



VOL 9 : No. 3 : 2017

# LUMUNOS

FAITH & LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

## *And Now Love*

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Doug Wysocky-Johnson

## Love as Priority

I read recently that the word ‘priority’ first came into the English language in the 1400’s. For the next 500 years, it was only used in the singular. Then starting around 1900 we pluralized the term and started talking about ‘priorities.’<sup>1</sup> It should be no surprise that we now talk about having multiple priorities without any sense of irony. It is just the way we live our lives, as if we can have many things that are most important to us. Not to mention our continual attempt to be in two places at one time, both mentally and physically.

Which leads us right into the time of year known as ‘the holidays.’ This is the season where we have multiple priorities while trying to be multiple places, all while multitasking our way into exhaustion. It is a good time to think about prioritizing, if by that we mean doing the hard work of saying one thing is more important than another.

## Faith, Hope and Love

This year in our three newsletters, we have taken a phrase from the Apostle Paul and used it as our theme. The phrase—‘And now faith, hope, and love abide’—feels timely to us. **Now** is the time for faith; **now** is the time for hope; and **now** is the time for love. Surely the world needs these qualities now more than ever.

The end of that passage from Paul goes like this: ‘and the greatest of these is love.’ Love is the priority. Love is the most important. When it comes down to it, and you must make a choice, then choose love. But what does that mean, especially with

such an overused word? How do we make love a priority?

## Defining Love

A decent place to start would be just a few lines earlier, where Paul gets concrete:

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.<sup>2</sup>*

Regardless of how many times you may have heard this at weddings, I would invite you now to read those words a second time, slowly. Let them seep into your own life and experience; risk applying them not only to your life, but to our life together as a community and country. There are twelve descriptors in those few sentences, and today I fall short on about half of them. Collectively we aren’t doing any better, and probably significantly worse.

## Showing Up

There is another definition of love that is relevant this time of year: Love means showing up. It means bringing yourself. Even if it is uncomfortable, even if you don’t particularly want to be there. (But not everywhere! Remember that priority is singular, and we have to choose what is most important, and that means trying not to be two places at once. If you have already forgotten this, return to the start of this article and do not collect \$200.)

There is a fancy word for this showing up, which is ‘incarnation.’ In the Christian tradition, it is the story we tell this time of

# Love Means Showing Up

year. God, (who is mostly defined simply as ‘love’) chose to prioritize us. God showed up amongst us, which set into motion all sorts of surprising events. This is what happens when you show up—you never quite know what is going to happen.

To summarize, love is the priority. It is the most important thing. And it looks like patience. And kindness. And letting go of resentments. And maybe most importantly, it means showing up. Not everywhere, for all people in all times. That is God’s job, not ours. No, for us, we can show up for the people and the values that are most important. As we do this—each in our own way, in our corner of the world—the world will be a more loving place. Now is the time.

## A Note to our Community

If you haven’t already, soon you will be receiving a year-end appeal from us. I have **faith** that you will read it, I **hope** that you will be moved to contribute, and we will **love** you either way. This year we facilitated over 100 meetings, retreats, and workshops, involving almost 600 people. Of those 600 people, half were new to Lumunos. Your donations are helping us reach a whole new group of Lumunaries—thank you! PS: If you haven’t received a letter, you can always contribute at Lumunos.org.

<sup>1</sup> Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, Crown Business 2014. <sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

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# Reflecting God's Hope and Love to the World

*Through the years, Faith at Work/Lumunos has remained vibrant in an ever-changing world because of the community of people who have been part of our work. We have been blessed by these "Lumunaries."*

**L**umunaries are people who embody the values of Lumunos—people who are using their gifts and living their call; people who value authentic relationships and continue to grow spiritually. Lumunaries are also people who have supported Lumunos and advanced our mission in one way or the other.

Dr. Dianne McCallister is a Lumunary in every sense of the word. Although she has served on our board and still serves on our Denver Advisory Council, Dianne's best contribution has been finding new people and places for us to have an impact. More than anyone, she has opened the doors for us to work with new people—hundreds and hundreds of people, all new to Lumunos. Dianne saw a connection between the historic work of Lumunos, and the needs of the physicians she serves in her role as a Chief Medical Officer. Because of her, we have held countless gatherings, workshops and retreats, all creating the space for people to live more fully into their calling.

