

Far distant vistas
leading me into myself
right here on this bench.

Sister Marti



HAPPINESS AND PAIN AND PEACE

My days of walking in the woods have been greatly curtailed by problems of mobility. However my memory is clear. I remember that every place I looked following a winter storm there was death: trees that had fallen, plants that had been uprooted. Life and death seem to go together. If I sat down on a stump and looked at a fallen and decaying log I found remarkable communities of plants and tiny creatures growing there. And there were also new sprouts coming from the extraction of some of the overturned evergreen trees.

We've just finished a festive time of joy with friends and family. Yet for many this is also a time of deep pain with a sense of loss. People who were important to us are gone and we feel that missing part of our life so keenly in these midwinter days. For me and others at Starcross we feel the loss of our Sister Marti (Sept. 24, 1939 – Feb. 22, 2016) in everything we do. She loved this season so much. Marti was the one who got up early and made the fire, who gathered us together to sing carols, who directed the decorations and convinced us that there were more important ways to spend our time than checking off items on our “to do” list.



Everyone reading these words has probably felt this same pain wrapped in joy at this time of year. But just like the discoveries to be made in a fallen tree in the woods, the presence of those we love somehow remains with us and grows as the years go by. It is a community of new life. My five-year-old grandson Damien dreams of the grandmother he only knew for a few years. And in one way or another we know Marti is always with us: in the darkness, in front of the Christmas tree, walking up the path to the Chapel.

I thought it would be appropriate to share something Marti wrote a few years ago. She called it simply, *The Peaceful Path*. I thought it might be a peaceful path for some of the rest of you at this unique time of year.



From Sister Marti —

Our chapel at Starcross perches atop a little hill about a thousand feet from the house. Several times each day we leave the bustle and activities below. The short walk up the hill offers a simple awareness of nature, an encounter with reality outside our own heads, a moment of refreshment and renewal – a breath of fresh air.



As we ascend, trees and buildings recede. Gradually more and more of the sky becomes visible. Sometimes the distant mountaintops poke through like islands in an ocean of fog. Sometimes the whole world sparkles with silver frost. Or, a brilliant gold sunset fades imperceptibly to smoky purple gray. Some nights we see our own moon shadows. Other nights everything is pitch black but the stars.

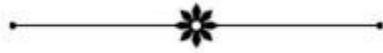
We humans are so easily distracted. It is possible, even easy, for us to live entire days and weeks without noticing much around us. Our internal voices chatter on. We feel compelled to “get things done”. No time is allotted for something as unproductive as looking up to the sky.

I am beginning to understand how peaceful moments in prayer join each of us to other people and to the rest of the world. It is as if there is a big sacred pool, and when we become quiet we enter that pool and join with God — and everyone else is there too.

Walking up the hill there are always memories. I remember a child trying to learn to tie her shoe, and I think of all the mothers who have watched their children do this, and what a tender moment it is. I think of our children who have died, and how just such a memory encapsulates the essence of their life.

I’m thankful for the laughter — our laughter, the children’s laughter, how it raises us up from our problems and frustrations. Most of all, I am thankful to be alive. The children have taught us what a gift life is, and how precious every day can be.

Mother Ann Lee (1736 –1784) of the Shakers said, *Live as if every moment were your first and every day were your last.* I think if we can manage that – nothing else is necessary.



It is good to have times of remembrance for those with whom we walked on paths of peace.

At the end of the afternoon we here at Starcross usually gather in the chapel for Vespers. The Anglican community has a better term for this time of common prayer — Evensong. There is meditation, reflection, some singing, a poem or two and a time for remembering the lives of people our friends have asked us to recall each year on a particular day. It is a great privilege for us to do this. It leaves me feeling part of a very wide and precious circle.



We usually end this act of remembrance with a couple of prayers recited by all. The first is from a Jewish tradition and goes something like this,
May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing and bless those in need of healing with complete recovery, the renewal of body, the renewal of spirit.

This is followed by a Buddhist prayer we learned from something the Dalai Lama wrote,
May the poor find means. Those weak with sorrow find joy. May the forlorn find new hope and happiness. May the frightened cease to be afraid, and those bound be free. May the weak find power. May our hearts join in friendship.

At those times when I find myself alone, or feeling alone, I find it comforting to reflect on those who came before me or with whom I had travelled. And usually my last act of the day is to remember those in need of help, often including myself, and then to say good-night to those I love but who are no longer walking the earth with me.



I had a birthday recently and with it came a strong memory of my parents. I took the time to dust off the frames of some cross-stitched pictures of birds that my mother sewed for me when it became obvious that we would be physically separated as I moved on with my

life's work. Many memories came to me as I dusted. Afterwards I stepped outside and was pleasantly struck by the number of birds flying around outside my door. It was one of those times when we feel free of the timeline between birth and death. What has been, what is, what will be, all seem to merge for an instant.

And so, as Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) put it,
All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.

Brother Toby

PS: If you have loved ones you would like us to remember each year, just click this [link](#). Of course, there is no fee.