

Bobby LeFebre Poems

April, 2020

The poems include here were written by Bobby LeFebre and shared with his kind permission. Learn more about Bobby and his work at <https://www.bobbylefebre.com/>.



These poems by Bobby LeFebre were performed by Bobby in First Universalist Church of Denver's worship service for April 5, 2020. Watch the video recording of the service at <https://vimeo.com/channels/firstusundays>.

In the service on April 5, Bobby said,

"The poet, when effective, is a cultural worker, a healer, a conductor and a conduit of a world begging us to see and celebrate our relationship to it. The poet is more than a writer, the poet is more than literature, the poet is a cultural translator, a humble prophet, a communal visionary, a steward and servant of humanity and emotion, a dreamer and realist, and inseparably entwined, a truthteller who takes responsibility for the visions that live within the possibilities that live within."

We are in unprecedeted times right now and as poet, I feel a deep calling and a responsibility to respond to these times. These...poems are about what we are all living through."

In addition to several poems performed in the April 5 service, Bobby LeFebre sent a few additional pieces to share with the First Universalist community.

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An Exercise in Ritual

We gather here together in this sacred circle like we always have.
Here, around this fire that has always burned.
The same fire that lives in our bellies and makes an inferno of our hearts.

This spirit we summon.
This beauty we conjure.
This inventiveness we invoke.

What is a vessel but a carrier of the coveted?
A transmitter of quintessence.
A conduit of culture.

Come and meet us at the place where ritual is given a body.
Where ceremony is given a face.
Where our existence transfigures into a song we warble in unison.

For he who sharpens his imagination is a visionary.
She who gives shape to intuition is a prophet.
They who hone mortality beseech the immortal.

Look at what we are building together.
We, the masons of reimagining.
The architects of metamorphosis.
The repositories of our collective consciousness.

Blessed be the makers.
The ones who set themselves ablaze willingly to warm the masses.
The ones who traverse the unknown giving life to the unseen.
The ones who examine, assemble, distill, and reckon.

Join us as we turn ourselves inside out.
Watch as we illuminate what kindles inside our bones.
Marvel as we paint with colors that yet not exist.

These places where we find and lose ourselves at the same time.
These messages we devise with purpose
These aesthetics we mold from the supple clay of our minds.

Join us at these holy places of abandon.
These playgrounds of ingenuity.
These geneses of more-inspired tomorrows.

For who does not admire a flower unfolding?
Who does not feel the warmth of the sun shining boldly upon their face?
Whose feet do not move at the coaxing of the drum's sound?

Here, where we live, boundaries and the impossible do not have a name.
Here, fear and failure suffocate under the weight of creation
Here, convention is an earth-covered tombstone rotting in the wind.

Blessed be the creatives.

The ones predisposed to questioning.

The ones with an immoderate hunger for understanding.

Come and meet us at a new juncture where expression devoid of consciousness is merely decoration.

Where art is an insistent incubator for justice.

Where equity and access are an altar we decorate with the flowers of promise and purpose.

For what is it to highlight the margins but to attempt to balance the scales.

What is a raised fist, but a war cry in the language of the purposely silenced.

What is dissent, but an innate aversion to the confines of the status quo.

Art and culture is a communal land that does not know borders.

A common language we are all born speaking fluently.

A right that has been paraded around as a privilege for far too long.

Come and help us rip the esoteric from the sky.

Let our hands reach for the stars,

grasp them,

and share their tangible glow with anyone drawn to their light.

Come and explore with us our insatiable thirst for wonder.

Let us allow untamed bewilderment to be our guide.

And here, we will all shine and wander together.

Here we will eradicate all of the man-made barriers we impose upon one another.

This beautiful burden we carry.

This responsibility tethered to our pens, our paint, pirouettes, percussion, and performance.

This work.

This digging.

These hands unearthing the truth.

This joy.

This beauty.

This struggle.

These songs.

These testaments.

These heirlooms.

These markers of humanity that remind us that we are here.

That we are alive.

That we always have been.

And that we will always will be.

