

## 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

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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