

I AM IN THE MANDORLA OF MY LIFE

Soliloquy for June Board Meeting (6/19/09)

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I am in the mandorla of my life, feeling the energy of the past – the sense of wind at my back propelling me forward into an unknown tomorrow toward which I move in faith, while held in the present by the force of this liminal space that holds the two parts together.

That holding takes me to the psalm I read in the morning. "The Lord is my strong hold," only I read it as "strongly held" – because of having someone in mind who came this week and who is also reading the psalms and who needs to be strongly held. This is a person who cried the first day he came and said, "I'm lost," and who wrote me an e-mail after our second time together reminding me of the time long ago in the vocational process where I had responded to his desire to read the Bible by giving him David Rosenberg's A Poet's Bible" and reading from it a psalm, and he reminded me that I had cried as I read it and now wanted to find the psalm again and wondered which one it was and did I remember, and now he said that all the psalms made him cry.

I came to be reading the psalms in the first place because I needed to get away from the bleakness and harshness of Jeremiah, and the over-familiarity of the New Testament, so had landed in the Psalms. At the same time, another person who came to see me a couple weeks ago had landed in the same place – the Psalms – at the recommendation of a friend, and we laughed together at the way Scripture can be so surprising because of the way we both were raised protectively, not seeing the starkness of the actual words and experience of warrior David. And now as I read the psalms each morning, I am aware that the two of us are at approximately the same place since we started this little regimen at about the same time, so whenever I read my psalm I am with this person in prayer and thought and I am aware of the confidence she has placed in me recently – something this person is not able to confide in others yet - even the most intimate associations including the person's spouse, and so I am carrying that.

And I am surprised too at a conversation with another person a week or so ago, a person lamenting the loss of mentors he used to be surrounded by, and in an attempt to help ground this person in reality, I asked him who might be closest to this position right now – thinking I could encourage him to deepen his

relationship to such a person, and then the answer to my question came, "It is you, right now." Oh, I thought. Oh, I don't know what that means.

And as I lay awake the other night, after getting an initial two hours sleep, I decided to get up and I wandered into the living room, thinking about this 5-10 minute sharing I am to do today, and intuitively I picked up this big book I put together. Yes, I am a person who puts things together. I am a mandorla woman. And I realized anew what a great story is contained in these pages! And how much I love history. In this case, it is partly Herstory. It is a great read. And right now it is alive because a woman coming here to Life/Work is launching her own God-inspired ministry called LightWork. When she says it quickly, it sounds like Life/Work, and I am startled for an instant. And I remember how this is the name we originally chose – Life/Work. Just Life Work, but the Commonwealth of Massachusetts said no, that name was taken and we would have to choose another. So we added Direction, and what a blessing that has been, for Direction is the mandorla, the uniting of Life and Work that Life and Work each has its own circle. And as I read our story, I see the life and energy and humor and intimacy in these pages. The newsletters were our way of reaching out to those around who cared and had been affected by the work. And these letters uncovered our own ongoing process in salient detail splattered over the pages – sometime in typewritten type and hand-drawn illustrations and headings, and a decade later in computer-generated fonts. And so this fledgling ministry of Light Work bespeaks life that I can feel in my own heart and bones, and it too is being born in Dorchester, just as Life/Work Direction was. And I know the hopes and twists and turns of those formative days and I want everyone here in this room to devour these pages in this book and laugh and cry and smile and think reflectively and feel the pulse of the Spirit in the shaping of the work in the days to come and feel their calling *de novo, de novo, de novo*.

And I come across an early reference to "Sarah Reynolds," and another a couple years later, a young aspiring writer who had suffered some personal hurts and had some obstacles thrown in her path, and who was persevering and even started her own business and who counted on our encouragement, and just three days ago I got an e-mail about a gathering planned for September on Vinalhaven Island with Tess Ward (author of *The Celtic Wheel of the Year* – a book I have come to love and have given to many others) and I was interested in the gathering (though I will not be going), and noticed that whoever sent the e-mail sent it in such a way that all the e-mail addresses were listed to whom this notice was going, so I read down through them and spied the name "Sarah

Reynolds" and so I took a chance and e-mailed her: "Are you the person who. . ." and waited. Back shot a reply and the story of all that has happened in the life and work of Sarah Reynolds whom we knew long ago, and I see what has transpired in her life and work that are like a thread woven into a tapestry, and when I go to Maine next week I will see her and hear the story in greater detail from her own lips.

And so I live in this mandorla of time where the past and future converge in the present, and the present is all we have. And I see the heading on a letter in 1982 saying "Nights at the Round Table" spelled with an N-i-g-h-t-s and I remember those nights and why it was important to keep the table round. And how we put that Merton quote on our brochure – "There is an important distinction between neurotic anxiety – a commitment to defeat – and existential anxiety, the healthy pain caused by the blocking of vital energies available for change, not a symptom of something wrong, but a summons to growth" and how over the years we have insisted on seeing others' anxious pain in those terms, and yesterday a Fathers Day card arrived in our mailbox from someone who sees Don in those terms – a father – and with good reason, considering her own father's unreliability, and she wrote "You changed my life" – on a card that bore the poet Frost's lines about taking the less-traveled road and that has made all the difference."

And I turn to a 1984 newsletter where Don wrote these lines, entitled *Mysterium tremendum*.

"I am a heretic by nature. I love the safety for my people (jews) in a democracy like this. No fickle finger of fate or boss can be ideally be raised over law of our land. And it is okay with me that Christians compete even with each other for folks like I am becoming. They want me and sort of alive even. Well and good and here I am feeling like the moon.

I am a believer by imagination. I love the freedom of eternity infused in our language (our communion). You can tell me where to go really, brother and sister in Christ, and I shall with God willingly. And it is beyond me how I am becoming able to.

Sort of dead to lots of stuff now the sun of His glory shows that there was maybe an astronaut on me. What did he/she do? Was it Jesus-like to poke a flag in my dust? What is this symbolism anyway to do with anything and how much like much of what I say is it helpful in our workshops that I say it and this way? Well maybe the

astronaut is Jesus and His flag really means something like I am discovered and my Home is calling for my presence and heartfelt works of reflection till the Day.

I am called out to speak over an ever present question--Do you understand?" - the answer being ongoing that is "Soon. Jesus shall return. Soon." Praise God.

And then came the surprising visit from the Walker's and a second beginning in the home on Halifax Street in Jamaica Plain, and the beginning of a life named Samuel who is being launched into orbit this summer. So maybe if this has sounded a bit like someone out to launch, or someone in orbit, I can be forgiven for this soliloquy by someone who "by reason of grace" has gone past the promised three score years and ten. Amen.