

Relying on Hope

Ry Southard

The Bishop's Confusion

I witnessed a Bishop's confusion
Wearing Diocesan fabric evoking shimmering chimere
A telling calm contrast to Sunday's dire sermons
Preaching peace at the edge of disbelief
A sympathetic Bach fugue adds majestic mystery
To rows of half empty pews

I lived in a cathedral for two and a half years
Singing as a professional chorister
Each day, each stone step, exploring unknowing
Evensong as always

Silly, unrepentant faith of 13 year olds
Practicing cherubic voice
Each tradition that binds us
A thousand echoes I will never forget

Alan and I spelunked the crypt
and scaled bell towers
Challenging resilience, we grew older without time
Cauterizing the carillon to every future memory

In the tower, we commanded Nob Hill
And toward Telegraph and the Bay Bridge
We know Grace Cathedral's every passage way
All we knew - were as boys

Majestic and learned, moderately tempered
We were kings or at least princes
Good enough for 8th grade

I am that Bishop 51 years later
in a paint smeared smock
Preaching peace at the edge of disbelief
To a congregation that doesn't exist
Walls without adornments, no echoes of evensong
Funny how history repeats

Peace be with you

about giraffes

and they tried to tell
me that giraffes
glue galoshes to
their ears on halloween

and these giraffes
prance around
making funny faces
at each other
hee haw!
the monkeys scamper
high into the trees

but i didn't believe
a word they said

it turned out
i was wrong

thank god for that

Calling out the Mountains

Calling out the mountains
Running through the trees
Echoes make me real

Screaming at the ocean
Crashing waves silence tears
 washing into foam
 illusions of a great nation

Fostering dreams of a never-existed justice
Some folks just made it up to create a new reality
 a mysterious rationale never to be unveiled
 a purpose to benefit their forever

Fervently yelling in silence
With thanks, the beach echoes peace
at least for today

We must shout out now
For justice and freedom, for a peaceful way forward
My nation once declared a civil war ended
My nation proclaimed in '64 a Civil Rights Act
 ending 100 years of injustice
and 300 years before that

America are you still real as I can't seem to touch you
My ears hear hate with eyes that replay evil white cone hats
The horror of death in Kenosha and Minneapolis
 so many other cities and towns
 so many red pins on the map

Vapors of hope hover mindlessly over decades of despair
I was not in any incarnation in 1774 or 1867 or
Tulsa, 1921 my disgraced birthplace years later

How to weave the present with a history of oppression
People of all colors need all our help
Our true nation of all

When I was younger in high school and just beyond
I remember
"We are the generation that will change the world!"
Hippies. Black Panthers. Woodstock. Kent State.

The rock and roll and Vietnam War and discrimination
our parents didn't want to understand
We knew we did
with the protests, drugs and music to escalate our future

What did we do with our lives?

I run in the foothills of Mt. Diablo
Through the Ponderosas and Aspens on Shrine Pass
Around Central Park as if I were a tour guide
Across the low tide at Hatteras

I call
Sweating out my demons
Giant Mountain humbled me, but I still ran up
and so weary, accepted a ride home
Run Discovery Park if you ever have the chance
to kiss the Puget Sound and listen for my call

Peace is the silent listening of the beach
You my lover and a mountain stream
New songbirds calling and preening in our garden

How can I share that peace with those
without a beach or backyard or mountain or hope
and with those that have never heard a call

I call out the Sandhills
Echoes amidst the Longleaf pines that unite us and make us real

Coma

Darkness thrust upon me
No delirium, no clouds, at least not at first
Prescient of nothing
I slumbered

Back and forth, a bouncy swing across the fence
Falling into an alley of nothingness

I lie below dunes of swirling, waving spartina grass
With a blanket of celestial forgiveness
Stars still twinkle no matter where I dream

Prayers from an unknown congregation
Hover in community
Barn building a soul
and a picnic for life

Regaining consciousness
awakening clarity mesmerizes
A Carolina sky
 blue
 absent of clouds

Beckoning, knowing
with vibrant intent and you
We cherish our home

December wondering

I am not an immigrant
i was born here

educated to believe
this was a land of immigrants
as were my great great kin
who wanted more

