

I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his  
beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

Wendell Berry (1934 - )



There are not many leaves left on the branches of the trees around me. The sky is a little grayer. We construct little altars of remembrance for Dias de los Muertos — the Days of the Dead. And, one of you who has experienced a great loss, asks me, “How do you handle grief?”

My friend, I know you hurt. I would like to simply sit with you and

watch the birds but many miles separate us and words will have to do.

Yours is a question that demands an honest answer and I have to say, I don't think I do handle grief, I simply live with it.

I have encountered so much death and new life that frankly it all seems to run together. At emotionally shattering times I do find strength and comfort in a number of things, most especially faith and place.

I have a strong faith but I can seldom make sense of it. My intellectual understanding of mysteries such as “God” is constantly changing. Regardless of that unsatisfied curiosity I somehow comprehend that life has meaning. I cannot truly walk long with anyone who wants to capture the sacred in a box. But I do find companionship with all who seek for transcendence even though my experiences are different from theirs. Faith often comes down not to words but empathy — not to beliefs but to hugs. I'm satisfied that something divine is in there somewhere.

I also find a lot of nourishment in the sense of place. I'm on the sidelines admiring people with deep connections to home. Thoreau in Concord, Van Gogh in Arles, William Carlos Williams in Paterson, New Jersey, and from my own generation, delightful folks like Wendell Berry on the Kentucky River, who wrote this beautiful poem about what we can get from the place where we live.

*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.*

When death comes to those I love, I feel a special need to touch the little patch of earth that is my home in order to find an anchor in the emotional whirlwind. Each in our own way must find “the peace of wild things.” I really feel that grace is given for each of us, in our sorrows, to find the place “where the wild drake rests.” For me, it may be the ant on the window screen, or the bird on the bare limb, or the breeze blowing the grass at my feet, or the wind chimes outside the chapel. There is something unique to help and heal for each of us at these times.

At Starcross there is a prayer we say occasionally as we look down at our feet. It ends this way;

*Here is the path of history and the mystery of life. This is where we stand. This is where we live. This is where we find the face of God in a tiny wild- flower.*

May peace and all that is good be with you and all who are in need.

***Brother Toby***