



Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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## Shetek Moonrise

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### Keywords

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### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

Online access:

<https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2023/03/22/shetek-moonrise/>

# Shetek Moonrise

*...what I saw was a full moon rising just as the sun was going down. Each of them was standing on its edge, with the most wonderful light among them. It seemed as if you could touch it, as if there were great taut skeins of light suspended between them. (Gilead, p. 18, Marilynne Robinson).*

I read Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* shortly after it was published, and I read it again about ten years later. Of the numerous scenes that remain in my memory, this one stands out most vividly. For a good reason.

Shortly after I read *Gilead* I went crappie-fishing with my nephew Sam. My wife usually went with me on these spur-of-the-moment-early-spring-evening-crappie-fishing-journeys that we took when we heard that the crappies were spawning at Lake Shetek. But she was busy with something else. So I called Sam who was a student at Dordt, where I was teaching, and we drove the seventy-plus miles to Lake Shetek.

It was a warm day in late April. We were fishing from the edge of a road that ran down the middle of an old (WPA-built) earthen dam, so there was water in front of us and water behind us. The sun was setting in the west as I cast my bait into the water. When it landed and I had adjusted the line a bit, I turned to say something to Sam who was fishing on the other side of the road. And then I saw it, a huge orange-gold moon rising in the southeast.

Just as Robinson had described it.

I shouted something to Sam and he immediately saw what I was so excited about. We dropped our fishing rods and started shouting and pointing and dancing. We were caught in the middle of the light.

Like most exciting events, the magic, the glow that enfolded us, the exuberance that filled our chests, lasted only a few minutes. But we talked about it, off and on, for the rest of the evening. And still do sometimes when we see each other.

Of course, it elicited vain thoughts in our minds that spilled out of our mouths. Had we been especially chosen by God to experience this natural event? Had anyone else that evening experienced it as we had?

And I wondered: Does this happen every year? every month? everywhere? Would we have noticed it at all if it had occurred a half hour later when we were caught up in the flurry of casting and reeling and catching and re-baiting? Would I have paid attention as I did if I had not just read Robinson's description in *Gilead*?

We humans — maybe Christians especially — can be overly self-centered, I suppose, when we experience an extraordinary event like this confluence of sunset and moonrise. We like to think God is paying special attention to us when special blessings fall in our lap, that God has especially selected us for this experience. Perhaps God has, and assuming this is probably not a bad thing — even though I am a bit uncomfortable with this assumption. But, of course, the greater wrong is not to recognize the gifts of beauty the Creator daily sets before our eyes. "That's all people are, just blind people," Emily Webb laments in *Our Town*.

Today, as I am writing this, I read in my daily dose of Buechner, ". . . the word that God speaks to us is always an incarnate word — a word spelled out to us not alphabetically, in syllables, but enigmatically, in events, in books we read and movies we see. . . "

It makes me think that Sam and I kept God pretty busy speaking to us on this little fishing trip. Simultaneous moonrise and sunset would have been enough, but we also caught a mess of fish once we had cast our lines into the water on the south side of the road.

And then, one more significant event: As we were going down the road toward home, just a few miles from the lake, a deer ran into my car, ran right into my driver's side door. He made a mess of the door but we were able to drive the seventy miles home in spite of it.

Writing this now, twenty years after that wonderful evening, I can testify that the deer hitting the car is a mere blip in my memory, while the magical moonrise/sunset is almost as vivid as when we saw it.

So I will conclude with these words Marilynne Robinson writes near the end of *Gilead*: ". . . there is more beauty than our eyes can bear. Precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm."