

READING

“Is not this a true autumn day? Just the still melancholy that I love - that makes life and nature harmonize. The birds are consulting about their migrations, the trees are putting on the hectic or the pallid hues of decay, and begin to strewn the ground, that one's very footsteps may not disturb the repose of earth and air, while they give us a scent that is a perfect anodyne to the restless spirit. Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.”

[*Letter to Miss Lewis*, Oct. 1, 1841]”

— **George Eliot, *George Eliot's Life, as Related in Her Letters and Journals***

Earth's Crammed with Heaven

The Reverend Cynthia A. Frado

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(Delivered by Carol Rothery)

Earth's crammed with heaven, says Elizabeth Barrett Browning, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees takes off his shoes, The rest sit 'round and pluck blackberries.

This is, perhaps, one of my favorite poems, for it encapsulates so much in those four little lines. *Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only she who sees takes off her shoes, The rest sit 'round and pluck blackberries.*

I think of this poem every year in the Fall, even though we have already reached that point in the season where there are just a few leaves remaining on their branches. Autumn, in its entirety, is by far one of the major reasons that I love living in New England. The turning of leaves from their monochromatic greens to incredible shades of red, orange and yellow is nothing short of heavenly to me. From the smallest plant to the largest tree, there is a magic pallet inside of each leaf, waiting to paint our forests and yards with incredible brush strokes of

oohs and aahs before they turn brown and are released from this life.

Suddenly, what once seemed rather ordinary and unremarkable now stands out to be counted. *Look at me*, they seem to say, and *see how beautiful I am...see what is special about me...see what divine spark dwells within my very being. It doesn't matter my size, my shape, my age...what matters is that there is something unique and interesting about me, and I have something important to contribute to the world.*

Sometimes, I think that we look at each other as if we are each a version of the same indistinguishable mold...the same leaf. Certainly, in the eyes of strangers we are all rather monochromatic within our skin colors, our presenting genders, our socio-economic lifestyles...rather ordinary and unremarkable as you pass us on the street. But what if, what if people were able to really see us, to really see the depth and breadth of our character, to really see what is special about us, what makes us laugh and cry, what concerns keep us up at night, what passions course through our veins? What if people could really see what sacred unique spark dwells within our very being? *Regardless of our size, our shape, our age, or any other identifying markers, there is something unique and interesting about each of us, and we each have something important to contribute to the world.*

Now that is the kind of autumn that I REALLY want to see...that autumn when every person brings their very best selves to the altar of humanity and we all go OOH and AAH when we look into each other's faces and souls.

Nature, I have found, has so much to teach us about ourselves. In her novel, *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker says, *I think it annoys God if you walk by the color purple in a field and don't notice.* I wonder how much of this life we don't notice? How much of nature we cast a blind eye toward? How many incredible people walk by us each day and we simply don't notice them, or we just can't imagine what lies beneath the surface? **We are, after all, storied souls on immense journeys, hiding in plain sight!**

Perhaps it is part of an inherent survival mechanism that we often tend to become self-focussed, self-absorbed with all the challenges, responsibilities, and technicalities of our days. Yet, the question begs to be asked: *How can we possibly notice the rich diversity of our community, our country, our world if we*

never look beyond the boundaries of our personal parameters? How can we possibly know the incredible people in this congregation if we don't make the effort to talk with one another, to hear each other's stories, to listen to one another's questions, to hold each other's pain and suffering, to appreciate each other's gifts and talents, to see what is beautiful and unique about each other?

Only she who sees takes off her shoes, The rest sit 'round and pluck blackberries, says the poet. There is an ancient medical practice in India called Ayurveda, and it requires of its practitioners that they remove their shoes and spend a few minutes each day walking barefoot upon the earth. When I worked for Dr. Deepak Chopra, he encouraged everyone on his staff to do the same. He told us this in February, and we all looked at him with expressions of "you can't be serious."

We asked him what was the Ayurvedic treatment for frostbite? He sat there, tolerant of our wisecracks and laughter, and then when we were finished he told us why it was important to make that daily effort. He said, *When we walk barefoot upon the earth we become more aware of our relationship to it. We become more energized, more sensitized to everything around us. And most important, we realize that we are not separate from it, but rather a part of it. And when you make that **connection**, he said, you regard everything around you differently...you see yourself differently, and then you are better able to see the world in a more interrelated way.*

Well, I wouldn't recommend walking barefoot outside during our New England winters, but I am going to encourage you to take the time to look beyond your blackberry bushes--to look beyond those everyday responsibilities and tasks that vie for your attention, and see the entire created order around you in a new and profound way. Certainly, the trees that have shed their facades are inviting us to look deeper into the world and into ourselves.

Today I encourage you to find your own means of connecting with the earth. If you are able, take a walk in the woods or a drive in the country during these remaining weeks of autumn and notice what has been hiding in plain sight. Then carry that newfound way of seeing into the everydayness of your lives. **BE THAT CONDUIT WHICH HELPS TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN OTHERS.** Bring that wonder and awe into all your relationships, and make an effort to get to know

people in a more intentional way. Discover that there is beauty and power, even in the broken places. At the very least, you can even share your blackberries with them!

John Muir, that great conservationist once said, *I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.*

As the seasons change, let Nature be your teacher. Take the time to look beneath the surface of things and people. Live each day as if it were always autumn, and let your best self show-up for each spectacular performance.

*Earth's crammed with Heaven...*and we each possess a piece of it in our souls.

AMEN and BLESSED BE