

Gladness and Generosity¹

May 11 2014

Based on Acts 2:42-47

Every time I walked past my front window in the past couple of days, I got distracted by the flash of colour in the corner of my eye and I'd have to turn aside and look again at the, purple pink, red, yellow of the freshly opened tulip, daffodil and hyacinth bulbs.

And every time I came or went from the front door, as I inhaled their fragrance,

I felt like I was breathing in gratitude and exhaling praise.

Gratitude and praise and gladness

for spring, for delicate beauty, for resurrection of these bulbs against the odds of what seemed like an endless winter.

On facebook, Jodie Boyer Hatlem gave me the poetry to express this experience by reminding me of a favourite ee cummings poem:

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,

and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth day of life and love and
wings; and of the gay great happening ilimitably earth)

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how should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing any - lifted from
the no of all nothing - human merely being doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are
opened).

It would seem that ee cummings knew how to put into words better
than most what it is to breathe in gratitude and exhale praise. Budding
leaves on trees, new flowers, unaccustomed blue skies and warm
breezes have a way of making us feel quite simply - glad.

Today I want to celebrate with you the Spirit's gift of awe and gladness.
There is power in this experience of awe, gladness, gratitude and praise.
Maybe even enough power to dislodge some of our more negative
human tendencies.

In Acts chapter 2:42-47, our main passage for today, we read that **awe**
came upon everyone, because many signs and wonders were being done
by the apostles. This awe and I presume the joy they were experiencing
led those who believed to sell their possessions and distribute their
resources to any who had need. Each day they spent time together in
temple and home – devoted to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship
and prayers.

And as they broke bread and shared food together with glad and
generous hearts, they were praising God and had the goodwill of the
people. Gladness and generosity it seems go hand in hand.

Or maybe a better way to put it might be that gladness leads to an open hand.

I want to talk about the source of this gladness

I have heard it said that we might do well to read and interpret both the book of Scripture and the book of Creation, because both have powerful ways to reveal our Creator to us – the ultimate source of joy.

Lately, as in my introduction, I've been most impressed by the book of creation – its power and beauty. Some of you know that I spent my vacation just over a week ago on Vancouver Island, near Victoria and Salt Spring Island.

I never tire of the lush beauty of the west coast forests and I'm amazed at the power of the oceans tides. When I sit beside the ocean and observe the surf, it always seems to me as if the ocean itself is alive. The ebb and flow of the waves are like an unimaginably large creature breathing in and out in an endless rhythm – like some gigantic lungs. I have also heard it said that as the life of the oceans go, so goes the life of the rest of the earth. Sobering words as ocean waters warm along with the rest of the planet.

There are some among us who have much more practice than most at reading and interpreting the book of creation. This land's first peoples traditionally had and many still have a connection to the land that is fostered by respect and awe. Their language and rituals and stories remind us that mother earth nurtures all creatures including us with

strength and resiliency that puts our greedy and exploitative ways to shame.

I have a story to share from the book of creation that was shared with me by a woman named Mary Dawn, but first I need to share a bit of context. Last week, I found myself staying for several days at a B and B on a First Nation's reserve where I was warmly welcomed by Jan. On the Saturday evening together with two young adults, one from France and one from the UK, (part of the Woofers program) myself from Toronto and Jan's family and friends all together, we celebrated this unexpected communion of strangers with a musical jam session and storytelling. I found out that evening that the mandolin is tuned like a violin and so I was actually able to join in on a borrowed mandolin.

Late in the evening, Jan's friend, Mary Dawn told us a powerful story that came to her in a dream. Because it is her story and because it is a dream, I have Mary Dawn's gracious permission to share it only if I don't write it down and if it is not recorded. And so I have not written it and it is not being recorded.

Mary Dawn's story.....

Mary Dawn was in awe of the gift of this dream, just as I have been in awe of the gift of this story.

The greed and disrespect of the giant were in the end dislodged by the power of the sea, but not without Mary Dawn's brave participation. She now shares this story with a glad and generous heart.

And yes there is a connection between this book of creation story and the book of scripture story in Acts.

This story in Acts has always been an important one for our Anabaptist understanding that faith and salvation must affect every part of our lives, including our money and possessions. But it isn't just instruction on what to do and how to do it, in fact it seems less about that than about the Spirit's transformative power that makes joy-filled and generous sharing possible. The Joy of Salvation, the inherent joy and gladness of our participation in a community of worship, prayer, and table fellowship,

it is that inner Spirit stuff that has oceanic power to dislodge us from the unchecked inequities and runaway greed of the version of capitalism within which we find ourselves.

This story of holding things in common, sharing as any have need, is just one of many stories in Luke and Acts that reveals its Old Testament based Jubilee theme. So starting with some of the OT passages: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is within it," from Psalm 24, and "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," from Psalm 23 describe the hope of the way things can and should and one day will be between the

Eternal One and the earth and the earth's inhabitants. But when inequities develop, as they inevitably will, Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 include instructions for Sabbath rest for the land every seven years and actually command a Jubilee celebration during the 50th year in which land is redistributed, debts are cancelled and slaves are freed.

And then there is Jesus' inaugural speech in Luke 4 based on Isaiah 61, that he comes to bring good news to the poor and proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (or in other words the year of Jubilee).

The entire scriptural tradition reminds us that the earth is not ours to own! It is not ours to disrespect. It is not ours to exploit endlessly. Mother earth and all that she provides to nurture and sustain must instead be ceaselessly released from our greedy addictions. Every seventh year she must rest, and any of her creatures human and otherwise that have become poor or exploited or captive must be released along with her. For those who have a lot of wealth, this may not initially feel like a celebration of course, but think about it – everything - people, animals, land restored and freed so that everyone and everything can be what God created them to be? Yes, this is worthy of celebration! Jubilee living is celebratory living.

This is the good news that Jesus proclaimed, that his death and resurrection accomplished and is expressed by the joy-filled living of the community that gathers in his name.

Ultimately we are a communion or community of strangers that by Christ's self-giving love have been made into a new community of joy and God has granted so much beauty on this earth to gladden our hearts. If we let the power of this beauty and a renewed respect for and connection to our mother earth cause us to breathe in gratitude and exhale praise then maybe our greedy addictions will drown and the Eternal Spirit will release our spirits and open our hands so that with glad and generous hearts there will be no one with need among us. Let's celebrate!