



## Some Paradoxes of Late Spring

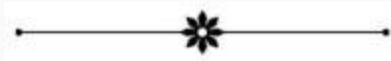
The bloody and tragic Civil War had just ended when spontaneous days of remembrance sprang up around the country. In most cases those remembered were victims from the north and from the south. It was originally called "Decoration Day", and still is in some places. Shortly thereafter, Memorial Day expanded beyond the military dead to become a national day of remembering all of our ancestors. There are still elaborate military rituals followed on Memorial Day but after WW II, it simply became a three-day weekend and the beginning of the summer holiday season.

Just a few weeks after we left San Francisco in 1976 and arrived here to establish Starcross, several elderly women knocked on our door. They asked if we and the five children we were caring for could



come to the small local cemetery to spread flower petals on the graves. They said there used to be a solemn observance but over the years it had faded away. I have a strong remembrance of the children assisting some of the elders as they walked from grave to grave very slowly. The children would scatter flower petals on each of the graves. I am sure there were many memories coming to the women.

But what I remember most is that as this touching observance was going on, the nearby road was filled with cars speeding on their way home following a long weekend at the coast. There was a really dramatic difference between the sounds from the road and the silence in the cemetery.



Most of the birds have hatched but many are still in their nests. In the morning the air is filled with choruses of young voices reminding their parents to catch and bring their breakfast. There is a human equivalent a short distance down the road at the local grade school. Young children, still secure in their homes and in the care and love of their parents, exuberantly run around the playground. My grandson Damien is one of those. I can't help but look out and see all the possibilities. Where will each of them be 20 years from now? I will never know. But that's okay!



Our Lance is a happy farmer! Everything is growing exactly as it should be. His experiments in the greenhouse have paid off. And with the help of some very interesting young helpers, plants are now growing where and how they should be! I can imagine what they will all be like when they are ripe and going on our table, and the tables those of our neighbors who are struggling. Our food pantry is a small contribution. But I do feel good knowing that when these children I see

on the playground come home, they will have a nutritious dinner and their parents perhaps will have a few less worries.

Where is the paradox? Let us look down to the border between our Southwest and Mexico. Further south, life in the “Black Triangle” of the three countries of Central America is very frightening. Death can be around any corner in those corrupt lands ruled by mobs. Some parents make the difficult journey north hoping for a better life, especially for their children. But when they come to our border they are stopped by “the zero tolerance” policy of the present administration. In what can only be described as a mean-spirited strategy, the children are separated from their parents. The mothers and fathers are put in camps along the border but most of the children are sent to detention facilities in the Chicago area. How long are they separated? It can be a very long time. Sister Julie, who coordinates moderate efforts concerning immigrants, tells me that over 700 children have been separated from their parents in the past few months. At least 100 of them are under the age of four.

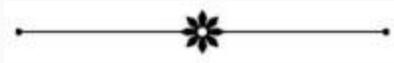
Do you remember those words on the Statue of Liberty? An immigration lawyer told me that many fleeing to our country know them by heart. My father did, and he was third-generation Scotch-Irish.

*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless,  
tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

Incidentally, Donald Trump’s mother was born on the Scottish island of Lewis and his paternal grandfather in a German village. I wonder if they would have been able to get into the United States under the present attitude of this administration?

I do not often cite prophecies, but something from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah seems to apply to these immigration issues. Jeremiah, speaking for God, says that a nation gets to keep the land it has been given IF it does not

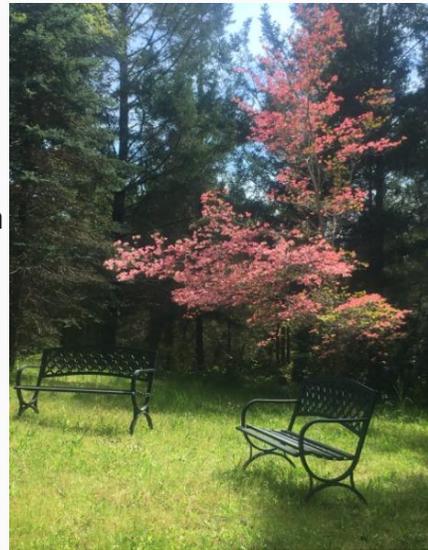
mistreat, *the alien, the orphan, the widow...*(22:3). I think it might be wise to pay heed to that!



As beautiful as this time of year is, sometimes things go wrong. Ravens steal the eggs from the swallows' nests. An unexpected cold snap retards the development of the tomatoes. Rain begins just as you start out for a walk in the woods. Sickness hits someone you love. A gap opens between you and an important friend.

I am told the Cistercian hermit-monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968), while with friends who were active in civil rights, antiwar activities, and concerns for the poor, would frequently ask himself “What am I doing with my life?” This is a question we all ask at different times in our lives.

When we're young we sometimes find ourselves trying to be what our parents or friends want us to be. We often define ourselves by what other people think of us. Then there comes a time when we start looking inside ourselves to discover who we really are and what we want to be doing. We give it a try. It seldom works out as perfectly as we would like but we're moving in the right direction. Even so, perhaps at the pinnacle of a profession, we ask “What am I doing here?” And maybe there is a big shift in our life. I think of



Jimmy Carter (1924–). One day he was President of the United States. The next day he was hammering boards for Habitat for Humanity. But we don't always have that freedom. There is the question of family, children to be put through college, illness and a thousand other concerns. Even in those circumstances, there is often a void — an empty space which appears in our lives. It's easy to miss that space. We should try hard not to.

Simone Weil (1909–1943), had a great respect for voids. She once wrote,

*Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it. For “grace” substitute “God”, “divinity”, “spirit”, “angels”, “sacred”, or anything you want.*

Sophie Scholl was a 21-year-old student at the University of Munich. She and her brother were arrested for distributing leaflets calling for resistance to the Nazis. They were quickly tried and executed on February 22, 1943. A few days before the inevitable, Sophie was listening to a recording of Franz Schubert's *Trout Quintet* and writing a letter to a friend. I came across a copy of the letter in *The Plough* magazine. Here is part of what Sophie wrote,

*Isn't it a riddle...and awe-inspiring, that everything is so beautiful? Despite the horror. Lately I've noticed something grand and mysterious peering through my sheer joy in all that is beautiful, a sense of its creator. Only man can be truly ugly, because he has the free will to estrange himself from this song of praise.*

*It often seems that he'll manage to drown out this hymn with his cannon thunder, curses and blasphemy. But during this past spring it has dawned upon me that he won't be able to do this. And so I want to try and throw myself on the side of the victor.*



This morning when I looked out of my bedroom window, I saw two adult quail couples hopping, almost dancing, on the gravel path coming down the hill.



There were no young quail following them. Their days of parenthood were over for this season. Their offspring were self-sufficient.

The quail on the path were not frantically looking for food, nor did they have any apparent concern for

predators. Even the occasional tractor sound did not distract them from their *Song of Praise*. A void had opened, probably for a short time, and the quail equivalent of grace had entered in! Somehow they knew that they were just in the right place in the complicated and yet simple drama of nature and life.

May we follow their example! And when in doubt, listen to the *Song of Praise* that is always within each one of us.

***Brother Toby***