



Neighborhood Unitarian  
Universalist Church

## The Buddha in the Bee Loud Glade

Rev. Dr. Jim Nelson  
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301 N. Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91103 (626) 449-3470 [information@uuneighborhood.org](mailto:information@uuneighborhood.org)

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Over the almost thirty years I have been a minister, I have used a lot of readings, both prose and poetry, in worship. It is one of the great joys of this work – to read through books, and slips of papers in files, more recently online, for readings for a Sunday's morning. The back of the hymnal has a lot; I regularly go through my files – paper and electronic; I use Marilyn Sewell's wonderful collection of poems Cries of the Spirit, Garrison Keillor's Good Poems, Donald Hall's How to Read a Poem; I read Rumi and Pablo Neruda, and on and on. Members of the churches I have served have sent me pieces and I have appreciated that so very much.

These bits of language are like place for worship service itself – little sanctuaries they are for me – places of retreat, places to get away from the busy drumming of the world and hope to hear something that touches on eternity or infinitely, something that works as a window to the sacred.

The world can press in on us. In the almost thirty years I have been a minister, we have moved from Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama, and there is still violence and hatred and dis-ease. The Soviet Union fell and we experienced first hand the violence that plagues so much of the world. There is oil pouring into the Gulf of Mexico, Arizona and that mess, the idiocy of the tea-party movement, the nativism and incipient fascism of our culture.

All that stuff out there. From time to time, it is good to leave it there, for this one hour and find sanctuary, find some stillness, some peace, so that we might go back out into the struggle.

These bits of words can be like little refuges, little sanctuaries. Words can be doors, windows – said in anger or hatred they are closed, but said with love or hope they can be openings to a better vision of living.

I began to write this sermon on Wednesday morning - that was very early for me but it was one of those weeks with so many other things to do – meeting after meeting after meeting. I felt rushed. And there was the poem of the day for Wednesday – they come to my email each day:

It is by Marie Ponsot and called *Imagining Starry*:

The place of language is the place between me

and the world of presences I have lost

—complex country, not flat. Its elements free-

float, coherent for luck to come across;

its lines curve as in a mental orrery

implicit with stars in active orbit,

only their slowness or swiftness lost to sense.

The will dissolves here. It becomes the infinite

air of imagination that stirs immense

among losses and leaves me less desolate.

Breathing it I spot a sentence or a name,

a rescuer, charted for recovery,

to speak against the daily sinking flame

& the shrinking waters of the mortal sea.

'The place of language is the place between me

and the world of presences I have lost .

'a complex country, not flat'

No, our world is not flat at all, and words can be the link between the self and the world of presences we have lost.

You know, of course, that the world religion means to re-connect, and in the understanding of what we mean by spirituality is the idea of re-connecting, of being linked to something outside of our selves. It's all about relationship.

The idea is that we are connected to something greater than ourselves, and we experience that from time to time. We often become separated and need to re-connect. I imagine you understand this. I certainly have felt cut off, disconnected at times in my life; sometimes significantly so and have felt lost. I have felt cut off from myself; I have felt cut off from others; I have felt cut off from the world. And when that happens I look for connection – words often help me do that. Music works too. The prayers I write each morning are attempts to re-connect. Words.

No words I have ever read on a Sunday morning, though, has had as many responses as this one over the years; it speaks to something deep, something many feel a need for, something missing. It happens to be in the back of our hymnal – number 483 and is by Wendell Berry– please don't look it up now – but listen:

*"When despair for the world grows in me, and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be – I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."*

Berry's words points to what is essentially spiritual – and there is a paradox in there – that in being most deeply connected we become most free.

This is what the Buddha sought when he sat under the Bodhi tree – to be free by being most deeply connected to the heart of things, not distracted nor deceived by illusions or desires, but connected. And to find that, he had to retreat, to go away so that he could come back; he went to the forest; he had to go into himself so that he could reach outwards. And in doing so he found some peace. Like Yeats, he sat in the bee loud glade and found peace there, the peace that comes dropping slow, that comes from the deep heart's core.

I don't know about you, but I have been looking for peace my whole life. It does not come to me naturally. I have often been anxious, jittery, it seems, my whole life. I have always had a lot of energy – maybe a little manic from time to time. I am very competitive; I talk too much and don't always listen well. It is for me hard to just sit.

Now there is nothing wrong with that – I like my energy and I like doing things; I love being busy. But it comes sometimes at the price of peace. My guess is that many of you know this all too well.

So, as I said, I look for words that can lead me to those places and times of peace. Yeat's poem, The lake Isle of Innisfree was one of the first. Let me read it again – hear the rhythm of the words – this is just gorgeous writing.

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Maybe you have some words like that – words that help you hear the deep heart's core, words that bring some peace, the peace that comes dropping slow. If you do, make a copy, memorize it perhaps, or keep it in your wallet or purse. Read it once a day. If you don't have something like that – find one – start in the back of the hymnal or elsewhere. There is no shortage of words in the world.

Yeats was inspired, in his youth, by Henry David Thoreau's Walden, which his father read to him, and Thoreau's decision to move to Walden Pond outside Concord [which means peace after all] build a cabin and live simply.

In Chapter 2 Thoreau writes this:

To be awake is to be alive. [an aside – remember that the Buddha said that he was awake!] We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life ...

Thoreau found it at Walden Pond; for Yeats it was the small island of Innisfree in Lough Gill near Sligo, Ireland. For me – well, for now it is my backyard. It once was a cabin on a lake in Northern Minnesota, or a dock on Lake Thoreau in Reston, VA [yes, we lived on Lake Thoreau!]. In January it was New Camoldi hermitage in Big Sur. Some days, it is this room – I come in here from time to time and sit.

And then I read or remember words, and, for a time, I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

We are coming to the end of another program year. In two weeks we will have our annual flower communion on Memorial Day weekend – please bring a flower to church. Regular schedule – 9:30 and 11:30. Then our Rights of Passage service, then our annual meeting on June 13<sup>th</sup>, which begins our schedule of one service at 10:00.

It's been a year – Hannah had a baby; I went on sabbatical; we had Mari Caballero as an intern, plus all the regular activities. It's been a busy world. There is so much for us to do. To do what we must, we must retreat now and

then and gather our strength for the work of the world. Go to Walden; go to where the orange tree blooms; go to Innisfree; sit under the Boddhi tree; go to where the springs do not fail; Go to where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water. Listen for the words and the music that bring peace.

Blessings on us all.