Covid-19

The sirens are sounding
The screams are loud

The virus has packed its bags;
World traveler without a passport

Borders are man-made
Walls cannot contain life on the move

But that's another story

Asian businesses were empty before streets
Racism

The toilet paper is gone
Panic begets panic

My 3pm meeting is now an email
Tom Hanks is raising his hand

Let's talk about the poor
30 million uninsured

Ends meet, public transportation to get there
Self-quarantine. Privilege. Paradox

Blue collars can't work remotely
Hourly wages side-eye the salaried

Go ahead and cancel school
Child care is a killer too

Industrialized without a heart
Developed without a conscience

Capitalism gaslights
Blames our bodies instead of broken systems

Wash your hands, cough into your sleeve
Plutocracy lampooning Universal Healthcare

Call on your God or whatever
Just don't touch your face when you make the sign of the cross

Love in the Time of Corona

Today, my love,
let the crackle of the world burning outside our door
be the music we slow-dance to.

Let us unclench our raised fists to make space for each other's hands;
run with me until we no longer see the smoke.
When we arrive at this imaginary place, there, where nothing else is,
we will experience what no one else can.

This beautiful fiction.
This escape from all that is imploding.

There, let me taste the warmth of sun's rays on your lips.
Let me float lazily like driftwood,
losing myself along the river in your eyes—
as the butterflies flutter and the hummingbirds hum,
let me braid honeysuckles into your hair.

Lay your head upon my heart.
Let the pillow pitter-patter promises to you in a language
only we are fluent in—
may the songbirds serenade us while the peacocks prance.

When the sun begins to take its daily bow,
let us try and convince it an encore.
For in the distance,
the flames are still flickering, the bullets are still flying,
and soon, my love, we will smell the smoke

Adobe

We have forgotten from whence we came
Confused deities for God
Forgotten about the earth
How we sprung from her
How creator molded us from her clay
How that makes us her children

We have forgotten the holiness of her soil
How it is a sacrament
The way it feels between our fingers.
How she always gives more than she takes

We have forgotten how her mud can make a home
a village
a community
A heart

Adobe

Sacred architecture
Bricks and walls fashioned by bronze hands left to hardened in the sun
Here in the southwest
Where the rivers run
And the *ristras* hang
And the valleys speak
And the bones of the indigenous rest beneath our feet

We stand

We stand here a library of collective memory
Stewards of the land
Where nature nurtured us
And our grandmothers endured

We,
A people before borders
Old as the wind

We, with stardust on our tongue
And moonlight in our eyes

Adobe

A tradition before machines

A ritual before desecration
A ceremony of the innate
A liturgy of the elemental

Adobe

Take me back
Sing with me a requiem to our past
These notes of inventiveness
These refrains of ingenuity
This *mezcla* of organic matter standing like an immovable testament to time.

Ghazal for Spring

For now, let us hang our pain and worry on the closest hook
and admire the quiet snow falling like balm outside, it is spring.

If you will, turn off the news and be still for a moment,
listen to the loud sound of silence that sings, it is spring.

They said the dolphins and swans returned to the canals in Venice,
the water is clear and the fish are swimming, it is spring

*La Madre Tierra está derramando lo viejo como una serpiente, curando heridas abiertas,
mostrándonos el amor en sacrificio y crecimiento; qué hermoso, ¿verdad? Es primavera*

Mother Earth is shedding the old like a snake, self-healing open wounds
showing us the love in sacrifice and growth; beautiful! It is spring.

Chase the smile welling inside you, even if you feel that it's fleeting,
it is proof the sun always has your back, it is spring.

Do not walk around the promise of new beginnings as if tomorrow will
foolishly repeat the mistakes of yesterday; seeds are sprouting, it is spring.

Forget not, there is a warm body in front of each shadow,
a heart beating, a mind conspiring, a spirit opening—it is spring.

This morning, entangled bodies made love as the cold rain fell softly outside,
physical distance morphing into metaphor; climax, equinox, it is spring.

The wind is howling outside, the hood is a siren that's not sounding,
I'm contemplating what will blossom from all of this, it is spring.

Nothing Left

And when there is nothing left to do but live,
let us retire the noise,
and build a home inside the stillness.