Here is Dianne in her own words:

*I can count three distinct times of hearing a 'call' in my life. The first was as a four or five year old, looking at my uncle's missionary surgeon pictures of cases in Africa. It was then that I knew I wanted to be a doctor. Then as a high school senior, I was excited to go to Stanford where I was accepted. But something inside told me that instead I was called to go to North Park College, a small liberal arts college with ties to my Swedish heritage and the church of my*

*youth. Somehow I knew that I needed to get grounded in my heritage and myself, if I was to be able to better serve patients later.*

*My third experience of calling came in 2001, at the Denver International Airport. I was waiting for a plane, and suddenly had a clear sense of calling. It was so strong that I ran into the bookstore to buy a journal to write down my thoughts. Something came together for me in those moments. I knew then as I do now that as a Christian, my personal mission, or calling, is to reflect God's hope and love to the world. Out of that experience I took a leap of faith and changed to a career path that had not yet been invented (the position of Chief Medical Officer). It gave me an opportunity to help create that role, and with a few other pioneers to begin the Physician Well-Being movement.*

*That was over 14 years ago. It has been a long road from that time in the airport to now. Along the way I found Lumunos, and knew that it was the "key ingredient" to reconnecting physicians with their call to medicine. I've now interviewed over 1000 physicians (and physicians to be) about why we do what we do. It usually boils down to two things—wanting to help people and a love of science. When doctors talk about this, they get passion and spark back into their speech.*

*I've seen with my own eyes that content from Lumunos, or a Lumunos group meeting, has literally changed the lives of so many physicians. By supporting physicians calling, Lumunos is making a real impact and changing the quality of patient care.*



# Hiking in Bear Country

By Angier Brock

## ADVENT WEEK 1

### Consenting to The Advent Journey

**Mark 13:24–25, 33.** *For in those days...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken...Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.*

I spent a few days last fall at a Virginia state park in the Allegheny Mountains. Having planned to hike, I was alarmed to hear that, during the week prior to my visit, a woman hiker had been attacked by a black bear. Because of that event, some of the park's hiking trails were closed. *Some?* My eyebrows must have shot up. I asked a ranger how safe she thought the open trails were. "Anytime you're in the mountains," she said, "you're in bear country."

Of course. Her words, which seemed obvious once she spoke them, made me think of times I'd naively hiked in other parts of Virginia's mountains—for the fresh air, for the lovely scenery, for the inspiring views, for the companionship, for the exercise—without giving a single thought to the black bears upon whose turf

I intruded. Just because I hadn't thought about them didn't mean they weren't there. The ranger's words had shifted my perspective.

It occurs to me that I have often set out on Advent journeys as naively as I have set off onto mountain trails. Ignoring Mark's account of Jesus's warning in today's gospel—*Beware, keep alert*—and casually claiming Advent as my favorite liturgical season, I have sometimes observed it as though it were a lovely walk through an interesting landscape, a kind of annual pre-Christmas exercise, often taken with gentle companions and always with candles and beautiful music. But if I listen closely to the stark and apocalyptic words of Jesus in Mark's gospel—images of a darkened sun, a moon that gives no light, stars falling from heaven—my perspective changes.

When I was in the mountains, my changed perspective meant that I thought about hiking differently. With my eyes opened, I could no longer blissfully wander off onto a trail without considering the risks. I wonder if the same is true of Advent. Here, too, a changed perspective requires a new kind of consent to the Advent journey. Advent does offer lovely views (and music, and candles), and it may

involve good spiritual exercise for my heart. But does it also involve risks?

The essayist Annie Dillard suggests that if Christians really understood the power of the God to whom we pray, ushers would pass out crash helmets during Sunday services. And so I wonder: Do I truly comprehend in whose habitat I am walking when I set out at Advent? Do I really know who or what I may meet along the way, and what the implication of any encounters may be? Am I aware that I may come up against a power greater than my own, a power that challenges who I am and what I know—or think I know? Am I fully cognizant of the fact that I may be not only challenged but also changed? Am I willing to take that chance?

These are among the questions I am living into this year as Advent begins.

## ADVENT WEEK 2

### Faith on The Advent Journey

**Mark 1:3.** *Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

**Psalm 85:11a.** *Faithfulness will spring up from the ground...*

Before deciding to follow through with my plan to hike alone where black bears might

also be rambling, I read the literature park rangers made available. The first rule of hiking in bear country is this: Be aware that you are hiking in bear country. And the second is like unto it: Stay alert. Also, make noise on the trail by talking or singing. My usual hiking habit is to stay quiet and listen to natural sounds—birds, wind in the leaves, running water. However, if good bear etiquette demands a little noise—so that bears might hear me coming and not think me an aggressor sneaking up on them—surely I could handle that.

