

## “The Nightshift”

April 9, 2013

Easter Sunday

Rev. Bill Eichhorn



Members of the Commodores sing “Nightshift”

### Readings

Messenger

Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird –  
Equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
Keep my mind on what matters,  
Which is my work,

Which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
And these body-clothes,  
A mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
To the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,  
Telling them all, over and over, how it is  
That we live forever.

John 20:1, 19

<sup>1</sup> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ... <sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were ... Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

I have loved the song “Nightshift” since 1985 when I heard the Commodores sing it for the first time. [Here is a link to the song on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrkEDe6Ljqs>.] Three members of the Commodores wrote the song as a tribute to rhythm and blues legends Marvin Gaye and Jackie Wilson, both of whom died way too young in 1984. The song won a Grammy award. More recently, Bruce Springsteen recorded “Nightshift” for his 2022 album “Only the Strong Survive.” The mood of the Commodores version was a sweet, gentle remembrance of two dear friends, while Bruce intensifies the blues in the music, which I think amplifies the bittersweet reality that treasured loved ones are gone and missed, but at the same time are remembered and celebrated. The song reminds us that we are not alone in this life and of the importance of friendships. It is a witness that when loved ones leave us, we are still influenced by our memories of them. Their songs keep coming through.

*Gonna miss your sweet voice  
That soulful voice  
We all remember you  
Ooh, your songs are comin’ through*

David Whyte writes how friendship endures:

*Friendship transcends disappearance: an enduring friendship goes on after death, the exchange only transmuted by absence, the relationship advancing and maturing in a silent conversational way even after one half of the bond passed on.*

But then the song goes further than offering the comfort we find in remembrance, because it also dares to illuminate a mystery.

*Gonna be a long night  
It’s gonna be all right  
On the nightshift  
You found another home  
I know you’re not alone  
On the night shift, oh  
You found another home  
I know you’re not alone  
On the night shift.*

“Nightshift” points to a belief that beyond this life, there is more. Beyond death there is “another home,” a place where we are not alone, a place where those sweet sounds keep coming down. Easter, I believe, invites us to be astonished by that possibility.

I believe the song “Nightshift” teaches us something else important about Easter. Jesus was with his disciples for a little more than three years, during which time they became a community of friends. When they gathered together for that final meal, Jesus told them his ministry with them was about to be cut short because he had become a threat to the Roman rulers and their Jewish collaborators.

Then he said: "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another." (John 13:34) Later, John tells us that after Jesus' death, the disciples locked themselves in a room out of fear the authorities were searching for them. But something astonishing happened in that room to lift their fears. The text reads: "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" The way I read that is that someone among them prayed or one of them recalled something Jesus had said or done which opened a space in their fears so that they experienced the presence of Jesus.

Here's what I believe happened to the disciples. In the midst of their fears and grief they experienced the presence of Jesus as they remembered his new commandment that they love one another. The resurrection in that room was the disciples remembering Jesus' love for them. To paraphrase the words from "Nightshift": they remembered how "he sang of joy and pain with his heart in every line, how he opened up their minds." They could hear him say, "Oh, talk to me so you can see what's goin' on."

Our daughter Beth Bratt offered her thoughts this week on the song "Nightshift." She said:

*I listen to the Nightshift song a few times a week, and often hear something new. "We're gonna get through this night" speaks to my hope and optimism when there is so much uncertainty, so much unraveling of our communities, our collective understanding of what is fair and right, so much darkness around gun violence, fear about our health, the weight of the personal pain, disappointments and burdens we carry.*

Beth goes on,

*I imagine some of the darkness and uncertainty was also present in that room of the Last Supper. I remember seeing that painting in Italy. I saw tiredness in their faces, maybe some fear, surely trepidation. They knew what waited for them outside that door. Surely on the minds of some of the disciples when hearing the "love one another" bequest was "what if we can't?" What will happen to us if we can't?" Luckily, we have poets and songwriters to balance and silence our doubts with words and images of what things would look like when we believe that we can. "We're gonna get through this night."*

One of the participants in our Lenten series shared with us her struggle over the years to make sense of the teachings she had received from the church about the crucifixion, the empty tomb and the resurrection. She told us that recently she had decided they were symbolic, and what lived on after Jesus' death were his teachings – a view I think many of us share. What is Easter about? It is about remembering we are created to love one another, to love our neighbors and even to love our enemies.

Our beloved Mary Oliver urges us to expand that love so that it includes not only humans, but also the whole world.

*My work is loving the world...  
which is mostly standing still and learning  
to be astonished.*

My friends, in these dangerous and troubling times we very much need to make a spiritual practice of loving the natural world because, along with friendships, it is one of our most vital tools for equipping us to live that commandment of loving one another.

Ann and I are blessed by the commute run we do four days a week with our great grandchildren, George, five years old, and Margot, twenty-one months, to deliver them to school and childcare. As we thread our way along Hwy. 101, George tells us about the fun things he did over the weekend, or he sings the latest songs he has made up. I keep my eye on Margot through mirrors, and often she is looking out the window, and when something catches her attention, she says, "Oh, wow!" Then we all repeat her "Oh, wow," and look out the window to see if we can see what astonished Margot. This happens several times during the drive. Margot is teaching us how to love the world, how to be astonished by the natural world that is all around us.

Last October, I introduced you to a poem as Ann and I started on this interim journey with you.

It's the Dream We Carry  
Olav Hauge  
*translated by Robin Fulton*

It's the dream we carry in secret  
that something miraculous will happen,  
that it must happen –  
that time will open  
that the heart will open  
that doors will open  
that the mountains will open  
that springs will gush –  
that the dream will open,  
that one morning we will glide into  
some little harbour we didn't know was there.

Since last October, time has opened. Hands have opened. Most importantly, hearts – your hearts – have opened. Just look at you today! You aren't quite to that harbor yet, but I believe, my friends, it is just around the bend. Let us continue to take care of one another. Let us continue to embody a radical inclusiveness and engage with movements for justice and peace. Let us continue learning how to be astonished by this amazing world and to care for the planet earth.

Blessed Easter to you.