Grab a wrench and unfasten the parts of you
that have become mechanical;
rest your weary limbs in the bed of anomaly.

Outside,
the machine is powering down.
You can hear the birds when the gears aren't grinding.

When there is nothing left to do but live,
make a vacation of your body;
each part explored, a stamp on your passport.

Begin with your heart, maybe?
Crawl inside and sightsee,
ask difficult questions about who it is, and why.

Outside,
the machine is powering down.
You can hear yourself when the gears aren't grinding.

When there is nothing left to do but live,
simply show up;
that has always been enough.

And together in this sudden strangeness,
radical imagination will run wild;
tomorrow being built today.

Let Us Pray

This morning,

I turned to the east and stared at the rising sun

That snuck upward against the sky

as though summoned

As the orange mixed with the blue of morning

a smile broke upon my face like a ripple in still water,

and for a moment ,

the ominous crackle of the world burning outside our door,

was calm.

For a moment the homeless man on the corner of Colfax and

Speer,

the one with the tired eyes and the dirty bedroll sitting loyally

like a puppy at his feet,

found shelter in the company of a stranger who bought him

breakfast,

and for a moment, there was peace.

How beautiful it is to inhabit these bodies.

How difficult it is to inhabit these bodies

This road we travel

This journey we seek

This path we walk with promise

On our best days we are chapels filled with everything the world
knows as sacred

Our smiles glow majestic like sun through stained glass

Our steeples write our names in the sky to remind the universe
that we are here

On our best days we are love and compassion and
understanding.

But on our worst days,

On our worst days

We are abandoned homes and broken glass

Doors that seem to lead to nowhere

We are splintered spirits aimlessly wandering desolate hallways

There is nothing but shadows here

On our worst days we are hate and intolerance and mercilessness

But on our best days,

On our best days we are oceans filled with potential

Our hearts anchor us confidently like boats atop the waves

Inside of us life swims vibrantly to and fro.

We are coral reefs shining brilliantly beneath the embrace of an
unending sun

On our best days, we are ambitious, benevolent, and fearless

But on our worst days

On our worst days we are deranged circuses

Animals in captivity trapped under the big tent of life.

We permit clowns to parade around as men.

We're an audience too enamored by the Ring Leaders' routine to
realize we are lions taking commands

On our worst days we are pacified, submissive, and languid.

But every day we are all nothing more than human

A patchwork of bone and flesh and dust sewn together clumsy,
but perfect

We are voices trying to scream loud enough so the world will
remember our names

What will our legacy be?

What sound will our existence make

What sound will our work manifest as.

I read somewhere once that in theory the energy created
by a sound wave never really disappears—it simply
spreads itself so thin and wide that it becomes inaudible
and is absorbed into the world around it.

That means that somewhere out there everything that has ever
been said ripples across the waters of empty space

Every bit of our elder's advice and every heart-felt
compliment hang like A+ report cards on Orion's

refrigerator door.

Every insult, war cry or racist joke sticks like gum to the bottom of god's desk.

Slurs pollute the sky as oil does ocean

There are stories all around us.

The sun is a recorder that chronicles our life's moments then shines onto us in playback so that we may grow

The moon is a bow pulled against the bridge of the earth the waxing and waning of the tides are movements.

It is an old song,

An old song.

One we forgot we know the words to but always sing along Our lungs rise and fall with the music.

Will your sound make the heavens swoon?

Or will you resound like missed notes, bent into off key time signatures.

When you speak when you act, do it with intent.

The universe will remember even when we won't

Every gentle breeze is a prayer,

Every syllable is permanent,

We are permanent.

What will this world inherit from you?

