

# Friends of Silence

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"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"

Dear Friends ~ May, the month of spring in its fullness, a lovely midway point in the journey to the glorious long hours of summer light. The season is one of blossoming and resurgent life. There is much to be grateful for, to celebrate, to love. Yet as I walk in the greening forest so dear to me, I hold the knowledge that nothing stays: I have left my daily, intimate acquaintance with this place. The forest, for her part, is passing too: already the bluebells by the river's edge have vanished; the dogwood blossoms have fallen. Moreover, the changing climate is putting its own mark on many of the places and beings I have cherished. This is the exquisite melody of mortality. Mary Oliver hums it in giving her well-known advice on living from her poem "In Blackwater Woods":

*To live in this world*

*you must be able  
to do three things:  
to love what is mortal;  
to hold it*

*against your bones knowing  
your own life depends on it;  
and, when the time comes to let it go,  
to let it go.*



Watercolor by Julie Gabrielli

Ah, but how? How to sway gracefully in this bittersweet, ever-changing, threshold dance of receiving and letting go? How to open the heart knowing that sooner or later it will be broken?

Not for answers, but for courage, I turn to those wiser than I, to the "soul-criers". When I am weary of holding my head up, I follow the advice of Martin Shaw and "*allow the great soul-criers to do it for me*". Astonishingly, the song they cry is one of belonging and joy, the deep knowledge of having a place in this wondrous, wheeling universe; of being eternally companioned, blessed to behold beauty and to see the miraculous in the everyday, to walk moment by moment in the presence of the Holy.

In this glorious and beautiful springtime of the world, may it be so. ~ Lindsay



The heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe.

~ Joanna Macy

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth...

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing...

~ Naomi Shihab Nye from "Kindness" in *WORDS UNDER THE WORDS*

I see that life's uphill  
From here on out. My tiny art,  
Circling its grief, will have to grow  
Joyous the only way it knows how.



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~ Frank Steele, quoted by Martin Shaw in

*ABRANCH FROM THE LIGHTNING TREE*

**'Tis a fearful thing  
To love  
What death can touch.  
To love, to hope to dream,  
And oh, to lose.  
A thing for fools, this,  
Love,  
But a holy thing  
To love what death can touch.**

~ 12th century poem quoted by Francis Weller  
in *THE WILD EDGE OF SORROW*

The winter is cold, is cold.  
All's spent in keeping warm.  
Has joy been frozen, too?  
I blow upon my hands  
Stiff from the biting wind.  
My heart beats slow, beats slow.  
What has become of joy?

If joy's gone from my heart  
Then it is closed to You  
Who made it, gave it life...

Help me forget the cold  
That grips the grasping world.  
Let me stretch out my hands  
To purifying fire,  
Clutching fingers uncurled.  
Look! Here is melting joy.  
My heart beats once again.

~ Madeleine L'Engle in  
*THE ORDERING OF LOVE*



**I am, you anxious one.**

**Do you sense me, ready to break  
into being at your touch?**

**My murmurings surround you like shadowy wings.  
Can't you see me standing before you  
cloaked in stillness?...**

**I am the dream you are dreaming.**

**When you want to awaken, I am that wanting:**

**I grow strong in the beauty you behold.  
And with the silence of stars I enfold  
your cities made by time.**

~ Rainer Maria Rilke translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy  
in *A YEAR WITH RILKE*

**Eternal Listener, give heed to  
your people...**

**Restore us, O Holy One;  
let your face shine upon us,  
teach us to love...**

**You companion us through the wilderness,  
through the shadows created by fear.  
You plant your Seed into each heart...**

**Restore us, O Holy One!  
Let your face shine upon us,  
teach us to love!**

~ Nan Merrill from "Psalm 80" in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*



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After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down aeons of emptiness, heaping profusions on profligacies with ever-fresh vigor. The whole show has been on fire from the word go. I come down to the water to cool my eyes. But everywhere I look I see fire; that which isn't flint is tinder, and the whole world sparks and flames.

~ Annie Dillard in *PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK*

I had no idea that the gate I would step through  
to finally enter this world  
would be the space my brother's body made. He was  
a little taller than me: a young man  
but grown, himself by then,  
done at twenty-eight, having folded every sheet,  
rinsed every glass he would ever rinse under the cold  
and running water.  
This is what you have been waiting for, he used to say to me.  
And I'd say, What?  
And he'd say, This—holding up my cheese and mustard sandwich.  
And I'd say, What?  
And he'd say, This, sort of looking around.

~ Marie Howe from "The Gate" in *WHAT THE LIVING DO*



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