

Monday, September 28

Mary Koenig

Fifty years ago, the Biology teacher at El Rodeo School in Beverly Hills advised me that there would be a special day the following week: "Earth Day". She explained the idea as I listened, hastily wolfing the mid-week cafeteria fare.

"We should celebrate the earth's bounty and make promises not to mess it up for future generations." She meant business and outlined the case against environmental pollution. There was no way I could disagree, so April 22, 1970, I found myself leading a parade of enthusiastic middle school kids down a swanky portion of Wilshire Blvd, with the Los Angeles Country Club to the west and Saks Fifth Avenue ahead on the east.



One of my motivated pupils, Keith - whose father imported killer whales to Marine Land in Palos Verdes - wore a gas mask. Other students simply carried home-made signs like "Stop Pollution" or "Save the Planet". These were age-appropriate placards, and I remember that these kids were enthusiastic, un-jaded and very pleased that the principal had granted me permission to walk them down Wilshire Blvd. I assume that their parents believed this extension of classroom learning was progressive and amusing. I also suspect that this exercise never caused another moment's reflection. Earth Day has now had fifty years of cultivation.

Today, we are managing to stay alive through isolation, and as I think about the poets who have given wing to my imagination, I am profoundly grateful. The earth adorns, even as Nature closes Her eyes:

First, from Ted Hughes' "Hawk Roosting":
*I sit in the top of the wood, my eye closed
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.
The convenience of high trees! The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.
My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation to produce my foot, each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot...*

Like birds of prey, mankind has soared with confident entitlement. We survey, believing that since we have mastery, the earth's bounty is ours for the taking. We assert hawk rights. Moreover, we are not inclined to apologize for wanting it all.

But what happens when the paradigm shifts and something insidious threatens our false sense of mastery? Remember the scene from the Disney film, Fantasia, when the shadow creeps and we hear Mussorgsky's tone poem, A Night on Bald Mountain? Holy Toledo! You mean I cannot confidently count on tomorrow being as comfortable as yesterday? Does Fate contrive against the just as well as the unjust? Does the demon return in the form of a deadly pandemic? I must confess that I am afraid of those images, and it is a child's whimpering fear of darkness and witches and loud cymbals. Mercifully, when the far-off

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bell from the little church at the corner of Rice and Greenbriar rings I am more than ready to accept it as a sign of hope.

Lord, bring me to a place of hope where I can see light. I want to walk as a child unafraid of terrifying graphs plotting out deaths and ratios of spreading disease. I want to not turn aside from strangers in grocery stores. It is earth day, and I want to embrace Creation without the need to pretend it is mine to master. I see what You are doing, although I don't always get you, God. Poets say it better than me:

"You are leading me on to the spots we knew when we haunted here together" and I was a child.
Thank you, Thomas Hardy.

Help me to look upward, or downward, content that it is *"You, Mastering me, God."*
Thank you, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

"How strange we grow when we're alone, and how unlike the selves that meet, and talk... The word is life endured and known. It is the stillness where our spirits walk...and all but in-most faith is overthrown."

Let me revel in a freshly pruned life, open to what comes next.

But when I think of age, and loneliness, and change I am afraid. I remember when we *"suddenly burst out singing and I was filled with such delight as prisoned birds must find in freedom. Everyone's voice lifted...everyone was a bird, and the song was wordless."*

Thank you, Siegfried Sassoon.

Regarding Self-Pity: "I never saw a wild thing sorry for himself. A small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough without ever having felt sorry for itself."

Thank you, D.H. Lawrence, for reminding me.

Amen.

Tuesday, September 29

Elizabeth Kragas

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. ~Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

During the pandemic almost every normal daily activity outside the home has been affected. I am cut loose and untethered from the daily business of running here and there, attending group meetings and keeping a schedule. Zoom meetings are one way I connect socially, but satisfaction in them is waning as the weeks drag into months.

So, I find that I have been slowly tuning my life to my garden.

Can't see friends? Then put in a pollinator garden, and the bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds will be my new friends!

I search for a small tree to plant, and a magazine editor says

Japanese maples are the best—Ok! A little maple arrives during the heatwave and all the leaves fall off! Never fear says the experts, the leaves will come back in. And now they are! I am so excited for a tree full of leaves to change color in the autumn.

I watch a squirrel return to his home every night. At 8 o'clock sharp he runs along the top of the fence, then onto the redbud tree, and then 30 feet above the ground, he jumps across to the giant oak tree! He scurries straight up, higher and higher until he hops, skips and leaps into his snug, safe nest.

Dear Lord, thank you for today. Thank you for the beautiful butterflies that come visit my garden. Bless your whole creation, and keep us safe—even the cheeky little squirrels. Let us hop, skip and leap into your loving arms! We are all your children. Amen.



Wednesday, September 30

Maureen Lamson

I am a big fan of all those TV shows about space. My favorite is How The Universe Works, where noted astrophysicists explain the mysteries and workings of our realm. They talk about nebulas, black holes, super novas, quasars, pulsars, neutron stars, and my favorite, magnetars. They tell of the millions of light years that are between the stars and the earth.