We are building our legacy right now. These words are
our bricks. Our work, our mortar
This moment, our foundation,
We live in the most beautiful of times

We live in the most challenging of times
So we must never forget how to dance amid the smoke.
To celebrate through the pain
To smile through the sadness
To love through all the hate

Let us pray

Let us pray
That we, the living, be drawn to our own light
That we dig into the deepest parts of ourselves and find our
buried treasure.
That we open these sacred boxes and always give more than we
take

Let us pray
That we grow compassion in the gardens of our hearts
That our words sprout legs and our actions grow wings
That our minds be open like tulips in the spring

Let us pray

That we learn the difference between the bootstraps and the
bootless

That we use our hands to lift each other up

That we dismantle the manmade borders we impose upon one
another

May we always be courageous

May we be transformed and reborn each day

May we live free and with abandon

May we grow and dream and love

May we be unapologetically us

May we never stop fighting for justice and peace

And today, may we prove that this great world lives up to its
reputation

That its heart is as big as its oceans and that its arms are long
enough to
embrace all of the people who call this house their home.

On Justice and Us

There are sweet bells of justice ringing righteously in the distance.
From where we stand, the sound is faint, but unmistakably beautiful.
From where we stand, faith convinces us to listen to what we hunger to one day see.

These recondite sounds, majestic as the *quetzal*'s coo.
These recondite sounds, soothing as the lullaby
the sunset sings as it slow-dances across the horizon.

And we,
we run with hope and abandon in the direction of the chimes.
Traverse an American landscape that has made winners of some
and bullseyes of others.
Traverse an American landscape that has been stolen, enslaved
and entered with bones and blood.

Even still,
we run feverishly toward the bells.
Because on good days, we know the ideals that live where the music is,
promise equality.
Promise prosperity.
Promise liberty and justice for all.

Our hearts are compasses that point in the direction of freedom.
Our hands, shovels unafraid to dig into the dirt.
Our voices, keys we use to open doors not meant for us to walk through.
Our minds, luscious playgrounds where dreams
and better tomorrows marry in the chapel of perseverance.

For in the distance,
maybe just outside our reach,
balanced scales beseech to be seen.
In the distance,
the sword lady justice wields in her right hand is not slashing disproportionately;
in the distance,
her blindfold has not yet slipped from her eyes.

Beneficent is the red road we have traveled.
Dignified, the path we have carved with promise.
We are the fruit our ancestral roots dreamed into existence.
Flowers cultivated in the garden of hard work and sweat.

Over a lifetime, the human heart beats more than two billion times without stopping.
This means, we have two billion reasons to stretch our wings.
To fly in the face of adversity.

To dance amid the smoke.

To love through the all the hate.

May boundaries be nothing more than invitations for exploration.

A starting line from which we sprint in the direction of the uncharted.

A catapult that launches us in the direction of the fruition of our dreams.

May justice prevail.

May it be not a fleeting allusion only pursued,
but a beacon of virtue we attain tirelessly and justly together.

For in the distance,
the bells are still ringing,
promise is calling,
and we will not stop running until we all arrive.
Until we all are free.

The Table

Come, all of you and gather around the table.

Bring with you the heavy luggage society has unfairly packed for you,
the bags overflowing with barriers you have somehow ingeniously figured out how to navigate.

Or if your bags are a bit less heavy,
or are filled to the brim with privilege passed down like an heirloom,
bring them too.

Do not fret if you feel your cup is empty
or if your china is encrusted with gold,
for today, we'll treat this table as an equalizer.

Today, honest conversation and selfless action will be the food that nourishes us.

Before we sit, let us pass our stories around like bread.
Take a piece for yourself, but always be conscientious;
ensure there is enough to go around,
for some know,
there is not always enough to go around.

Or maybe there has always been enough.

Maybe in the back,
in the rooms where the food is prepared,
there is a surplus of things tucked away from the grasp and eyes of the peering.
Stockpiles of things cannily sharing a wall with moaning scarcity.

Maybe the meal was designed this way.
Where some are intentionally invited to the helping,
and others intentionally left off the guest list--
No seat pulled out or given up,
no place setting bearing their name.

If you are not invited to the table,
it is possible you are on the menu.
And those without seats,
those of us tired of being consumed,
have this collection of your ugly we have been saving.

Saving for moments just like these.
Boxes filled with old bones and new blood.
Attics packed with epithets and mason jars full of scars.
Cedar chests stacked with broken treaties and the nooses tied around our forefather's necks.