America offered unoffended

sighs of helping dreams of helping
painted on idea tapestries
lining the arriving ships
new storefronts and landscapes
we are our people
just as all of we

i beg you to read
i plead
a Bill of Rights
and a Constitution
our responsibility
this squirrely freedom

Read, lead, and teach
Freedom is not a given
Life grants you bupkus
Ha! Hit it on baby

Believe in the paragraph above
with chords of dreams
Pray for below

We are so thankful, so blessed to be
beyond Aleppo and every chaos
if ever hope needs renewal
as now

Diversion in the Age of Covid

A huge old oak fell across the river
 roots asunder
Its taller neighbor cottonwood joined the next week
 a thunderous splash and new current

 askew roots and branches pushing opposite embankment, tearing
Into a fierce eddy and mud slewing erosion

When leaders lead diversion
 the chaos of disunity thrives viral
waterproof fires of obfuscation fuel clogged lungs and death

Normally pretty switched-on box turtles love a good sun snooze
 now they avoid these tree trunks
hiding in slow eddies under root shadows

better to be wet and cool-ish
 and confused
than hot and dead on a careening aimless log

Epistle from almost age 65

Accomplishments no longer matter
I wish I could write and paint more
Adding to the bounty of creative love
Moisture for every desert

Stymied by past mistakes
I'll have to work another five years
It makes me tired, exhausted to consider that

I'll drag my feet a few times and call
"I'm Burnt Out!"

But it is better
than being an abandoned Kurd searching
for another shelter, another survival
another blood-stained parcel of sandy betrayal

Hallway hope

The corridor of judgement was waiting
I chose a different hallway, it was a good day
Reminding me of luck and superstition
Don't follow a crowd without a parachute

We open the windows to fresh air and hope
It happens everywhere
except where the windows have been blown out
and only hope remains

hope on a diet of rubble and ruin
hope on a broken bridge
hope in our congress bellowing
love lost at a market abandoned
love gained when we kissed in the alley

hope that the corridor should crumble with hope
love in our every hopeful kiss
breathe as if

Hope is the most important word in language.

It transcends all.

Embrace hope each day.

Lasts longer than a latte.

I am my country
I am yours
I am a man
I am puzzling to some
Certainly different
I report to none

Be free as the song sings
Fly free as the wind swirls
Live lively frolicking in the dunes
Chair surf the tide
Dream song of twilight pearls

I am a nomad wandering
walking across
The Something Sea
There were mountains ahead
The path was dry and rocky
It will be nights before a bed

Breathe free the night sky
Stars fondle my dreams
Fresh is each breath
Vast is the beyond
Thankful to ponder these things

June 8, 2020

I have the calculus
The math is within reason
Our nation is damaged
The storm has hit our shores

It's hard to know when reason sticks to science
while fluff drifts so abundant
It worked for me in biology class
The frog was dead and we did surgery
Discovery and purpose and understanding
Sense was made
That was a long time ago

The formula for peace has been
sequestered in our souls, harbored in a forgotten lobe
Perhaps it is time to sing for the future, to revive
and forgive the ugly past

We nullify reasons
to go forward together
Such is foolishness

languid

Pretending with faith
Lazy in the heat
Dreaming of ice tea and wealth

Walking down Main Street
Buildings a hundred years older than me
Our history is elsewhere, but we marked
Kress and Woolworth

What do you see yonder down the road
A home, a marquis, a park, a protest, a bathroom
A club to never exit

A median boulevard with shade to sit with your dog
and rest beneath green
where is everyone?

There is a cool spring and a splash rock
no pretense
A place for all ...calls us, all of us

happenstance is me
just a bounce on luck's metronome
languid as needed
for another tomorrow in the south

Last words

In memory of Jamal Khashoggi

I was an unknowing super hero fending off 15 men half my age
But not 17, I failed

Kill me
Dismember me
Blame me
Its all about me

Not how I want to be re-membered
but that's irrelevant now

My writing was true
Opinionated but true
Seeking a place of
no cruelty or demigod mad mandates
an injustice free zone

