

The Steadiness of Love
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The first play I ever saw was in high school, somewhere around 1968. It was The Man of La Mancha, performed in one of the first (I think) theaters in the round, the Anta Theater, and it starred Richard Kiley. I sat riveted throughout the entire performance.

I remember it all, right from the first scene, when the narrator opened with the line:

I shall impersonate ... a man.
Come, enter into my imagination, and see him:
Boney, hollow faced, eyes that burn with the fire of inner vision.
He conceives the strangest project ever imagined ...
To become a knight errant
And sally forth into the world, righting all wrongs!

Hear me now, oh thou bleak and unbearable world
Thou art base and debauched as can be!
And a knight with his valors all bravely unfurled
Now hurls down his gauntlet to thee!

I am I, Don Quixote,
The Lord of LaMancha,
My destiny calls, and I go!
And the wild winds of fortune
Shall carry me onward ...
To wither so ever they blow ...
Wither so ever they blow ...
Onward to glory I go!

You could have knocked me over with a Magdalena (a lemon flavored cupcake)!

Years later, how many – 40? Can't be – sometimes when I start wandering in my thoughts, I think of that "Come, enter into my imagination..." because there often seems to be no visible paths to follow when my thinking gets going.

That's sort of what happened over the last few days. As I read the readings for today, I continued to be intrigued by the drama that unfolds in Kings! What a cast: and story! Ahab and Jezebel, Nathan, Elijah, the Baalian prophets/priests, and today the passing of the prophetic torch to Elisha.

Did you hear that great line that Elisha repeats twice to Elijah: “As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you”

That verse, repeated for emphasis, fired the synapses in my brain and took me right to Naomi and Ruth. Remember them?

Naomi’s husband Elimelech had died. She was left with two sons: Mahlon and Chilion, who each took a bride from the women of Moab: Orpah and Ruth. Well, Mahlon and Chilion died, and Naomi brought her daughters-in-law back to the land of Judah, to send them back to their families. Orpah left and began a career in media and synagogue talk shows, but Ruth refused to go:

Book of Ruth, Chapter 1:16-17 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

This is the kind of live story I want to star in, but that’s for another time!

Still, there I was, in the imaginary theater of my mind, more intrigued by this loyalty, love, and courage of Elisha to stay with Elijah; Ruth to stay with Naomi; and then the Gospel reading:

If there is an image of Jesus that has stayed with me, as much as any theatrical moment or lyric from a song, it is the idea of Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem. “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to Jerusalem.” Written in retrospective of course, by Luke, with a surgical and somewhat antiseptic precision, what he is really saying is: as he prepared to move toward his execution...

The synapses ignited again, more intensely, more sadly, more reflective of the bleak and unbearable world that maybe prompted Cervantes to write...

Nonetheless, what was generated was the idea or sense of what kind of courage this man had, the conviction, the love of others that he would not leave them, not abandon them ever, even unto his death and then from beyond, by his example, would lead them to the eternal love of the one who created us all.

These two readings transcend the present and the material. The mantle that Elijah takes off and hands to Elisha is no longer needed where Elijah is going. The things that entangled Jesus’ community in his time and ours: resentments, the disciples desire to bring revenge upon the village that would not receive him; the endless restlessness of this journey; leaving this world behind, as we reach for the higher things... expansive, transcendent, cosmic – loving.

Not unlike call of Cervantes, I think, the idealism he writes of, face to face with the realismo of then and now, the higher order that surely its roots, conscious or otherwise, in the deeply religious history of Spain, then turned heinous in what must have seemed antithetical to all things religious to the oppressed - the Inquisition.

But what got these prophets and others through the times, without losing the fire of the vision.

What gets us through. "Hear me now, oh thou bleak and unbearable world Thou art base and debauched as can be!"

Why do we keep on keeping on...

For me, it is love (the "all" inclusive of live – courage, fealty, humility, intimate touch, included, all aspects of a love beyond all understanding?). The love of poets, writers, and bards...

So, I did a little poking around the 16th Century and others and I had no trouble discovering the same intensity of the love so far described in many places:

Let's play a little: "Name that whatever:

#1: Discovery of love

The good-morrow, John Donne 17th Century

I WONDER by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seaven sleepers den?
T'was so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.

#2 – Love beyond discovery...

Sonnet CXVI, William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

#3 Describing love by describing nature...

A Red Rose by Robert Burns 1794

O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luv am I;
And I will luv thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry:
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
I will luv thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.
And fare thee weel, my only Luve,
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my Luve,
Tho' it ware ten thousand mile.

#4 Love inseparable, no dissolution possible, regardless of the barriers

TO ALTHEA FROM PRISON

by Richard Lovelace

Richard Lovelace (1618-1657) was a dashing, handsome, well-educated gentleman who, as a soldier and poet, strongly defended the king during The Bishops' War in Scotland (1639-1640) and the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). While confined there for seven weeks in 1642, he spent part of his time writing "To Althea" and another poem.

S1

When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates,
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates;
When I lie tangled in her hair
And fetter'd to her eye,
The birds that wanton in the air
Know no such liberty.

S4

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

Love that is discoverable in all of us, beyond all we can imagine, comparable only to the most beautiful of nature, which itself pales against it, love that cannot be broken.

What is it we all strive so to describe in words and in song?

[Music of each song, played in parts]

#5 Dreaming about love:

When I Fall in Love

December 28, 1956 Nat King Cole

Introduced in the movie One Minute to Zero (1952)

Original Hit by Doris Day

#6 Sometimes confused and

Crazy

Classic Country

Patsy Cline

#7 Waiting for love

Some Enchanted Evening

Mantovani

South Pacific

#8 Seeking Assurance

Do You Love Me Zero Mostel & Maria Karnilova

Tevia sings to Golde: Fiddler

Dreaming, confusing, waiting, longing, seeking assurance...

Whether we write about it or sing of it, watch movies about it from Greta Garbo as Marguerite Gautier and Robert Taylor as Armand Duvall in Camille to Heathcliffe and Cathy in Wuthering Heights...

It strikes me that all these things have been an endeavor to seek and find in more present, maybe distracting ways... the love that Elijah and Elisha; Naomi and Ruth foretold – and the incarnation of that Love in Jesus and his sacrifice and faith:

That is that the love we seek is what leads us here, gets us through, and lives long beyond us – with us in whatever it is that God holds next for us. In the meantime, our task, perhaps is to become more of that love in the present, expressed and lived into our lives in all the ways we can find.

We are just on the edge of wonder, as wonderful as that may be...

And what to compare it all to... well, hard to say, but we try:

Sonnet XVIII "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest;
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Amen.