



Red guava blossoms.
Ordinary time begins,
in chapel and field.
Anonymous

On this Independence Day weekend it seems appropriate to advise you that outside my bedroom window a war is going on between myself and the Redcoats. My foes are fanatical English robins. The battleground is not the bridge in Concord, Massachusetts but our two small guava trees. No muskets are fired but there is the frequent rapping of my walking stick on the window.

Have patience. There really is a spiritual lesson here. But first about guavas. At this time of year the trees are covered with large red blossoms which, if left alone, will ripen into delicious fruit in November and December when such delicacies are greatly treasured around here. The problem is that the blossoms are, to birds, a narcotic! It is nice to see happy birds but every blossom they attack is one less guava for our table in autumn.

What to do? Native Americans in New England, when planting corn, planted an extra seed in each hill for the birds. That sounds very nice but I do not know how I could convince this army of flying addicts how to restrict themselves to one section of guava blossoms. We thought that netting the trees would be a good solution until the first bird was trapped. All things are NOT fair in love and war, and certainly not in conflicts between humans and nature. No nets.

Well, we put up strips of red and silver foil but I think the robins just think that adds a festive touch to their feasting area.

OK, lets go back to Concord and “the shot heard ‘round the world” on April 19, 1775. Our nation’s founders were fighting for individual freedom from monarchical domination. They were very noble in that venture and we continue the insistence on liberty. But, to be frank, we have never been enthusiastic about responsibility for the common good. Seeking personal advantage and lending a helping hand are too often competing agendas in American life. To be fair to the founders, the opening paragraph of our Constitution says to “promote the general Welfare” but that is an attitude often hard to

find in the Congressional sandbox.

So back to the robins and my dreams of a bowl of guavas in late autumn. Could it be that both the robins and I are part of the common community of nature and I should be thinking about our “general Welfare”? If so, does this calls for a sense of partnership, rather than how can I control the situation for only my advantage?

Would it be good to stop thinking our nation should always be “Number 1”? Is this beginning to sound rather subversive? Are lights blinking in some underground intelligence unit in the Utah desert? Let’s go back to the Prophet Micah (740–670 BCE),

*This is all the Lord asks of you,
To act justly,
To love tenderly,
And to walk humbly with your God.*

That humble walk will take us past all the parts of God’s creation; all the peoples, all the creatures, all the things. I am pretty sure that includes the robins in the guava trees.

Get enough people who are just, loving, and humble and we would have a peaceful world. What is the line in AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL — *And crown thy good with brotherhood*. Each of us can be a stepping stone in that direction.

Brother Toby