Divine impudence for another way
to repent the malice of today

Legend to Live

how do you sing to a circle
a prism that doesn't listen
colors so wanting for song

syllables waiting to be named
in poems of affection
words that mean more
than tumbling in kaleidoscopes

there is a place for us in this sphere

we must sing louder with gusto
more harmoniously to attract
sweet birdsongs of lullaby justice

like playground antics
a perfect hopscotch score
when it seemed so much simpler

We will not surrender
a bounty we embrace
with woeful disclaimers
when we are the problem

Political charades our drug and sidekick
faux facade of a movie western town
so seemingly tranquil until bad men ride in

We will not give in to such spuriousness
dishonor, sloth or pretense
It is better to go away and die
than to pretend in shadows of shame

Our legend to live

lying on the mountain
nestled in a boulder easy chair
scrunching toes in the hot thin air
then a swift dunking
and drying over a moss lined rivulet

nodding to the faded distant moon
chatting with a marmot
eyes heavy with joy
drifting in acceptance

looking down on our home
safe in the valley below
a garden of kindness and ferns and tranquility
another safe place to be me
with you

mercy

living in a world of serpentine dreams
they bellow and swerve
I don't know why
a universe guided by nature

so lucky to be educated
and fortunate to know that
blessed with misfortune and parallel luck
surviving and accepting the forest
of love where we live

remember our walk in Padua
we had no idea where we were or going
we found a salumeria vibrato
a picnic with fresh friuli and olives and cheese
and ciabatta love

we went to Orto Botanico
the birth of forgiveness
I left my childhood here

the garden pardons all with tender shoots
there is no loneliness amongst plants
refuge when others fail

how is it so acceptable
to ignore people living in places
we will or would never go by choice
putting the pieces together before they are blown up again
I lust for forgiveness
I pray for your luck

Mercy is where we place it
and we remember as if embedded
living for dreams and hope

Of dreams

Surreptitious dreams hiding
In my universe delightful and tragic
as dreams will be if I remember them
 Some re-enter my parlor disguised as dreams
 and I awaken breathless for one second
 then calm and dreamy for remembrance

I embrace that tragedy
It wasn't so bad
Heck I'm alive and in love
Don't bet against me at the casino

Testimony of witnesses may say something different
They didn't have that dream after all
My friends get it somehow
I suppose because around that campfire
on the beach or at the Kimble's house

We lived in that perfect moment
Blissfully joyfully sharing
Stopping time for being dreamily relevant

Prefecture of Promise

Just above the horizon
Heat glimmers from a distance
Prickly pear cacti and agave now blossoming glorious

another road was beckoning
wafting beguiling airs
Inca Doves coo mesmerizing

perfumed perfection and
pine trees trees mask the gate
closing behind history and all memories

Welcome to the Kingdom of unknown Liberties
We will never tell you
making it up as we go along
Suspense is our power
Submit indentured citizen

Our worries were banished by a hope
we couldn't quite finger
The holiday lights made us fuzzy and forgetful
What's the problem anyway
Where's my nametag

We walk drunkish down the alley
sashaying and swaying
Singing and wondering about dreams
when before it was all about just that

In another day, I awoke with you
thirsty for truth
about another road
Eager to labor and sweat for new hope
Coffee never tasted so sweet
Who are we?

Reason

Reason is just a word
for thinking we know what we are talking
about because we've talked about it

for a Very long time
as if we don't have day jobs

The fun part is when we succumb
to self-reason and belief
the opaque of opulence
Yummy in my tummy

Turbulence awaits passionately
to Stir any and all discord
Including aforesaid Reason

Please do not treasure disharmony
until you think this through
ignoring the headlines

Sacred

Why detour the howling moon
Pushing waves to the shore
We who accept
Lap them up as never before
Howling moon joy

The reason we are here
To treasure our place
A gift from the Spirits
With honor and grace

Obscured by those who claim other
Myopia to deny earth's truth
Big Ears is of our sacred earth

The wisdom of our elders
Bones rise up from the sand and caves
And canyons and plains and shores where we once flourished
Chanting with drums as generations before us
Dancing and turning like Sufis
With history's embers in the shadow of our elders

Smoke from our pipes in peace with our earth
Spirits and caves and roots
We do not cut off the tops of mountains
Or core their roots

Self Healing

A temple rubbing
What's left of my favorite shirt
Shapes upon a canvass
A camera, some brushes and reason
Shore up hope to

Ward off viciousness
When vitriol, violence and vengeance are every season
Where virile went wrong

Walking in the woods seeking solace
Breathing evergreen
Weaving trees into peace
I find a power pole, like no other
Words on orange
Glaring and naked

I turn to look around expecting a troll
No evidence of mischief to tease my soul

This is true, my photos don't lie
Walking closer, wonder rises
Inhaling relief then mindful sighs
I see this sign and know this song
An always lullaby

Self
Healing

Special Alert

6:11am: News Flash! A special alert has been issued.
Stand by for further information.

