

The gift of light

A creation story

Key ideas: light, gifts, creation, sharing, suffering

In the beginning, when the world was being made, God gave each of the animals a special gift, in a very ordinary wooden box. The animals knew how much God liked to surprise them, and they gasped in wonder when they opened their boxes. Out of one box there rolled the foaming waves of the sea; from another the gnarled trunks and leafy arms of the trees; from another the shimmering calm of the lakes. As each box opened another wonder of creation tumbled out, shaking itself and stretching, and looking around for a place to settle in comfort. Every animal opened its box, except, that is, the seagull.

Everyone begged the seagull to open his box, but the more they asked, the more he clutched it to himself and said, 'God gave this to me, all for myself'.

It wasn't long before the animals guessed what might be in the box, because they were finding it very hard to see what God had given to them. The world was still in darkness.

First the bear approached the seagull. 'My young cubs can't find their way in the forest', he growled. 'Please open your box'. But the seagull said, 'It's my gift, no-one else can share it'.

Next, the animals sent something small and delicate, hoping it would move the heart of the seagull. A bee approached him, saying, 'I can't see my way home to the hive, and my young will die from hunger.' But the bird pretended not to hear.

Then all the trees in the forest agreed to try. In the darkness their roots were cold and had no life, and they couldn't tell when it was spring. The seagull's answer was still the same, 'This gift is for me.'

Finally, the animals remembered the raven, such a clever, wily bird, full of tricks. Some days later, the raven slipped on quiet wings to the ground beside the seagull. 'It is very good to see you, seagull,' he said, 'I hear the others are angry that you won't open your box'. As they spoke, the seagull clutched the box closer, and lifted one leg to keep his balance. As he did so, the raven slipped a thorn under his foot. When he put his foot down again the seagull screeched with pain.

Because he was still holding the box, there was no way the seagull could pull the thorn out. 'I would love to help', said the raven, 'but it's too dark to see'. Whatever way he looked at it, there seemed to the seagull to be only one answer to the problem. Slowly he opened the lid of his box, and a rush of gleaming jewels poured through the air towards the sky. As the raven saw the sky studded with stars for the first time, he was filled with wonder. He bent down and picked up the foot of the seagull...and pushed the thorn in deeper!

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I still haven't enough light to see the shape of your foot or to find the thorn against the dark of your skin.' Carefully the seagull opened the box a little further. This time a globe of light climbed silently to the sky and rested among the stars. Again the wonder of the moonlight thrilled the raven and he pleaded. 'Look, look, look.'

He bent down again and lifted the seagull's foot. Again, he pushed the thorn in deeper. The seagull swayed with pain, and dropped the box. Liquid gold, circling round like the rings of a whirlpool, poured from it. Slowly it rolled through the air until it rested in the sky, bathing the whole earth in a light more golden than honey.

'Surely you have enough light now to remove the thorn,' pleaded the seagull. The raven stood and looked, then pulled the thorn out of his foot. The seagull gave a long sigh of relief, and the raven looked around at the gleaming earth. 'Isn't all this just wonderful?' And the seagull agreed.

So it is that the seagull often stands on one foot, to remind us that it is difficult to share the light with others, and that this can often happen only with pain.