

A poem for Friday, March 5

Many people, it seems, are discovering Pauli Murray these days, and are celebrating her as a shining shero of gender and racial equality. She amazed us with her passion and brilliance as an organizer, a legal scholar, a writer, an activist and a priest. We sometimes forget that her first ambition was to be a poet and she made a mark as such. What follows is from a volume of her poems published in 1970.

Collins Kilburn

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers
Hope is a bird's wing
Broken by a stone
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty--
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule,
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,
A name and a place for one's children
And children's children at last...
Hope is a song in a weary throat.

Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

From DARK TESTAMENT AND OTHER POEMS by Pauli Murray

Lent II, Saturday, March 6, 2021

This Saturday we'll read John Ashbery's poem, *Hard Times*. Though published forty years ago, this poem has a particular punch in our pandemic time. The first two words, "Trust me," may be ironic. Half through, note "climate" and consider its meanings within the context of the entire poem. The "mouthful of aluminum teeth" may be a reference to industrialization; what do you think? Nearing the end of poem, do you feel an isolation, a loss of days? Hard times here and there, on our and other's ways.

Hard Times

Trust me. The world is run on a shoestring.
They have no time to return the calls in hell
And pay dearly for those wasted minutes. Somewhere
In the future it will filter down through all the proceedings

But by then it will be too late, the festive ambience
Will linger on but it won't matter. More or less
Succinctly they will tell you what we've all known for years:
That the power of this climate is only to conserve itself.

Whatever twists around it is decoration and can never
Be looked at as something isolated, apart. Get it?
And He flashed a mouthful of aluminum teeth there in the darkness
To tell however it gets down, that it does, at last.

Once they made the great trip to California
And came out of it flushed. And now every day
Will have to dispel the notion of being like all the others.
In time, it gets to stand with the wind, but by then the night is closed off.

— John Ashbery

Poem for Sunday, March 7

This poem comes from Marilyn Nelson's collection *Carver: a Life in Poems*, a portrait in poems of the life of George Washington Carver, botanist, inventor, painter, musician, and teacher.

From an Alabama Farmer

Dere Dr. Carver, I bin folloring
the things I herd you say last planting time.
I give my cow more corn, less cottonseed
and my creme chirns mo better butter. I'm
riting to you today, Sir, jes to tell
you at I furtulize: 800 pounds
to the acur las March. Come harves, well
it were a bompercrop. How did you found
out you could use swamp mock? I presheate
your answer Dr. Carver by mail soon.
What maid my cotton grow? It do fele grate
to see the swet off your brow com to bloom.
I want to now what maid my miracle.
Your humble servint (name illegible)

A Poem for Monday, March 8

(From Sharon) Our own Lenten wilderness experience is enhanced by devotion to prayer and meditation, sinking deeply into the spiritual practices that most 'save' our souls. You will recognize Psalm 1:

Blessed
is one who bends not
to voices of harm within or without
but meditates on Holiness day and night
like a willow tree sinks roots into the riverbank
neither withering nor wanting
nor bowed down
but blessed

Sharon Blessum, *Songs of the Beloved*

Poem for Tuesday, March 9

I thought this poem fit with where many of us are right now. As things start to open up and life begins to resume a bit, we are trying to sort out where we go from here.

Marge Miles

Just beyond yourself.

It's where
you need
to be.

Half a step
into
self-forgetting
and the rest
restored
by what
you'll meet.

There is a road
always beckoning.

When you see
the two sides
of it
closing together
at that far horizon
and deep in
the foundations
of your own
heart

at exactly
the same

time,

that's how
you know
it's the way
you
have
to go.

That's how
you know
it's the road
you
have
to follow.

That's
how you know.

It's just beyond
yourself,
it's
where you
need to be.

From *Just Beyond Yourself*, by David Whyte

Poem for Wednesday, March 10

My poem for this week is "Sometimes" by Seenagh Pugh. It is a good reminder that things can turn out okay. Adams Wofford

Sometimes

Sometimes things don't go, after all,
from bad to worse. Some years, muscadel
faces down frost; green thrives, the crops don't fail,
sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well,

A people sometimes will step back from war;
elect an honest man; decide they care
enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor.
Some men become what they were born for.

Sometimes our best efforts do not go
amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.
The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow
that seemed hard frozen: may it happen for you.

-- Sheenagh Pugh

Poem for Thursday, March 11

I (Stephanie Ford) chose this poem from the latest collection of Nikki Giovanni's poetry, *Make Me Rain* (2020). For me, it calls to mind Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-77), one of the heroes Collins Kilburn taught last fall. Her siblings went north, but Hamer stayed behind in Mississippi to care for her mother and to love the land of her birth; and she became a determined voting rights activist. Hamer sang to give other activists courage. Listen to "This Little Light of Mine" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhiV6DB_h_8 Fannie Lou Hamer made a difference because she stayed.

But Some of Us Stayed

we forget the strength
of those who stayed
behind
we sometimes don't recognize
what it took
to decide to build
a church
a school
a store to sell the yams
we picked from the ground
the tomatoes we carefully watched turn
red
on the vines
to see the okra pods
as well as to pick
our own cotton

we took pride
in our work
and lovingly encouraged
our daughters to dream

we sent them
our daughters
to school then
to college
and they stayed to help others

100 years is not
so long
when we plant
love with patience

when we find that song
that gives us strength
to go on