The materials said that, in case of a bear encounter, one should back away slowly, always facing the bear. They also said, somewhat reassuringly, that attacks by black bears are rare—and, somewhat less reassuringly, that if a bear attack *does* occur, it can usually be fended off with sticks, stones, or even bare hands. Thus informed—and armed with a hiking pole, binoculars, water, trail maps, and a mental list of songs I like to sing when alone—I felt prepared. In other words, I had faith in the information and also faith in myself, faith that I could do what I needed to do. And so I hit the trail.

In hindsight, I realize that I didn't necessarily put my faith in the right things. Had I known the path would be as winding, steep, and narrow as it was, I would not have counted on being able to back away safely from a menacing bear, for backing up would likely have sent me tumbling down the mountainside. Also, it's hard to sing when you're hiking uphill. Even my faith in my ability to stay alert was not terribly well placed, for any number of distractions arose. A great deal of attention went to avoiding tripping over rocks and roots—and, simultaneously, to watching for trail blazes marking the path. Grand vistas, captivating rock formations, and the season's last wildflowers were other marvelous distractions.

My journey through Advent has similar pitfalls. I try to prepare my heart. I try to stay aware of the season, to slow down and be intentional about observing the rhythm of December's shorter, darker days. Nevertheless, the weeks leading up to Christmas are typically busy ones—shopping, cards, holiday concerts, holiday gatherings of family and friends. When so many marvelous views and voices beckon,

how do I stay alert, focused, faithful?

Perhaps Psalm 85 offers a clue. The Psalmist writes, "Faithfulness will spring up from the ground..." Faithfulness will spring up—from *the ground*? Could faithfulness be not so much something in me, something I have to have or have to do—as it is something that rises to meet me as I put one foot in front of the other and keep walking? Perhaps faithfulness is already on the path, waiting to spring up from the ground to greet me—if I am but willing to take the first steps.

### ADVENT WEEK 3

#### *Hope on The Advent Journey*

**John 1:7.** *He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*

When I first turned onto the park trail, I was surprised to see an array of white signs tacked to trees leading up the path. "Safety Zone," they read. *How curious*, I thought. And then, *Good to know*, assuming the signs indicated a bear-free zone. But did the bears know? I don't know, but even when the signs disappeared about fifty yards up the trail, I kept going, bolstered to have started off with that unexpected reassurance, that initial zone of "safety."

Reading signs can be tricky. Whether something signifies danger or hope can depend on context. I have thus far been casting American black bears (*Ursa americanus*) as a menace—and certainly they can be. They are wild creatures; their power is not to be taken lightly or toyed with. However, their presence in our Commonwealth can be read not as a problem but as a source of hope, for like the eastern bluebird and the bald eagle, their story is a success story. At one point, Virginia's black bear population had diminished to near extinction. Thanks to increased understanding of them, raised public awareness, and good management practices, black bears now thrive. Omnivores, they are again playing their role in the various ecologies of the state. Among other things, they eat fruits (thereby scattering seeds) and ants and other insects (thereby helping control populations of tree-damaging beetles). They also help keep the forest floor clear by scavenging for carcasses; and, because they are at the top of the food chain, they help keep other

populations of animals healthy by preying on the weak and the sick. Their current robust number signifies that we humans can sometimes redeem our misunderstandings and mistakes as regards the creatures with which we share a planet.

Redemption is a good thing, something that gives me hope, for I have plenty of my own misunderstandings and mistakes in need of being redeemed. Today's gospel reading also speaks to hope and redemption; both are proclaimed by a voice crying in the wilderness. In Mark, we meet John the Baptist only through his words, but in Matthew's gospel, his dress and diet are described—in ways that make him sound rather bear-like. He wears skins with a leather belt around his waist. He eats locusts and wild honey. Also, like bears, who dig around in leaf litter and scratch at trees and roots (activities that hasten the decomposing of dead matter, another contribution to the environment), he stirs things up.

On my hike, I never did see any black bears. On the last leg of my hike, though, about two-thirds of the way down the mountain, I met a young woman coming up the trail. She had entered the forest on a different path. She had not seen any black bears either, but she had passed someone who had seen three. He said he had clapped his hands, and the bears had run away.

Twenty minutes or so later, after almost four hours of hiking, I again saw the white signs and knew I was re-entering the "Safety Zone" near the foot of the mountain. Again the signs gave me hope. I was tired. I was hungry. I was running short of water. But I was almost home.

What's stirring in you as you make your Advent journey? Where do you need redemption? What great, or small, or even ambiguous signs give you hope?

