

## Column

I suppose we all like stories that end well, whether it be in fiction or in real life. In the latter – in real life – a friend or family member is sick, perhaps deathly so, and makes a remarkable recovery. Or a missing person or lost object is found. In either case, there is rejoicing. Words of the Old Testament prophet Amos come alive: “He [God] turneth the shadow of death into morning.” (5:8).

What a happy turn of expression that is! I have never been lost in the woods overnight, but it must be a terrifying experience. Imagine propping up against a tree and trying to wait out the night. As you do, you pull whatever clothing you have around you in an attempt to stay warm, as you pray that no fierce, wild beast will make a meal out of you. You are surrounded by darkness, and the night is interminably long. Finally, in total exhaustion, you fall asleep. When you wake up, you find light streaming through the trees. You can now pick up a path and find your way to safety.

Another example -- and this did happen to me -- you lose your wallet. In my case, I took it out of my pocket and laid it on the table while eating in a restaurant . . . a very foolish thing to do indeed! Then I left and drove 20 miles before realizing it was missing. When I did, I panicked and immediately turned around and went back to the restaurant. To my great and endless relief, an honest soul had turned it in, and none of its contents was missing. Darkness was turned to light, night to day.

Jesus in the New Testament tells three stories in which there is a favorable turn of events. In the first, a shepherd finds his lost sheep; in the second, a woman finds her lost coin; and in the third, a father is reunited with his lost son . . . “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” All three stories end happily with the shadow of death turned to morning.

No doubt you have had such moments in your life. You know how the shepherd, the woman and the father felt. The problem -- if you want to call it that -- is how to deal with the time before daybreak, when the night is as dark as it can be.

At such times, God does not forsake us. Our part is to remember that with Him there is no darkness. Just as an airline pilot has to trust his navigation system in the midst of darkness and storms, so we have to trust Him. David in Psalm 23 perhaps said it best: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”

In the Great Story, the ultimate happy ending comes with the resurrection of Jesus and out beyond it our resurrection. “Because I live, ye shall live also” is His pledge and promise.

*O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer).*

*The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's  
Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.*