

chapter 8

by Elizabeth Ullery Swenson

We began this walk in to the dark with an astrological event, the Perseids meteor shower, so it seems only fitting we head towards the end of this book's study with another one. Tonight, Sunday September 27 (or early September 28 for some of you), we will experience a supermoon total lunar eclipse, an event that has not happened in 30 years and will not occur again until 2033. Not only will we experience the rusty red glow of the moon as the sunlight is scattered by the Earth's atmosphere, we will experience it while the moon is a mere 226,000 miles away from the Earth and will appear 14% bigger and 30% brighter¹. Jackie Faherty, an astronomer at the Carnegie Institution for Science, said in a September 25 National Public Radio interview; "Basically we like to think of the color of the total lunar eclipse being the reflection of all of the sunsets and the sunrises that are going on on Earth at that time." She goes on to say "It's always a little bit scary when an astronomical body that you're so used to seeing in the sky starts to disappear on you. But it's not going away. It's just a passing into the shadow of the Earth."²

As we have wrestled with our darkness over the past few weeks it seems fitting for the earth and moon to wrestle with its own darkness. Tonight the sky will grow dark and glow with a Biblical eeriness. With our scientific understanding and our ability to control light and dark with electric lights we are no longer afraid of such astrological events, but it is no wonder that an eclipse, lunar or solar, have been used to mark significant Biblical events from the death of Jesus to predictions for his earthly return. I believe there is something liminal about the night in general, but even more so with such unique events. The moon has drawn close to the earth and its comforting white/blue glow will become red, there is something holy about that. The stars will shine more brightly without the competition from the moon our lunar rhythms will be shaken.

As Barbra Brown Taylor heads out to the woods to live 12 hours by the rhythm of the night sky she announces her readiness to listen to God, yet no actual voice breaks the silence of the woods. Knowing that "direct answers, clear guidance and specific tasks" are rarely offered by God, she accepts the "peaceful darkness as a token of divine presence." What token of divine presence might we receive as we head outside in the deep dark tonight?

¹ "Supermoon Lunar Eclipse," *Telegraph*, September 27, 2015, accessed September 27, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/11895052/Supermoon-lunar-eclipse-2015-Amazing-pictures-of-once-in-a-generation-event-live.html>.

² Ari Shapiro, "A 'super Bowl' of the Sky," *National Public Radio*, September 25, 2015, accessed September 27, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/09/25/443489211/a-super-bowl-of-the-sky-sundays-supermoon-eclipse>.