

“Saying Yes”

Rev. Bill Eichhorn

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The Miraculous Draught of Fishes
James Tissot

Readings

Calling

Nancy Shaffer

When you heard that voice and
knew finally it called for you
and what it was saying-where
were you? Were you in the shower,
wet and soapy, or chopping cabbage
late for dinner? Were you planting radish
seeds or seeking one last stock? Maybe
wiping handprints off a window
or coaxing words into a sentence.
Or coming upon a hyacinth or one last No.
Where were you when you heard that ancient
voice, and did that Yes get born right then
and did you weep? Had it called you since
before you even were, and when you
knew that, did your joy escape all holding?
Where were you when you heard that
calling voice, and how, in that moment,
did you mark it? How, ever after,
are you changed?

Tell us please, all you can about that voice.

Teach us how to listen, how to hear.

Teach us all you can of saying Yes.

Mark 1: 16-20

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I will make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee’s sons. They were in the boat, mending their nets. Right off, he made them the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat and the hired hands, and followed.

I read and write poetry because it provides a way for me to notice, to catch sight of and witness to the Sacred Mystery in everyday life, in the world of nature, in my dreams and in the landscape of my inner life. The signs of that gracious Mystery are ever present, but as Denise Levertov writes in her poem, “Primary Wonder”:

Days pass when I forget the mystery.
Problems insoluble and problems offering
their own ignored solutions
jostle for my attention...

It is my daily writing practice that turns my attention to that Sacred Presence flowing through our lives, through all the world. During my forty years of ministry and many sermons, I relied heavily on poetry to not only interpret biblical texts, but to illuminate challenges facing church and society. A college professor at Wittenberg University first awakened me to the beauty and power of poetry. On the first day of class, he read three Shakespeare sonnets, none of which I understood, but after the third sonnet, he looked up with tears in his eyes and said, "Can you believe they pay me to read this?" Professor Matthews had me right then. Poetry had me in that moment. I said "Yes" to poetry, and by the end of that semester I had learned something of why poetry can move us so, how it can open our hearts.

In May, 2000, Linda Spence invited CCC members to participate in a six-week writing group that would use her book, *Legacy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Personal History*. Anna Cook, Gail Lester, Louise Trudeau and I met with Linda for six weeks, and we continued to meet every Friday up to and including last Friday. Twenty-two years. Along the way we named ourselves the Legacy Writing Group and grew bonds of friendship. We made ourselves vulnerable to deep remembering and welcoming the words that wanted to tell our stories. For me, the words that came often took the form of poetry, the right words in the right order. That's what I can tell you about saying "Yes" to a voice, to a muse, to a call to witness to how the Divine Light shines through all things. As with Denise Levertov, days pass when I forget the mystery.

And then [she writes]
once more the quiet mystery
is present to me, the throng's clamor
recedes: the mystery
that there is anything, anything at all,
let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,
rather than void: and that, O Lord,
Creator, Hallowed One, You still
hour by hour sustain it.

Here I will share with you some of my own poetry.

Imprint

Here, at dusk
white foam rides high
on inky rollers rumbling
toward the beach
and

molten light
illuminates wet sand –
a monk's manuscript.
Here
where the sea presses
driftwood into pulp –
I take up the pen.

Fourteen Years of Mammograms

For fourteen Januarys
I have sat in this waiting room
while she goes down the hall
for her yearly mammogram.
She calls me her good luck charm.

Seven chairs hold up women
waiting to find out
if their cancer has returned
and if so, where, how far.
Fear softened by hope
fills every chair.

Now, she comes towards me
with a face I see but once a year.
Tears wash her cheeks
into radiant relief -
she is smiling.

But there is not cheering,
no high fives. We take our grace
and leave quietly. Others still wait,
each one holding onto
some good luck charm.

Practicing the Craft

To write poems like Mary Oliver,
I go among the trees and jot my noticing's
on slips of paper stashed in trees and under rocks.

To write poems like Kim and William Stafford,
I get up just before dawn, go outside or open a window,
lower a weathered bucket into memory's well and
welcome whatever comes.

To write poems like Denis Levertov,
I write poems anywhere, anytime –
on airplanes, at a café in Mexico,
by a fish hatchery and at the kitchen table
meditating on Mt. Rainer's many moods.

And when I write poems my way,
I sit by the river or walk the ridge.
I seek some liminal hour like dawn,
dusk or midnight. Often, I gather
with writing companions in some cafe
around small marble tables with scones and coffee
where we exchange honest words seeking the right order.