### ADVENT WEEK 4

#### *Love at The End of The Journey*

**Luke 1:30.** *Do not be afraid for you have found favor with God.*

In a hymn at the close of his long poem, *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, W. H. Auden writes, "He is the way. Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness; you will see rare beasts and have unique adventures."

*continued on page 7*

# On Love and Being: A Conversation Between Mother and Daughter

*In this article, Lumunos' new Outreach Manager, Becca Perry-Hill, explores faith, hope, love, and motherhood through a conversation with her mom and former Director of Operations and Development at Lumunos, Betsy Perry. Becca became a mother and Betsy a grandmother in November of 2016 with the birth of Maya Lou. In the spirit of the Christmas season, a time to reflect on love, family, and birth, Becca and Betsy sat down to talk about what they've learned from becoming a mother and grandmother in the past year.*

**BECCA:** How did you feel about becoming a grandmother to Maya?

**BETSY:** Well, I think I was just about as excited as you were becoming a mother to Maya [laughs].

**BECCA:** I think maybe more [more laughter].

**BETSY:** I love being a grandma to Russ's children's children – all seven of them—but there's nothing like being a grandma to your own biological grandbaby... And one of the most amazing things about being a grandmother, that I didn't even realize, is how she teaches me, even when she was just a tiny newborn. Her movements, her sounds... her downward dogs, her dolphin pose. All of those things just teach me how yogic a little baby is—meaning in balance, in union. And now seeing her learning to walk, keeping that balance, and how she gets into it gradually. She doesn't just all of a sudden one day walk. She has weeks of practice walking with somebody. These are just things I delight in. [It] gives me hope for the world.

What about you? How did you feel about becoming a mother?

**BECCA:** Of course, I really did want to become a mother, but I think right before [her birth] I had some ambivalence—feelings both ways. I mean the worry of what does this mean, how is this going to change my life, and my relationship with Skyler? Even the dogs and how they're going to react [laughs]. And, am I going to be a good mother? All of those fears you have before [the birth]. You're excited and it's the thing you really want, but at the same time it's really scary. After I became a mother, I think almost immediately, I had a sense of purpose that I didn't have before. In that, now, I was responsible for this little human being and that would probably inform pretty much everything that I did from there on out... Throughout my life I've experienced feelings of loneliness and I really haven't felt lonely since I had her.



**BETSY:** You said, I forget how old she was, maybe two or three months, and you said, one day when she looked at you that she loved you. That it wasn't just her early eye contact, you know, at a nervous system level, but that there was real meaning behind it. That was a time I saw you really blossom as a mother.

**BECCA:** It takes a while over those first few months. You're still getting to know this person and there's not much to them really [laughs].

**BETSY:** They take a lot of care, but—

**BECCA:** They're eating and sleeping and crying, but you don't really quite know them yet. So, you get to know them, especially over this first year I think.

**BETSY:** So, love is something [pauses], or let me ask that. Is love of Maya something that has evolved and grown since she's been born?

**BECCA:** Oh yeah. I think it went from, in the very beginning, just sort of being a worry kind of love. Like, I would wake up in the middle of the night and think 'is she okay?' And then, eventually it became an excitement to come home and see her and hold her. You just start to miss them and want to be with them just like any other person you love in your life...

So how has being a grandparent to Maya changed you?

**BETSY:** The biggest thing that comes to mind is loving just sitting there playing and watching her. And, play, once I became like a responsible teenager and adult, play was not something that was encouraged... There's a real purpose for play and a real purpose for, especially in being a grandmother, to just BE with the child... It's really learning how to play and enjoying it.

BECCA: Similarly, for me, you have to turn off your devices and not be so distracted and multi-tasking... When you're with Maya, she knows if you're not really fully present... So, to be a good parent, you have to be in the moment and let go of all the calls, emails, and texts. [You must] let go of the past and the future and just be there with her...

What do you hope for your granddaughter?

BETSY: Well, the primary hope is that she grows into exactly who she is meant to be... If she's strongly living into who she is then she'll feel her own voice, and her own power, and sense of what is right—to be able to go forward with whatever she chooses to do and whoever she chooses to be...

So, what about you? What do you hope for your daughter?

BECCA: As a parent, you really want to protect them from everything in the world. I hope she doesn't have to experience all the pain and hardships that seem so evident in the world right now. But at the same time, I think about my own experience, and while I've been lucky not to have experienced great loss and suffering, I do think that what I have experienced has made me more resilient and contributes to who I am. So, I guess what I hope is that I can raise her to be strong and resilient. So that whatever she does face in the future, she will be able to get through it being who she is. And, [at the same time] be joyful and creative through whatever she might have to experience in the future.

