

## **‘Where are You?’**

*“Have compassion for everyone you meet even if they don’t want it.  
What seems conceit, bad manners or cynicism is always a sign  
Of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.  
You do not know what wars are going on down  
Where the spirit meets the bone.  
Forget your perfect offering.  
There is a crack in everything.  
That is how the light gets in.”*

My colleague in ministry Gary Smith, who before he retired from  
First Parish in Concord was the person who most preached to me,  
Me listening to his sermons on podcast, sometimes even late at night  
In the dark,  
When NPR had spoiled too much my soul and burned too much my ears,  
If you know what I mean...  
And who I wish was still preaching, because like you I need  
Good words now more than ever...

....Tells the story of the time he awoke in the middle of the night  
To make the oh so adventurous and dangerous in the dark trek...  
To the bathroom.  
His home then that he shared with his wife Eliz was set back in the trees,  
No streetlights outside, no nightlights inside.  
Normally he moves to the end of the bed, shuffles on the edge,  
Follows his foot along the footboard and gets his bearings

By the soft, red glow of the two clock radios, one on either nightstand.  
Take a left, head for the door, reach for the doorknob.  
This is a familiar journey.  
There are familiar places and objects to get his bearing.  
This adventure does not change from one night to another.  
We get the picture, right? Yeah, we know the version  
Of this journey in our own homes,  
We, all of us, fellow travelers, fellow migrants, in the dark to the bathroom.

Except for this night, this night when even the stars and moon  
Outside the window were obscured by cloud.

*“I don’t know what went wrong,” says Gary.*

*“Was I not fully awake? Was I still half-asleep?”*

*What I know is that I never found the footboard with my feet.*

*And I never saw the numbers on the clock radio.*

*And...there in my bedroom....I suddenly realized I was very, very lost.*

This happen to anyone here?

Gary says he stumbled around inside his bedroom for a good while,  
Trying not to awaken anyone else in the house,  
Touching first one unfamiliar object, then another, then another, then  
another,

Him totally, hopelessly lost in his 250sq foot bedroom.

*“Am I sleep walking?”* he remembers asking himself.

But he also remembers being afraid he might be near the head of the stairs.

So he just stopped himself in his wondering tracks and began whispering his wife's name.

*"Eliz! Eliz!"*

No response. Not loud enough.

*"Eliz! Eliz!"*

Still no response. Good grief.

*"Eliz! Eliz!!!"*

Finally she answered. *"What?"*

*"Where are you?"* Gary asked.

*"What? Where are YOU?!"*

*"I'm lost."*

*"You're lost?"*

*"Not anymore, though. I heard your voice, I know where I am."*

And they laughed.

And Gary found his way to the bathroom, and back.

*"Where ARE you?"* Gary needed Eliz to get his bearing back.

He really needed to know he was, but asking out loud in the room:

*"Where am I?"* would have been a stupid question,

Because how was Eliz to know, she startled awake out of a deep, still sleep.

*Eliz, where am I?* was not question.

No, instead it was: *"Eliz, where are you?"*

Gary says, and I say, that this is not a bad question for us to ask here

In the morning light that is barely keeping the dark at bay –

You maybe shaking your head with me at the radio that says 90.9 on the dial

As we hear of the candidate over there saying that we should

Keep bar Muslims from the country, watching as we do so his poll numbers rise,

Or the religious leader over there, president of Liberty University, saying that he packs a gun to protect against Muslims, to which the students listening to him cheered,

Or the media circus that surrounds almost everything, trying To fearify, fearify, fearify us so much that even last week's fire alarm here During the middle of worship caused some of us to wonder:  
*Should I get under the pew? Should we shelter in place?*

Against this backdrop, against this dark,  
asking: "*Where am I?*" doesn't help very much, does it?  
Because in order for us to get un-lost in the dark, and get our bearings,  
And become people who are 'faith-ified' rather than 'fear-ified'  
In this time when racism and xenophobia and terror seem to get all  
The light,  
I need to know where you are, and you need to know where I am.

Because we've tried to do it alone, I'm sure, and  
We've all been there, fumbling in the dark, unable to find the footboards,  
Unable to see the glow of the clock radios,  
Becoming lost.  
And in that lost-ness, we need help, don't we?  
Please tell me you agree that we are more, says Gary, than a sanctuary full  
Of individuals, each with our own precious private beliefs,  
Muttering under our breath: Where am I? Where am I? Where am I?

Please tell me you agree that we need help, that we need each other  
If we are, indeed, to stand up in the light of the room and be counted,  
We who need each other have to find our way back,  
We who are lost and then found together,  
We who live in the dark and light together,  
We who must come out of the shadows and stand on the side of love  
together,  
We who across families and lovers, across pews and pulpits, across choirs  
and congregations,  
Across streets and homes, across towns and cities,  
Across countries and nations,  
Across the world might ask in this season of little lights and large hope:  
*Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?*

Amen.