

Virtual Worship – Prayer & Homily

Sunday, May 3, 2020

Prayer

Breathe deep the breath of life –
find your breath, center down,
feel below you the earth and its ancient turning,
feel above you the sky and its ancient stars,
and you, here, held between them – alive, awake, and here -
know that here you are named and you are known as beloved.
Join me in this time of meditation and prayer, first by sharing silence together.

Spirit of Life, Source of Love,
God of a thousand names and beyond all naming,

So much of the vibrant color of life seems faded these days –
and we would be fooling ourselves if we didn't pause, and hold,
the real-ness of our grief, our bewilderment, our uncertainty.
May that be a reminder for us far beyond this time –
that joy and sorrow are always threads that are woven find –
moment to moment, breath to breath –
that it's okay, and in fact a sacred practice,
to honor what we're feeling –
and that while we proclaim and preach hope and courage,
at the same time we hold the real grief of the world.

May it break our hearts open, but not apart –
so that sorrow leads to compassion, which leads to love –
may those threads hold us together.

We hold in our hearts this day all those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit.
I invite you to bring the names you are holding in your heart this day –
in joy or in sorrow, in celebration or in grief,
and silently or aloud now in this sacred hour,

to speak their names...

For all those names, and many others, may we all be held in love and grace.

These words of meditation come from Barbara Crooker

All That Is Glorious Around Us

is not, for me, these grand vistas, sublime peaks, mist-filled overlooks, towering clouds, but doing errands on a day of driving rain, staying dry inside the silver skin of the car, 160,000 miles, still running just fine... And I think of how my mother struggles to breathe, how few good days she has now, how we never think about the glories of breath, oxygen cascading down our throats to the lungs, simple as the journey of water over a rock. It is the nature of stone / to be satisfied / writes Mary Oliver, It is the nature of water / to want to be somewhere else, rushing down a rocky tor or high escarpment, the panoramic landscape boundless behind it. But everything glorious is around us already: black and blue graffiti shining in the rain's bright glaze, the small rainbows of oil on the pavement, where the last car to park has left its mark on the glistening street, this radiant world.

Homily – Bloom-In-Place

The little daily calendar on the shelf
always seemed to have such useful bits of wisdom –
practical, and sturdy teachings, like the shelf it sat upon.

It was nothing fancy, just the Month and date,
practical, too, so it could be used year after year.

May 28th, it says, Bloom Where You're Planted.

I've always loved that phrase –
a reminder to notice and attend to and celebrate the beauty and life and love
that is always right around us, or perhaps, within us.
To find the nourishment of the near and close,
and to sing your own song, live your best life, find the love
right at hand –
that there can be, and mostly likely is,
beauty enough,
anywhere you are.

On this Sunday, each year, we have gathered atop Walden Hill at the Maypole.
As Stephanie mentioned,
it has always been a beacon atop the hill each year at our church,
signaling the return of spring,
the vibrant colors of community and warmth
and, for many, a season filled with thresholds –
retirements or the ending of a school year,
graduations and perhaps preparing for someone in the family to leave home –
the reminder
that our lives are woven together,
strand by fragile strand,
otherwise blowing in the wind
but rooted, grounded,
by our presence, our ability to hold on to beauty,

to take into our very own hand
the vibrant colors of life.

The imagery of it has come to me differently this year –
and I don't know about you, but I have a feeling,
in this odd shared experience –
while we are not all affected in nearly the same ways at all,
we still have some shared-ness in this all –

the imagery of the Maypole this year jumped out to me as
our lives just going in circles.

Just round and round –
kind of like some have called this time Groundhogs day –
each day spiraling into the next,
not sure of the difference between today's charts,
where we are on the curve –

we're being asked, invited,
to just go round in circles, it seems –
to stay put, as much as possible.

Of course, we'd much rather celebrate this with ribbons in hand -
and generations and families gathered
on a grassy circle in the sunshine.
And we will, again, though not today,
at least not the same way.

I've traveled extensively, wrote Henry David Thoreau, *around Concord*, he added –
his hometown.

Maybe you've felt that way, too.
Some have posted about taking a mini-vacation
from the living room to the bedroom,
then a saunter to the kitchen,
and extending their trip to the laundry room.

But of course there is wisdom, and depth,
in paying attention to the near and the close.

There's a great satirical article mocking those who have critiqued Thoreau –
for not really roughing it –
for having his mom do his laundry,
for regularly going back to town –
and then the article says,
it's not that easy, now, is it?
harder than it looks – with some other choice words.

But a reminder that our longing for community is pronounced right now.
And a reminder to pay attention to what seem like the well-worn circles
right around your home, right around our heart.

Those places,
which hopefully we can be in right now,
or if we can't, hopefully we have known places like this,
where we feel, as the poet Joyce Sutphen writes,
stitched into place –
those places where our identity
seem woven into the land, woven into place –
kind of like the Maypole can feel –
weaving us together –
blooming-in-place.

I wonder,
if perhaps if the poets ran the government,
the directives would feel more like invitation –

instead of *business shuttered* –
commerce is taking a breath –
instead of *quarantine at home*

instead of *shelter in place*

what if the spring said to us –
bloom in place.

Circle 'round and 'round in beauty,
gather whatever colors you can find,
gather whatever beauty you can find,
as if you're in a spiral dance
right where you are,
rooted in whatever space
is safe enough to hold you,

and even if your life and livelihood
asks you to venture out –
for essential work
or essential wages for food,

maybe the blooming itself
is the resilience you have been forced to find
and the gratitude you have
for every person wearing a mask in public
for every reminder from our leaders that
it is an act of love for us to give each other healthy and necessary distance –
for every creative, thoughtful, inventive way to show love and hope
that has found its way up and out of the cold ground of fear
to the bright, hopeful light

so that we can still sing, as if we're dancing 'round the Maypole –
in my soul, the sun is shining,
in my blood, the rolling sea,
in my breath, the air of mountains,
in my body, mother earth.

So let's go fly a kite –
as the children would have sung together today.
as Rose and Joe played for us –

perhaps if we can't travel too far to one side or the other very far,
the direction we need to go is like the song –

*up to the highest heights,
let's go fly a kite and send it soaring...
up where the air is clear –*

That's the type of air we long for –
we need to send love and beauty and hope
soaring, 'round and 'round our own hearts and souls,
across miles to circle 'round those we love and miss,
across fears and uncertainties
to hold us, wrap us in beauty.

Go fly a kite today, everyday if you can,
literal, as has been reported by church members
as happening in Soldier's Field park in recent days,
or, like Rumi once wrote,

*open the window in the center of your chest
and let the spirits fly in and out –*

Open the window of your heart,
let in the bright colors of the world, of memory, of song, of story –
the threads of connection that you can't take hold of in your hand
but you have to take hold of in your heart to survive –

Travel extensively around your home,
around your life and your soul –
bloom-in-place –

which is the only way a flower knows how,
and we marvel at them, don't we?

As Hawthorne write about the Maypole on Merry Mount,
Jollity and Gloom were contending for an empire.

That's the state of every soul right now –
and I would say it's not an either/or –
jollity and gloom are woven as much as the ribbons would be –
and to know that's okay –
and even in the midst of all of this,
to remind ourselves there is also beauty –
that jollity is still alive,
because we are – and ours is a faith of both/and –
we can have both.

So, if you can,
take a drive down memory lane, in real time,
there atop Walden Hill –

it might not be as crowded this year with people,
but it is crowded with love and memory –
there is more love atop that hill
than there is space for ribbons 'round that pole.

Each strand, and a thousand more,
are singing and dancing up where the air is clear -
and holding you
in the sunshine.