So I find myself imagining being able to travel that far from mother earth. I wonder that if I was drawn over the event horizon of a black hole, and my atoms were spaghettified, yes, that's the correct term; who says astrophysicists don't have a sense of humor? Would I meet God way out there? Would my soul find its way to heaven? Can I travel so far that God isn't there? Where are you?

My favorite Psalm, 139, answers my question. *Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me.*

Thank you, God of everywhere.



Thursday, October 1 *Jessica Locheed*

*This little light of mine....I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine....I'm gonna let it shine
This little light of mine....I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!*

Such a simple song that many of us were taught as children and yet so amazingly profound and often so very hard to remember. It is based on a text that is a bit more sophisticated,

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ~Matthew 5:14-16



I remember singing this joyful song at Vacation Bible School when I was a small child. I remember singing it at the Women's March with my sister, my niece and thousands strong in Washington as a form of solidarity and insistent protest. I most recently remember tearing up while watching it on a television show being sung by a trans-woman who was showing her truth for the first time in her church. Until that moment she had been dressing as a man, hiding her light. She feared rejection and judgment from her church.

For me church is now home, it is safe....a refuge from any storm. However, there have been times in my life when church felt foreign to me. When I found CTK in 1992, I found a church home, a place where everyone was welcome. Christ the King is open in a way that few places are. We aspire to be a beacon shining to guide those in need of a guiding light.

The metaphor for light is one that comes easily to us. We take comfort in knowing that Jesus is the Light of the World. We work to shine our own light. But we also know that there are shadows of pain and isolation, shadows of hatred and bigotry, shadows of loneliness and rejection. Our Black and Latin brothers and sisters fight daily battles against social structures designed to create hierarchies of injustice; they fight generations of pain and exclusion through separation and othering. Our LGBTQIA brothers and sisters often live in fear and uncertainty from a young age: fear of rejection from their families; fear of being alone; fear of being ostracized from their church; fear of being outcast. Our immigrant brothers and sisters live in fear and uncertainty of being accepted; being welcomed; finding shelter; finding work; feeding their families. So many people, so many truths. We just need to open our hearts and let each other in.

We shine brighter together because we stand stronger together. But we also need to welcome others to share their light, their truth and to heal in the light that we share.

Lord, help us to remember your gift of Light is one meant to be shared with the World. The gift of Light is one of hope, love, joy, peace and understanding. It is an embracing Light that unifies people in your Grace and Love. Amen.

Friday, October 2

Johnny, Martina, Hannah, and Elena Longoria

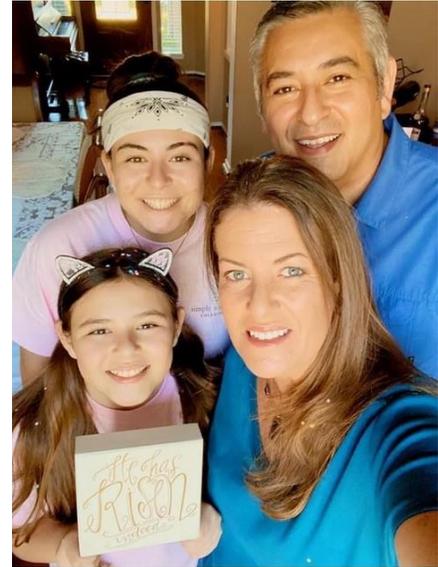
The Longoria family celebrates 75 years of community and gives special thanks for the youth outreach, rich musical tradition, and stewardship opportunities at Christ the King Lutheran Church.

Heavenly Father, thank You that we are celebrating 75 years of service at Christ The King Lutheran Church. We thank You that we are all One in Christ, and we pray that as members of Christ The King, Your body, Your Holy Spirit would knit us together in the bonds of unity and love.

Lord, You have promised that You are the One that would build Your Church and we ask that You would continue to equip each of us, both individually and corporately with the talents and gifts that may be used to Your praise and glory for the edification of the rest of the saints of God.

Protect us from the wiles of the enemy who seeks to destroy and cause divisions among Your body. Help us to be sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable and gentle towards each other. Let us not be motivated by selfishness, but in humility may we seek to regard the needs and necessities of others before our own.

Give wisdom to the whole Church, to our pastors and deacons; give wisdom to those who teach and a teachable spirit to those that listen. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all this day and for ever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Saturday, October 3

Valerie Lloyd

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace. ~Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*



I've always loved this verse since I first heard Pete Seeger's rendition of it in his famous song "Turn, Turn, Turn." It's impossible to not mentally croon along with him in his gentle chorus as you read the verse "a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." The calmness he brings me is based in the certainness of everything that this passage describes. A time for everything, yes everything, the good and the bad, the painful, isolating times and the times filled with laughter and friends. It's Pete Seeger's casual command to "turn, turn, turn..." that makes the meaning of this passage stand out to me.

