

**A summer sermon given by Kate on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July during our *Kirkin' O' the Tartan* celebration. The readings were Luke 10:25-37 and Colossians 1:15-28. Let us remember to be about "soul making" as the new season begins.**

There was actually a faint chill in the air early Wednesday morning that drew me outside like a magnet in the middle of a hot and humid week. Sitting in my garden swing, I watched a patch of golden light glow and grow through a thick web of tree branches. In front of me a bumble bee was dancing in and out of the purple flowers that had sprung up uninvited in our garden. Knowing that blessings often come in threes (a holy number in Celtic spirituality), I sat still and watched. That's when the squirrel started chiding me from the willow. Well, you can't always choose the shape of your blessings! But then a red-breasted grosbeak appeared. I guess you can't control the number of them either!

As I sat in the swing, I realized that once again I was falling in love. The smells, the sounds, the colors, the light – all bringing my heart to a reverent hush. And I wondered – was **this what Mary felt** when she sat at the feet of Jesus? What was it about the moment that Jesus entered her house that drew her to her spot on the floor? Was it the light in the room? The light in his eyes? Was it the sound of his voice as he greeted the gathering? Was she simply hungry for a word that would lighten her load and engage her heart? Or was she just ready to get **out of the kitchen**? What brought Mary to silence at Jesus' feet?

As I asked that question in my garden swing, I sensed her sitting right next to me. "Taking in the glory," she said. "Taking it in and reflecting it out." Now...I know those were her words and not mine, because **glory** is not a word I use often. So, I had to pay attention... The birdsong picked up considerably at that point. The song sparrow let loose a wild cascade of notes (how can something so tiny be so loud?). The mourning dove landed on the telephone wire above me and cooed. The baby crows were trying with more or less success to produce a reasonable caw. And a breeze, an actually cool breeze lifted my hair. Gift upon gift upon gift.

"Taking in the glory, and reflecting it out!" That is what Mary was doing at the feet of Jesus. Taking in his words, resting in his love, feeling his

breath on her hair, perhaps a tender hand on her shoulder, she was immersing herself in blessing. That is also what my mornings in the garden are about – sitting at the feet of the source of life, taking in sounds, feeling the breeze on my skin, watching the light dance and change and breathing it as far down deep into my body as I can, hoping to breathe it back out through the day.

"Take in the glory, and reflect it out!" **Glory** is a good word for today. The vision of the ancient Celtic Christians was truly glorious. In their eyes, there was nothing in the created world that was not filled with the light of sacred. In fact, when the gospel was first brought to the *Keltoi* (the Greek appellation for the people living on the fringes of Europe at the time), they had a easy affinity for it. It was not hard for them to embrace the concept of incarnation, God fully alive in human flesh, in the person of Jesus. After all, they already knew that matter and spirit could not be separated, that all of being was holy. They did not have the same Roman hang-up (that has since become our own) that something had to be either-or, one thing or another, sacred or profane. Both/and, divine and human, matter and spirit, body and soul – all held together, this was the world/spirit view of the Celtic peoples.

Now with those words written, the telephone rang and I did not get back out that morning. So, after another day and night of oppressive humidity and thunderstorms, I found myself taking in the dawn in my small writing room, coffee steaming and candle flame moving in the air. With the whirl of the fan silencing any sound from the outside, my first thought was "What do I do now?" "Take in the glory, and reflect it out." Mary, it seems, had come inside with me.

As I reflected on her words I realized two things. First, that the glow of the sun from yesterday, the song of the birds, even the blessed breeze was still accessible, still living inside me. But now there was more – the solid mattress comfortably grounding me to the floor, the writing table Joel had lovingly made for me, the art prints

on my walls. Second, for the very first time, I noticed that there were three, all women portrayed in various kinds of reflection, one with a hummingbird speaking to her, one resting in a womb-like cavern, and another, incredibly, sitting at the feet of Jesus. And as I sat there, rather stunned by what I had unconsciously done on my walls, created a kind of feminine trinity of prayer – in solitude, in nature, in Scripture – the call of the song sparrow pierced through the open window.

There is another divide that Celtic intuition weaves together. It is the split between the interior and the exterior worlds. We are used to thinking we live **in** the world, it is all **out there**, outside of us. But **all the world lives inside us as well**. John O'Donohue writes that the senses, our five senses, are divine thresholds where these worlds meet, come together, and act in and on one another. (Think about that...the senses are the place where the worlds are constantly mixing!) Creativity for us is all about holding the exterior and the interior in common esteem, where they can mix and tumble and create something made of spirit and body, mind and heart, flesh and soul. True works of beauty.

The image of Mary sitting at the feet of Christ is an image of a woman using all of her senses and honoring her interiority, knowing she must feed and care for the world inside herself if she is to create something beautiful and nourishing on the outside. "Take in the glory, and reflect it out." I humbly add to Mary's words: "Take in the glory. Let it sift and mold and crumble and shape, let it gestate and grow, and reflect it out as blessing to the world."

When I look at our precious earth in such shambles, how we have dared to desecrate the air and the waters, the mountains, even the moon, and certainly one another, I believe we are living the rupture between the invisible world inside ourselves and the world outside. We have not honored the connection and the consequences have been devastating. We have not taken the time to nurture the spirit within us, to deepen the well that holds all of being, including ourselves, in love and wonder. As a result, we have disconnected ourselves from our own life source.

If we focus all of our energy on addressing the problems **outside** of us in the visible world,

without ever deepening our internal well of spirit, we will continue to set the world **out of balance**. As O'Donohue writes in *Anam Cara*, "If we become addicted to the external, our interiority will haunt us". And sadly, I think that is true for many of us have. Even the church has fallen out of balance, giving more attention to solving external problems than developing souls. The catch only wise and developed souls will be able to begin to even understand the problems of our split-apart world.

English poet John Keats said that "the great purpose of human life is 'soul-making.'" Soul making is our primary calling. Yet how many of us wake in the morning with the thought of how we will this day develop our souls? How do we develop our capacity for **holding worlds together**, which is what soul does, worlds that have been asunder since the invisible world, has been neglected, denigrated, and dismissed? As Christ holds the visible and invisible together, so are we meant to do the same.

Dear friends, I invite you to use all your senses, to take in all the glory around you, let it breath inside you, let it move you to laughter and to tears, and dig a well of compassion... Then reflect it back, bring all of the riches of yourself to the mending of this sacred matter we call creation. With Mary, we must find time to be still, to honor the world inside, that we might develop souls that embrace all things. Amen.

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