Update 8:13am: False alarm. It's of no consequence.
There was no crime or catastrophe
other than ignorance, hubris and buffoonery.

The start of another day.

Testimony

I reread the testimony
Scanning the photographs for truth
That's all there is to history
The rest is interpretation
and its temptation

The challenge with reinventing
a broken system, pipes and all
We stood silent in amazement
at how bad it was

There was no tourniquet handy
My hands squelched the heavy bleeding
I wrapped my handkerchief around the wound
Pressing my soul into hope

There is no magic to healing
Faith and science and love
The legs of truth

When triumph comes calling
We must be ready for those infrequent moments
and guard against trojan horses
That foal injustice

The Pity

The pity of America
Its broken bones and travesties
Irrational, destructive behavior
 so detrimental to civility and equity
Constant and brash and violent and deadly
Becoming the poster republic for denying human rights
 quagmires of no way on earth and inaction
There are no theories or easy solutions that end well
I did the math

I am not an anthropologist, but respect those skills
I don't understand the why, the motivation, the disconnect
Margaret Mead would have a full plate of discovery
 meeting over a long, long lunch

I was 65 when I learned a black man my age
 remembered sitting in the balcony
For all the wrong reasons
He was young, not knowing Jim Crowe

Living each day as if I can unlearn things
Rewiring my brain, a citizen scientist
 practicing evidence-based mindfulness
I know it sounds dull and social media unworthy
But hey, if I can evolve and change for the better
Seeking equity in every nook
That makes evidence-based hope, a very good thing
And end any pity

Treaty

Dinner was an improbable affair
Guests mingled like diplomats
Displaying black and white finery
Furtive glances, imagined smiles, somber stares
Occasionally a truly heartfelt laugh

Elegant place cards adorn
abundant plates and bowls
Neighbors whisper about neighbors
Serving dishes of limp smiles
as opposing generals do at surrender
with negotiated tolerance
assumptions of defection cloaked in your dress

You enter the room so regally
You all look so miserable!
No, no, all disclaim
I proclaim a new manifest
We shall be friendly to our differences
Minister, make that happen!
Guests were speechless
The sun managed to rise the next day
Such is majesty

What a president said
"Vermin" to describe his enemies

The vermin of racism
Embedded, emboldened
Scurrying through America
as if nothing happened
White-washed and re-written
Syncopating mistakes
in triplicate
Stamped into history, lines dissecting a nation
Fascist diatribe
Just another day

Free has too many meanings
Why not just one – free from bondage
One human over another
Free is just and compassionate
Sometimes too far away
Mostly taken for granted
Just another day

I listened incredulously as the doc said to my Dad
"Would you like to pray?"
Where am I?
Doctor of theology or medicine?
Baptism or cathartic procedure?
Earth orbits the sun last I learned
Just another day

I'm from another planet, a sun of peace
Reflecting solace and joy
The wind whispers
Follow me this way

What happens every day

Buried in concrete and wood and plaster
and sooty smoky dusk and grit and rebar
and pipe and dry dust and grimy smudge and dank dust
Gasping in smelly dark nothing
for another swirling pain I never knew

I don't feel my legs or right arm
I miss my wife and children
I pray they are not dead buried beside me
I know I'm bleeding to death slowly
a tourniquet of destruction
My left arm itches fire and my eyes throb numb
A splinter of light sees my breath
Hearing faint sirens' wail
I want to have hope and fail

The bombing hit our apartment
without discretion like bombs do
I imagine my parents are dead
I fear for my family and yours
I prepare for death

A gargle of dust and another gurgle
Drowning without water
Searing pain every last muscle pulsing
I cherish my wife and two girls
Wishing a letter I cannot write

I write prayers and love with my breaths
and picture peace before any future
goodbye