

Poetry in the Midst of a Pandemic

May the wisdom and creativity of others offer strength, perspective, and hope.

Pandemic **by Lynn Ungar** **3/11/20**

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath --
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love --
for better or worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

The Peace of Wild Things **by Wendell Berry**

When despair 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.

by Kitty O'Meara

And the people stayed home.
And read books, and listened, and
rested, and exercised, and made art,
and played games, and learned new
ways of being, and were still. And
listened more deeply. Some
meditated, some prayed, some
danced. Some met their shadows.
And the people began
to think differently.

And the people healed.
And, in the absence of people living
in ignorant, dangerous, mindless,
and heartless ways,
the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed,
and the people joined together again,
they grieved their losses, and made
new choices, and dreamed new
images, and created new ways to live
and heal the earth fully,
as they had been healed.

From Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place **by Terry Tempest Williams**

I pray to the birds.
I pray to the birds because
I believe they will carry the messages of my heart upward.
I pray to them because I believe in their existence,
the way their songs begin and end each day,
the invocations and benedictions of earth.
I pray to the birds because they remind me of what I love
rather than what I fear.
And at the end of my prayers,
they teach me how to listen.

Lockdown
by Brother Richard Hendrick

Yes there is fear.
Yes there is isolation.
Yes there is panic buying.
Yes there is sickness.
Yes there is even death.
But,
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise
You can hear the birds again.
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet
The sky is no longer thick with fumes
But blue and grey and clear.
They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples
are preparing to welcome
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary
All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality
To how big we really are.
To how little control we really have.
To what really matters.
To Love.
So we pray and we remember that
Yes there is fear.
But there does not have to be hate.
Yes there is isolation.
But there does not have to be loneliness.
Yes there is panic buying.
But there does not have to be meanness.
Yes there is sickness.
But there does not have to be disease of the soul
Yes there is even death.
But there can always be a rebirth of love.
Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.
Today, breathe.
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic
The birds are singing again
The sky is clearing,
Spring is coming,
And we are always encompassed by Love.
Open the windows of your soul
And though you may not be able
to touch across the empty square,
Sing.

Imagine
by Lynn Ungar 3/20/20

Imagine with me for a moment --
don't worry, I'm not saying it's real.
Imagine, if you can, that there has been
not a calamity, but a great awakening.
Pretend, just for a moment,
that we all so loved our threatened earth
that we stopped going on cruises,
limited international flights,
worked on cherishing the places
where we already are.
In this pretty fantasy, everyone who possibly can
stops commuting. Spends the extra time
with their kids or pets or garden.
We have the revelation that everyone
needs health care, sick leave, steady work.
It occurs to us that health care workers
are heroes. Also teachers.
Not to mention the artists of all kinds
who teach us resilience and joy.
Imagine, if you will,
that we turned to our neighbors
in mutual aid, trading eggs for milk,
checking in on those who are elderly
or alone. Imagine that each of us
felt suddenly called to wonder
*In this moment, what does the world
need from me? What are my gifts?*
Yes, I know it's just a fantasy.
The world could never change
so radically overnight.
But imagine.

Enough
by David Whyte

Enough. These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.
This opening to the life
We have refused again and again
Until now.
Until now.

Untitled

By Laura Kelly Fanucci

When this is over, may we never again take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theater
Friday night out
The taste of communion
A routine checkup
The school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.
When this ends
may we find
that we have become
more like the people
we wanted to be
we were called to be
we hoped to be
and may we stay
that way – better
for each other
because of the worst.

PRAYER FOR THE MORNING

By Audette Fulbright Fulson

Did you rise this morning,
broken and hung over with weariness and pain
and rage tattered from waving too long in a brutal wind?
Get up, child.
Pull your bones upright
gather your skin and muscle into a patch of sun.
Draw breath deep into your lungs;
you will need it for another day calls to you.
I know you ache.
I know you wish the work were done
and you with everyone you have ever loved were on a distant shore
safe, and unafraid.
But remember this,
tired as you are:
you are not alone.
Here
and here
and here also
there are others weeping
and rising
and gathering their courage.
You belong to them
and they to you
and together,
we will break through
and bend the arc of justice
all the way down
into our lives.

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.