



Selected Poems by Wendell Berry and Prayer and Devotional Guide by Kyle Childress March 17-22, 2014

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Monday March 17

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

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.

~From *Collected Poems*

1. How does despair grow in the author?
How does despair grow in you? How do
you respond to despair?
2. What is the "peace of wild things" as
described in this poem?
3. What is the "grace of the world" and
how might we rest in it? How do the
wild things in the poem know peace and
grace and we don't?

THE COUNTRY OF MARRIAGE

I.

I dream of you walking at night along the streams
of the country of my birth, warm blooms and the
nightsongs
of birds opening around you as you walk.
You are holding in your body the dark seed of my sleep.

II.

This comes after silence. Was it something I said
that bound me to you, some mere promise
or, worse, the fear of loneliness and death?
A man lost in the woods in the dark, I stood
still and said nothing. And then there rose in me,
like the earth's empowering brew rising
in root and branch, the words of a dream of you
I did not know I had dreamed. I was a wanderer
who feels the solace of his native land
under his feet again and moving in his blood.
I went on, blind and faithful. Where I stepped
my track was there to steady me. It was no abyss
that lay before me, but only the level ground.

III.

Sometimes our life reminds me
of a forest in which there is a graceful clearing
and in that opening a house,
an orchard and garden,
comfortable shades, and flowers
red and yellow in the sun, a pattern
made in the light for the light to return to.
The forest is mostly dark, its ways
to be made anew day after day, the dark
richer than the light and more blessed,
provided we stay brave
enough to keep on going in.

IV.

How many times have I come to you out of my head
with joy, if ever a man was,
for to approach you I have given up the light
and all directions. I come to you
lost, wholly trusting as a man who goes
into the forest unarmed. It is as though I descend
slowly earthward out of the air. I rest in peace
in you, when I arrive at last.

V.

Our bond is no little economy based on the exchange
of my love and work for yours, so much for so much
of an expendable fund. We don't know what its limits
are--
that puts us in the dark. We are more together
than we know, how else could we keep on discovering
we are more together than we thought?

You are the known way leading always to the unknown,
 and you are the known place to which the unknown is
 always
 leading me back. More blessed in you than I know,
 I possess nothing worthy to give you, nothing
 not belittled by my saying that I possess it.
 Even an hour of love is a moral predicament, a blessing
 a man may be hard up to be worthy of. He can only
 accept it, as a plant accepts from all the bounty of the
 light
 enough to live, and then accepts the dark,
 passing unencumbered back to the earth, as I
 have fallen tine and again from the great strength
 of my desire, helpless, into your arms.

VI.

What I am learning to give you is my death
 to set you free of me, and me from myself
 into the dark and the new light. Like the water
 of a deep stream, love is always too much. We
 did not make it. Though we drink till we burst
 we cannot have it all, or want it all.
 In its abundance it survives our thirst.
 In the evening we come down to the shore
 to drink our fill, and sleep, while it
 flows through the regions of the dark.
 It does not hold us, except we keep returning
 to its rich waters thirsty. We enter,
 willing to die, into the commonwealth of its joy.

VII.

I give you what is unbounded, passing from dark to dark,
 containing darkness: a night of rain, an early morning.
 I give you the life I have let live for the love of you:
 a clump of orange-blooming weeds beside the road,
 the young orchard waiting in the snow, our own life
 that we have planted in the ground, as I
 have planted mine in you. I give you my love for all
 beautiful and honest women that you gather to yourself
 again and again, and satisfy--and this poem,
 no more mine than any man's who has loved a woman.

~From *A Timbered Choir*

1. Stanza III describes the author's marriage in terms of a graceful clearing in a forest with a house...How is marriage (or church membership or deep friendship) "made new day after day"? How is your relationship with God?
2. How is marriage/membership/ friendship the "known way leading always to the unknown?" (stanza V) How with God?
3. "To accept it, as a plant accepts from all the bounty of the light..." (stanza V) is to live by grace. How is grace shown in the poem? How/where do you see grace in your marriage/membership/friendship and with God?

