



For the farmer, seeds that were planted in the spring have matured, been harvested, and now are stored. For all of us, autumn is a time to forget what is supposedly important, and watch the leaves turn and fall. For some it is the first autumn, and for some the last. For most of us it is an opportunity for love of nature and of people. We have been here before and most likely will be here again. At least that is the way I would like to think about this season.

Students in a nearby high school began the term very conscious of a classmate who ended her life. Many of them are wearing bracelets

which say “Speak Against Silence.” And, they are writing on each other, with a marker, “*I am someone.*” Suicide has become the third leading cause of death between the ages of 15 and 24 in the United States. And it is beginning to be a growing cause of concern among even younger people.

Recently the New York Times reported on an incident that deeply troubled the reporter and all others concerned. Rebecca was a 12-year-old who had been seriously maligned online. For a year she had been “cyberbullied” by a group of middle-schoolers. She changed schools, dropped out of media groups, and went into counseling. For a while it seemed as if things were getting better. Rebecca auditioned for the chorus and went back into cheerleading. But she and her taunters made contact again on the Internet. One morning Rebecca did not go to school but climbed up on the tower of an abandoned factory and jumped.

It is not just kids. The suicide rate for Americans between 35 and 65 has risen by a dramatic 30%. The generation of “baby boomers” started out with so much going for it. Life was full of possibilities in the post-World War II years. One social scientist speaks of “an illusion of choice – where people thought they would be able to re-create themselves again and again.” They wanted a life better than their parents. But that expectation frequently did not materialize. One psychologist observes that “many boomers are even reluctant to accept the realities of aging.”

Why?

A man named Frank tried to kill himself. He was not successful. When interviewed as to his reasons for suicide he said that when he was young “*people were more in tune with each other. ... There was not this big separation between the poor and the rich.*”

Both Frank and Rebecca were feeling the pain of social isolation. Of course there are always other contributing factors especially debt, poor health, the availability of very powerful, and potentially lethal medications. But an increasing number of people who were counting on a bright future find themselves in a social train wreck.

Now those of us who are not in situations like Rebecca’s or Frank’s have a serious job to do. I think it's very safe to say that there are people close to us, or near to us, who can find no way out except through a termination of their life. I read where someone recently said that only “overly religious” people talk about “hope.” I don't consider myself “overly religious” but I sure feel that a lack of hope is part of the problem that many of us face at this moment in our history.

Any number of authors have described heaven as “a day in October.” There are more wonderfully beautiful days coming up. As we take time to let autumn nourish us in some way, let us find ways to share that experience with the Rebeccas and Franks in our lives. In the process we may ourselves find more hope for the future.

I am among those who have found that to keep hope from slipping away we can turn to beauty — it surrounds us these days. The colors are amazing. Every breeze is a song. Perhaps we can encourage ourselves and others to join with Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) in the prayer which closes her poem *Besides the autumn poets sing*,

*Grant me, O Lord, a sunny mind,
Thy windy will to bear!*

Brother Toby