

December 15

Micah 7:8 (NRSV)

Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

Jim Lovell was an astronaut and the commander of the Apollo 13 lunar mission, which had to abort their goal of landing on the moon after an oxygen tank exploded and left their space module crippled. Lovell is praised for his wisdom and heroism in bringing his crew safely home. The Apollo 13 was not his first harrowing experience. Here is another part of Lovell's story as told by Rev. Magrey R. de-Vega in his book *Awaiting the Already: An Advent Journey Through the Gospels*:

“When he was a Navy pilot in the 1950's, Lovell was flying a mission in his F2H Banshee off the coast of Japan. Faulty instruments mistakenly led him away from his aircraft carrier, forcing him to miss his rendezvous point by several miles. Lovell felt hopelessly lost as he flew circles in the dark over the Sea of Japan. As he tried to turn on the cockpit light, his instrument lights suddenly shorted out and everything went black. His chances of survival, let alone a safe return to the aircraft carrier, grew dimmer by the second.

Lovell glanced at the water below, the absence of light both inside and outside the cockpit forcing his eyesight to adjust to the dark. With his vision newly accustomed to the darkness, Lovell was able to spot a faint trail of phosphorescent algae, which had been churned up by the propellers of his crew's aircraft carrier. He followed that glowing trail all the way to a safe landing atop the carrier. Were it not for the darkness that engulfed him from the night sky and his damaged electronics, he would not have spotted the radiant trail that had been present to lead him to safety all along...

Lovell learned that sometimes, one has to go through the darkness in order to recognize and appreciate the light.

Suffering is like the darkness that surrounded Jim Lovell's plane. Just as it forced him to adjust his perception and see a new way forward, your hardship can give you an unexpected chance to recognize a hope that has been with you all along. It does not mean that God wants you to suffer, or that God caused your suffering to begin with. Instead, it reminds us that God is always present to offer us new life, even when we don't recognize it. Sometimes, it takes suffering to help us arrive at that realization.”