What advice would you give me about raising Maya with faith, hope, and love?

BETSY: Just keep doing exactly what you're doing [laughs]. You're off to a good start!... In exploring things like faith, and what is hope, and what is love—just explore them with her and have discussions with her, even early on... So, if you can give her a chance to do that, [then you'll] help her begin to develop a sense of faith, hope, and love early on.

*At Lumunos, we like to keep the conversation going and facilitate meaningful connections. Our challenge to you is to find the time and space over the holidays to read a book or talk with friends or family members about faith, hope, and love. To get you started we recommend Brené Brown's book, "Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead" (2012). Additionally, here are a few reflection questions to get the conversations rolling:*

*How did the ideas of faith, hope and love resonate with you as a child? How has that changed in adulthood? How has faith helped you in your role as a [parent, grandparent, sibling, child, friend, etc.]? In your life, who showed you the true meaning of love?*

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**NOTE:** If you'd like to hear more, audio of the complete conversation is available on our website at [www.Lumunos.org](http://www.Lumunos.org).

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**Betsy Perry** is a Lumunos consultant, retired nurse, educator, fundraiser, yoga teacher, mom to Becca Perry-Hill, and now grandmother to Maya Lou. She lives in Hendersonville, NC with her two dogs and husband Russ.

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**Becca Perry-Hill**, Lumunos' new Outreach Manager, became mother to Maya Lou on November 23, 2016. Before joining the Lumunos team, she worked as a cook, earned a Ph.D. in environmental sociology, taught environmental science, and managed an outdoor gear shop. She lives in Asheville, NC with her husband Skyler and daughter Maya.

My hike in the Alleghenies last fall was a unique adventure. The trails took me along bright and sunny spots on the mountain. They also led into darker places on the mountain's narrower, shady slopes where a dense tree canopy blocked the sun and the temperature dropped several degrees. From a high clearing, I could see part of the park lake in the valley far below. The lake was just across the road from my cabin—but from where I was, I could not see my cabin or any other buildings in the park. I also crossed several stream beds, though autumn had been dry, and the water was little more than a trickle.

As for rare beasts, I saw a few birds and squirrels but no black bears. Probably I should not have expected to, for typically—the recent bear attack notwithstanding—black bears are shy and reclusive animals. I could not say for sure whether or not any bears saw me.

Perhaps Advent has also been a unique adventure. Perhaps you yourself have met a few rare beasts along the way. Together we have encountered Jesus and John the Baptist through their words in Mark's gospel. We have also heard from the gospel writer John and from the Psalmist. Like my brief conversation with the woman I met on the trail, our exchanges have been brief. On your own walk you have undoubtedly met other rare beasts—some real, some imaginary, some dead, some very much alive, some wise and kind, some that may have seemed menacing until considered in a different light.

Today is not only the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent but also Christmas Eve. Where is it then that we end our journey? Have we come to an overlook with a lovely view—a sleeping baby in a stable visited by watchful shepherds, gentle animals, jubilant angels, and cunning magi? Or, as we come into this place, do we see more deeply into the troubled world of then and now—the world of innkeepers denying hospitality to vulnerable, weary travelers, the world where a jealous and vengeful Herod lingers in the wings. Do we find any hints of those innkeepers or of that Herod dwelling in us?

Perhaps the most important questions we ask at the end of the Advent journey have to do with love. According to the Talmud love, perhaps a little like black bears, can shake things up. It is love—no, Love—that we meet at the stable. Do we fully comprehend the awesome power of the Love that lies swaddled in the manger, the Love that brought us here? What might it ask of us as the Christmas season unfolds? What preparations have we made? What provisions do we have? Who will be our guides on this next stage of our journey?

Happy Fourth Sunday of Advent, and Merry Christmas!

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**NOTE:** These weekly Advent Reflections will be posted on our website. If you sign up for our newsletter on the website, these will be sent to you via e-mail. The online reflections will include music and videos.

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**Angier Brock** is a former long-time Board member of Lumunos, songwriter for retreats, and women's ministry leader. These days she is doing some freelance writing and editing, playing in a hand bell choir, being a Virginia Master Naturalist, and grandmothering.



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*“Oh Lord, Show me where love and hope  
and faith are needed, and use me to  
bring them to those places.”*  
— Alan Paton, from *Life Prayers From Around the World*