I've always resisted change vehemently. I'm scared of change, of the unknown, of uncertainty, and of having no control. I think we all feel this way sometimes, when we can feel the certainty of our current life slowly start to drift away. When normalcy takes on a different, darker light, and we feel like we are running out of the good times, it's a natural response to fight and grab onto what we have, even if it doesn't serve us. We fear the changing of time. We do not trust that the unhappy times will end. The Teacher tells us in this passage that not only will every different kind of time come, but it's in God's plan of the universe for this to happen. A fact of life written into the fabric of everything around us: there is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven. We can trust in this truth during the turbulent times in life and remember that the turning is inevitable and beautiful. Like Seeger's calming voice guiding us along the verses, God guides us and brings us back to the times of laughter after a long period of weeping.

I feel empowered by this scripture to let go of my fears and trust that the Lord will make this time of isolation and fear short-lived. I know in the next year there will be little that is familiar and comforting, but I also know it is not forever. Worrying about when the times will change will only make them loom further away in my head. Instead, I can read this verse and listen to Pete Seeger, and let the times turn from one to another without worry. We will always survive the times of war and hate and cherish the times of peace and love. Remembering God's constant comfort through it all—like a steady hand on the rudder of a ship, steering me through hazardous waters—frees the worries from my mind. I can instead focus on daily happiness and joy.

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Dear God, let me remember your infinite wisdom and knowing. Remind me that the times of hardship will pass, and comfort me with times of gladness and peace. Free me from my worries, and let the times turn from one to another without friction or anxiety. In your name. Amen.

Sunday, October 4

Marie Martinez

Hear my pleading, Lord! Be merciful and send the help I need.

My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me, O my people." And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."

Oh, do not hide yourself when I am trying to find you. Do not angrily reject your servant. You have been my help in all my trials before; don't leave me now. Don't forsake me, O God of my salvation. For if my father and mother should abandon me, you would welcome and comfort me.

Tell me what to do, O Lord, and make it plain because I am surrounded by waiting enemies. Don't let them get me, Lord! Don't let me fall into their hands! For they accuse me of things I never did, and all the while are plotting cruelty. I am expecting the Lord to rescue me again, so that once again I will see his goodness to me here in the land of the living.

Don't be impatient. Wait for the Lord, and he will come and save you! Be brave, stouthearted, and courageous. Yes, wait and he will help you. ~Psalm 27:8-14



The Biblical languages enthusiast in me shudders at the thought of turning to the Living Bible's paraphrase of this text, but there's something beautiful about how it reads.

In this prayerful portion of Psalm 27, David's heart hears the Lord say, "Come and talk with me" (v. 8). In Scripture, hearing indicates much more than mere auditory sensory perception. It is not a passive act. Hearing leads to doing, to following, to obeying. David's heart *hears* and then *responds*.

In this psalm, David is conflicted. On one hand, he is begging God not to hide God's face from him, fearing abandonment and rejection. Yet, at the same time, he states that even if what are considered the most tightly knit human relationships are dissolved, God would still take him in and call him God's own. He pleads with God to help him, to save him from his enemies, all the while remaining fully confident that God will intervene as God has done for him in the past. This internal conflict is very much so relatable content!

There is a popular saying that quips, "As of this very moment, you have survived 100% of your most difficult experiences." Is it just I, or is that phrase easier to appreciate when you're on the other side of a challenge? Some days don't feel like there was any morsel of survival at all. Sure, your body is still alive, but is to survive simply to make it out alive? I would say that for people of faith, survival is, yes, to have lived through it, but more specifically, survival is the resurgence within ourselves of the Christian hope that inevitably gets lost to some degree along the way. In this sense, we can be surviving well before our trials are even over. In verse 7, David tells the Lord to *hear* his pleading. His pleas, full of desperation, fear, forsakenness, and doubt, also illustrate David's confidence that God can and *will* act to save him. He is surviving. The parallels between this verse and Jesus' cry from the cross in Matthew 27:46 are beautiful. "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") Jesus' cry is full of pain, lament, forsakenness, perhaps doubt. But the very act of crying out underscores his faith in God's *hearing the cry*. (Jesus is quoting the psalmist's plea in the opening verse of Psalm 22!) He believes

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that God will *hear* him and will *respond*. And what a response: the reconciliation of all things to God's self in Christ Jesus (Col 1:19-20)!

David illustrates for us what it means to cry out to God, to listen to God's beckoning for us "to come and talk" (v. 8). And then, we are instructed to "wait for the Lord" (v. 14). Waiting, like hearing, is not passive either. We wait in prayer. We wait in service. We wait in active listening. And we wait in confident expectation that God will, indeed, act.

*What are you **hearing** God say to your heart? What action does that inspire on your part?*

*In what ways are you **actively** waiting for the Lord? In what way is your waiting passive or even impatiently passive?*

Gracious God, thank you for faithfully listening to your creation as we cry out to you. Grant us ears that truly *hear* and hearts that understand, and embolden us to respond to your call in ways that glorify you. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.