Wednesday March 19

V. SIX DAYS OF WORK...

Six days of work are spent
 To make a Sunday quiet
 That Sabbath may return.
 It comes in unconcern;
 We cannot earn or buy it.
 Suppose rest is not sent
 Or comes and goes unknown,
 The light, unseen, unshown.
 Suppose the day begins
 In wrath at circumstance,
 Or anger at one's friends
 In vain self-innocence
 False to the very light,
 Breaking the sun in half,
 Or anger at oneself
 Whose controverting will
 Would have the sun stand still.
 The world is lost in loss
 Of patience; the old curse
 Returns, and is made worse
 As newly justified.
 In hopeless fret and fuss,
 In rage at worldly plight
 Creation is defied,
 All order is unpropped,
 All light and singing stopped.

~From *A Timbered Choir*

1. Sabbath is not earned and cannot be bought (line 5) and we cannot control it (line16-17). So how do we honor and practice Sabbath?
2. Line 18-19 says "The world is lost in loss/Of patience" Dante said, "The first proud being, he/ who was the highest of all creatures, fell - / unripe because he did not wait for light" (*Paradiso*, XIX, 46-48). How does our impatience unmake or defy creation?



Thursday March 20

WHATEVER IS FORESEEN IN JOY

Whatever is foreseen in Joy
Must be lived out from day to day
Vision held open in the dark
By our ten thousand days of work.
Harvest will fill the barn; for that
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.

And yet no leaf or grain is filled
By work of ours; the field is tilled
And left to grace. That we may reap,
Great work is done while we're asleep.

When we work well, a Sabbath mood
Rests on our day, and finds it good.

~From *A Timbered Choir*

1. How is the vision of joy lived out daily? What daily, mundane work do you do that contributes to your joy?
2. Yet great work is done while we're asleep? Are you able to rest and sleep well at night? Or do you worry over what more work needs to be done? Why?
3. Good work and good trusting rest go together so that we know that life is good. Can you think of a day in which you felt this combination of good work and good rest which resulted in your sense of joy and well-being and gratitude?

Friday March 21

AMISH ECONOMY

We live by mercy if we live.
To that we have no fit reply
But working well and giving thanks,
Loving God, loving one another,
To keep Creation's neighborhood.

And my friend David Kline told me,
"It falls strangely on Amish ears,
This talk of how you find yourself.
We Amish, after all don't try
To find ourselves. We try to lose
Ourselves"--and thus are lost within
The found world of sunshine and rain
Where fields are green and then are ripe,
And the people eat together by

The charity of God, who is kind
Even to those who give no thanks.

In morning light, men in dark clothes
Go out among the beasts and fields.
Lest the community be lost
Each day they must work out the bond
Between the goods and their price: the garden
Weeded by sweat is flowerbright;
The wheat shocked in shorn fields, clover
Is growing where wheat grew; the crib
Is golden with the gathered corn,

While in the world of the found selves,
Lost to the sunlit rainy world,
The motor-driven cannot stop.
This is the world where value is
Abstract, and preys on things, and things
Are changed to thoughts that have a price.
Cost + greed - fear = price:
Maury Telleen thus laid it out.
The need to balance greed and fear
Affords no stopping place, no rest
And need increases as we fail.

But now, in summer dusk, a man
Whose hair and beard curl like spring ferns
Sits under the yard trees, at rest
His smallest daughter on his lap.
This is because he rose at dawn,
Cared for his own, helped his neighbors,
Worked much, spent little, kept his peace.

~From *A Timbered Choir*

1. How do we live by mercy? What does the author mean? What does the author say is the proper response to living by mercy? How do you live in response to mercy?
2. What does it mean to "lose ourselves... in the found world of sunlight and rain..."? How does the author describe the lives of those who have lost themselves?
3. How does the author describe the lives of those who are "found selves"?
4. Which best describes your life? Lost self or found self?



Saturday March 22

**MANIFESTO: THE MAD FARMER
LIBERATING FRONT**

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.

And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.

When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.
So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.

Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millenium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.

Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.

Listen to carrion -- put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.

Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is nighest your thoughts.

As soon as the generals and the politicians
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go.

Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

~From *The Country of Marriage*

1. The first twelve lines are contrasted with the rest of the poem, which might be said to be ways to "practice resurrection." Reflect upon your own life; are you practicing resurrection?
2. What lines and images stand out to you? Why?
3. What might a church that practices resurrection look like?