We keep, under our beds, the sting of your water hoses
and the, "No dogs or Mexicans" signs
that flew proudly like flags.
Buried in lock boxes beneath our fruit trees is the barbed wire of your internment camps;

the bars of the prisons you built, salivating with us in mind.
We have, next to the extra Virgin Mary candles in our closets,
the gods ripped from our grandmothers;
the languages you choked out of our throats.

We have albums thick with snapshots of history our DNA refuses to forget.

We store, in file cabinets, next to broken olive branches, the names family and friends deported,
the names of our family and friends banned.

You wonder why we grimace when we taste apple pie?
Why the sweetness you savor, is too bitter for us to swallow?
You wonder why we kneel when your flag is raised?
Why our balled fists still punch holes in your pretty blue sky?

We know, that what the machine hasn't already swallowed,
it will most definitely be coming for.
Tractors with growling bellies and flesh between their teeth.
This disease that runs rabid through them.
This unquenchable thirst for things that are not theirs.

Your tables are not new to us.
These tables you made us fashion but refused us to sit at.
Our hands and feet and hearts know them well.
This perk of being the builder.
This perk of baptizing the wood with our sweat.

In your rear-view mirror, you can see us coming.
But we are not coming for your head.
We are aiming for the humanity that lives somewhere in the basement of your heart.

Our very existence is ceremony.
This struggle sewn into our being.
This survival radiating from our resilience.
This joy we make space for despite the sting.
Do not be surprised if we ask why the invitation was late.
If we show you we've built a table of our own.
One we fashioned out of necessity when we realized yours wasn't large enough to hold us.

Do not be surprised if we hand you a wrecking ball before we do our voice.
If we ask you to dismantle the comfortable place you sit at as we watch.
And when you are finished, pass the wrecking ball to us.
We, too, will break down the silos we have built.

Then, when we are both left standing in the rubble of what used to be,
let us weigh our pieces until the scale is balanced.

For it is not enough to merely have a seat at the table;
one must be the designer of it.

So, let us destroy to rebuild anew.

Let us unpack our bags, lend each other our ears, and gift each other our hearts;
for listening and loving are foundations to understanding,
and conflict does not have to be combat.

Conflict can be a supple garden that change grows in.

So, let's grow things together.

Let us sit at this new inclusive table, pass our stories around like bread,
eat,
be fed,
be healthy,
be valued,
and truly be heard.

Wind Chaser

There is a madman
on the loose
who insists
on chasing
the wind

He runs
from one end of the earth
to the other
arms and eyes wide open
moving in the same direction as
dancing leaves
and pollen escaping
the clutch of
the cottonwoods

This invisible kiss
that bends the necks
of tulips
and men

This kiss that coaxes
the song out
of hollow chimes

He hunts this magic
anxiously
like a wolf
that's never tasted
the blood of its prey

This quest for
something fleeting
something unwilling to
be immured for too long

But the madman chases the wind

Gallops and dashes
in every direction the grass
sways and the tumbleweeds
roll

When he tires
he rests his weary body
upon battleground

Allows the elusive breeze
to cool his
sweat-beaded brow

Allows the breeze
to caress his wounds
by moving
in
through
and around
him

These unseen fingers
caressing the softest
and most callused parts
of him.

This ephemeral altar
he prays to

This lover
of transience
that always
knots his mind

When the man is still
his repose is not peaceful
for the swirling wind
soon abandons him
as he rests

There is a man chasing the wind.

It's path as curious and
uncertain as a
fluttering butterfly's

There are things
in this world
built to belong to
nothing or
no one

Forces so wild
the earth
often feels
like a cage

Existences that feed off
of freedom
and open roads.

But there is a man who chases the wind.

His legs
have become weathered boats
with broken sails

He paddles to the shore
to enter the house
he built for two

The house is cold

It has no windows
and the candle on the table
burns low

The wind
pours herself
into the space
visiting the man
briefly

As she
extinguishes the
candle in passing
he knows that she is there

That she has always been
That in some ways she will always be

But this time
he accepts that she
cannot stay

For the wind
is a wanderer

whose only home
is wherever
she happens
to be.

He walks her to the door
kisses her goodbye for the last time
and tomorrow

he
will not
run.