

Let It Shine

Friends, if you read the newsletter regularly, you might have noticed poems showing up in it for the past several months. This is because I find poetry to be an essential part of my own spiritual practice and development. Not *writing* poetry, mind you – I haven’t tried my hand at that since high school (. . . you’re welcome). But reading and sitting with and reading again and thinking about a good poem is very much like reading and sitting with and thinking about scripture. It’s good exercise for the interpretation muscles you need when sitting with our sacred stories. There are layers and shades and angles of meaning, and every reader comes away with an experience and response that is necessarily individualized. Like scripture, a good poem reveals a profound truth about the human experience, but “tells it slant” as our friend Emily Dickinson might say.

At the end of the day, the fact is that I have had a particular poem on my mind quite a bit lately. The poet, Andrea Gibson, is worth checking out if you have time and inclination (and are okay with spicy language occasionally); I find their work remarkable. This poem has been a favorite for a long time, and this isn’t the first time I’ve found myself turning its lines over in my head to reflect on them again. I find it beautiful and honest, hopeful and true. Sometimes I pray with it like a psalm. And I need it these days. Maybe you do too.

Shine

by Andrea Gibson

I was once told the story of a shaman
who woke every single morning of his life
crying for all the world’s sorrow
And yet every day
he would rise and shine bright,
He would walk the path
from morning to night
when he would light the night sky
with the stars
that would shine inside his dreams
And for every hell he ever saw
he made himself become the hope
that tugged the rope
that rang the bell
In the steeple
of the people’s hearts.
He would part the seas of greed
with the outstretched hands of his giving
replacing the hate
with the most amazing grace
this world has ever seen.

A week ago,
another war started.
And there wasn’t a poem inside me
that wasn’t crying.
There wasn’t a poem inside me
that didn’t pound
with the sound
of a thousand bombs screaming
to where children on the ground
were dying.
And I didn’t want to speak
I didn’t want to sleep
because I didn’t want to wake
to another morning of mourning so many.
When already
tomb stones had paved
as many prairies
as highways had
and the traffic
was backed up to my heart.
And I didn’t know where to start,
Like it was all too much,
Like I could never reach to touch
A healing hand
to the wounds the world

stood so brutally branded with.
Like I couldn't bear the pain.
Like I could never
find the strength
To lift a prayer of faith
beneath it all.
And I felt so small
felt like we were all so small.
Too small
to even knock a dent
Into the door
that holds the hateful hinges
of this war.
And a week ago
I almost wanted to give up.

But then
I remembered the story
of the man
who lived his life as a light
through even the darkest nights.
His eyes held the song of the dawn
And his sorrow
was the thing that kept him moving on,
Kept him building a better tomorrow.
I remember the story
And somewhere,
behind every thing inside me
that had felt so small,
behind every voice inside me
that was doubting
came a voice behind that,
Loud and proud
Like my grandmother's voice
Shouting
"What do you mean you're small?
Of course you're small
We're all small
But we are small
like the moon is small in the sky
And not a wave would ever
find its way to shore without us.

We are all as small
as a single tide.
But if that tide
were to ever stop
the entire ocean
would freeze in shock
And nothing in it would survive.
We are all small
like the notches
on the line
that will one day wind
the revolution
through every gutter in this world.
Then it's time
we start believing in our power
Because the darkest hour
will only come
If we refuse to flower
the light
that has always burned,
Bright inside us"
So decide
What would you die for?
Then live
Every moment of your life
Like you were born
Into this life just to save it
Knowing the light
At the end of the tunnel
Is the fire of your faith
So never put it out
And every time you start to doubt
Listen to the cries
Of everyone who has come before you
Pushing you on
They know
There has never been a bomb built
That can wilt the petals
Of your power
When you allow yourself to bloom

When you bloom
There will be no room for anything else

Gandhi said
You must be the change
That you wish to see in the world
So you've been curled up and sad?
Good
Depression is the first blessing
It means you've been in tune
But now the moon is waiting
For you to burn bright
And there has never
Been a time
When your light
Was needed more
Never a time like this before

Yes you are small
We are all as small
As a single breath
But tied to the rest
We are all the life of the world
The pulse that turns rocks to pearls
Inside the darkness
Of their shells
So become the well
Where wishes are born
Become the bell
That rings when even
The birds refuse to sing
Become the wings that fly
And every time you're full of sorrow
Every time you wake up crying
Know that that day
Is a perfect day
To shine

I am so grateful for all the different ways you shine, good folks of FCUCC.
May you flower the light that has always burned, bright inside you.

Pastor January