

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear friends ~ “This isn’t the world I want to live in.” The thought echoes in my mind as I close the news app, the messaging app, the email app. My lungs wrestle down a gasp of humid Appalachia air in response to the endless feed of Apocalypse I just conjured with thumb swipes across a screen.

No, not Apocalypse. They are, in fact, creation stories. What else to call it when a group of people assesses the world and says, “We want it to look different than this,” and then imagines a new paradigm into existence? From idea...to fruition. Creation.

I’m reminded of a scene in the musical *Hadestown*. A crowd of revelers, relieved that Persephone has emerged from the underground after a far-too long winter, begs a modernized version of Orpheus for a toast. He is a poet, after all — his very words potent enough to change the hearts of humans and gods. Everything goes silent. Then shy Orpheus gazes into the audience, inviting the entire theater into his benediction: “To the world we dream about... and the one we live in now.”

The world we live in now crumbles and rebuilds endlessly. Each new day is a question: What kind of world do we want? And each motion, conversation, or choice we make answers that question tactilely. If the human imagination invented scarcity, extraction, and the silencing of voices, what’s to stop us from imagining a paradigm where none of those things have sway?

Last summer, during July’s heatwave and drought, a voice began to tell me a story about how God dreamed rest, companionship, and nature’s balance into being. That creation story came to me as a gift (one I’m sharing with you here) with an empowering message: it could be different than this. May we all have the courage to imagine new possibilities. ~ Joy



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**In the gift of this new day,  
in the gift of the present moment,  
in the gift of time  
and eternity intertwined,  
let us be grateful,  
let us be attentive,  
let us be open to what  
has never happened before,  
in the gift of this new day,  
in the gift of the present moment,  
in the gift of time and eternity intertwined.**

~ J. Philip Newell in *SOUNDS OF THE ETERNAL*

**The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even but a millimeter the way people look at reality, then you can change it.**

~ James Baldwin from the interview “James Baldwin Writing and Talking” in the *New York Times*, 1979

*The world existed.*

*Before anything else, it was all fire: Golden, molten, radiating, relentlessly bright flame.*

*Nothing was hidden. But nothing could be seen either, because it would melt the eyes. Even God was nervous to approach the world.*

*God longed for the dark things. Ash meant everything had burned, but it also meant substance had cooled. God could gaze upon charcoal and see all the folds and tunnels that ran through it, marking a flame’s path. God could hold it in the hand, stick it in the pocket, carry it elsewhere.*

*God said, “Let there be shadows, where I can hide from the light, rest from the day, and cool my sweat.” A shadow descended over the place God now sat resting. God imagined the heat itself could rest.*

*God laughed and clapped. “Yes! I do not want to kill the heat forever, just offer it relief from its relentless work. Let it take on another personality from time to time.” God filled a tub with silver movement, with blue splashing. God called the magic “water,” and it was good.*

*Gently, curiously, slowly, God upturned the tub over the flames whose pulsing screams snuffed into a hissing whimper, a relief, another way to exist.*

*God stopped and looked around the world as it stood. True, many corners still pulsed with energy and heat, but the harshness of it dimmed because there were ashes to replenish the ground. And there was water to offer to the ashes (imagine what magic might now sprout there!). And there were cool, shadowy corners to nap in. Or, God now considered, where one could invite someone else to sit, too.*

*Now God longed for “Someone Else.” It was a desire even stronger than when God had wanted ashes, or shadows, or water. Out of this great desire — this love — God conjured all the bacteria, the fungi, the plants, the animals, the humans. And the world now hummed: with the pulses, the hisses, the splashes, the snores, the chatter of it all.*

~ Joy Houck Bauer

Making sense of the world takes so many forms! Some of them just engage the lineage of despair more explicitly than others... you could expand... to so many other forms of art, including the unheralded art of living our everyday lives, and the creation and maintenance of connection. What does it look like to cherish other people? To cultivate our empathy for one another, even when our own experiences are so disparate? If a burning world is our lived reality, how do we continue to steer ourselves towards the sort of compassion that might create a different one?

...But we do have to figure out how to create narratives — amongst people who hold very similar beliefs, but also with those who do not... All of those ideologies are, at heart, antidotes to the deep sadness at the heart of everyday life. We need better ones.

~ Anne Helen Petersen from "The World Has Always Been On Fire. What Now?" in her Substack newsletter; May 28, 2025

That your world is in agony is no reason to turn your back on it, or to try to escape into private "spiritual" pursuits. Rilke reminded me that I had the strength and courage to walk out into the world as into my own heart, and to "love the things / as no one has thought to love them."

~ Joanna Macy in RILKE'S BOOK OF HOURS

**How shall the mind keep warm  
save at spectral fires—how thrive  
but by the light of paradox?**

~ Robert Hayden from "Stars" in COLLECTED POEMS



Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

~ Dr. Howard Thurman

Sometimes you need to first start by addressing all the problems. Or sometimes you start by actually talking about the things that are going really well and the things in which you connect beautifully... A lot of people in the field of conflict are talking about 80/20. It's the 80% that you actually agree upon or share a vision for or care for. And the 20% that you don't. But we have a real knack at this moment to go to the 20% first. I think we have a lot to gain to rebalance that a little bit.

~ Esther Perel, from her interview on the "What Now? With Trevor Noah" podcast

**Think in ways you've never thought before.  
If the phone rings, think of it as carrying a message  
Larger than anything you've ever heard,  
Vaster than a hundred lines of Yeats.**

**...When someone knocks on the door, think that he's about  
To give you something large: tell you you're forgiven,  
Or that it's not necessary to work all the time, or that it's  
Been decided that if you lie down no one will die.**

~ Robert Bly from "Things to Think" in MORNING POEMS

**I've been thinking about the way, when you walk  
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs  
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"  
when someone sneezes, a leftover  
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.  
And sometimes, when you spill lemons  
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you  
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.  
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,  
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile  
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress  
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,  
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.  
We have so little of each other, now. So far  
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.  
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these  
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,  
have my seat," "Go ahead — you first," "I like your hat."**

~ Danusha Lameris, "Small Kindnesses," in

HEALING THE DIVIDE: POEMS OF KINDNESS AND CONNECTION

We can never speak about God rationally as we speak about ordinary things, but that does not mean we should give up thinking about God. We must push our minds to the limits of what we could know, descending ever deeper into the darkness of unknowing.

~ Joy Williams in 99 STORIES OF GOD

We must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.

~ Dorothy Day in THE RECKLESS WAY OF LOVE

**Isn't that the saddest thing in the world...  
A comma forced to be a period?**

~ Ocean Vuong in ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS



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