much the display of brilliant light.

Here inner beauty, wisdom and strength shows up and shines through Esther as she is in the right place at the right time. The infamous declaration in the book of Esther, ‘for such a time as this’ confirms the conviction of showing up on time.

The story of Esther is

* A beautiful story of deliverance
* It is a story without any reference to the name of God however, in these chapters we are keenly aware that God is moving in a mysterious way
* He is always working behind the scenes. He is moving and pushing and rearranging events and changing minds until He brings out the most ridiculously, unbelievable events that will set His perfect plan in place.
* Esther, God’s lovely star, shines the brightest in this very dark period of Jewish history. She is brilliance on display because of her grace (Esther 2:9); restraint and control (2:20) her teachable spirit(2:10, 20)her modest, authentic and kind spirit (2:12-17)regardless of her surroundings

**Conclusion:**

We can choose to isolate and spend time thinking there is nothing wrong; we can incinerate others and situations with our attitudes and actions; we can isolate and pretend there is nothing wrong or we can illuminate the darkness by shining the light of Christ!

Weknow that light dispels darkness. Light provides direction. Light brings distinction. Light reveals and can be revolutionary for those who accept it.

When the light of Christ shines in and through our lives, darkness must dissipate!

When our spirits collide with the spirit of God, we will become bright lights. We will disturb the darkness.

*Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think’ I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand! Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand-shine! Matthew 5: The Message*

Go and give light to those who sit in darkness! Luke 1:79