

Christmas Eve 2012 – Meditation

From the stillness of this holy night, and from the old, old story telling itself once more right here among us
and from the world around us
a call to look down.

And it's hard. It's hard to do that, don't you find? I like looking up.

The stars are so lovely, and the atmosphere up there must be fresh and clean
and here we are in a barn. The air in here is....well, “fresh” is not the word that leaps immediately to mind.

Here we are right in the warm, noisy stench of what it is to be alive.

And we look down....

it's dark in here.

No radiant beams from thy holy face....the light from that star outside? That's no floodlight, bathing the sky, and is only dimly reflected in here...just there, through the crack in the stable wall. Here, our eyes adjust to that. Our eyes that crave the light, dilate only unwillingly to accommodate deepest dark, to shadow, to the tiniest flicker.

Outside, those shepherds heard angels, shook their scraggy heads and wondered what had happened, what should they do? Looking out they saw the stars reflected in the water of the stream where they had brought their flocks to rest, and for the life of them, there where the water met the sky, the reflection and the reality they did not know where heaven stopped and earth began. And so in the half light, looking down lest they stumble, looking up in case the angel chorus would do an encore, they ran to find out.

In the barn, no such vision. Only the starlight coming in through those old boards....our eyes adjust to even a flicker

But one tiny flicker there is. There in the hay, when we look down.

Here in the barn we *need* to look down. There are kittens underfoot, and piles of...barn things. It's important to watch where you walk, here. This is real life.

One flicker of light there in the hay. And we move closer and there he is – and he's beautiful.

In the face of brand new life, the impulse is to bow, to bend, to lower our eyes – to let our silence say what we cannot....

a new life has the power to bring our vocal cords to their knees.

But then - you look away....because in the hay you see that child but you see other things as well.

looking down is dangerous.

you look at that child, perfect, ten fingers, ten toes, a set of lungs that maybe even now he's using to howl his newborn praises into the night air

but around him though dance shadows....

and almost as though he's the lightning rod, a divining tool, a portal....

you look at him and you see that

this one child is alive

but others are not. Others are not. THEY seem to be there too, in the shadows of that stable; their lost, slight voices a counterpoint to his healthy newborn wail

and, partly because it's this time of year...and partly because we are human, we feel in our own bones the ache of a world where children are shot and leaders choose to starve themselves because there is no justice and millions of babies suffer unspeakably

and we think - how can we rejoice at this one life when others are suffering

and it seems the right song for now is not a lullaby but a lament, a cry, a drum beating demanding to be heard

and our hearts break with it all.....

and to come here on bended knee seems too much. Were we to bend the knee now - we might never ever get up – we might break in two.

But look. Look for a moment. **THIS IS IT. THIS IS THE FLESH AND BONES, THE MARROW AND THE BEATING HEART OF THE MATTER.** This is the mystery of our faith. It's here in the shadows, here in the hay we look down

and we see

the fullness of God with us Emmanuel.

So many people say – as they look up with eyes open and desperate for truth

they say where is God, if indeed there IS a God,

And if there IS a God, who is God in the midst of a world sobroken?

And the answer of this night - the answer I invite you to consider - to be born in you right now is....where is God? God is right here. Right here in this stable with its shadow and questions and poverty.

Right here in this child who will soon have to flee - a refugee - to escape a tyrant's insane grasp for power

who will himself be homeless and rejected

and in the end die a criminal's death.

Where is God?

What we do here is honour the question, is accompany one another as we keep asking. And finding and asking yet again.

And we say that the key, the hint, the clue, the WAY is here.

God's very own self, here in a stable

And it calls forth from us

not a nod of intellectual assent, not even full blown carols of praise

but a grunt of recognition from somewhere too deep to name.

Here at the manger, looking down at this child

this is not so much a theoretical answer as it is a place to gather as we struggle and live out the mystery.
A place to set down your pack for a moment, rest your aching feet and shoulders sore from the journey,
and be one with the other creatures who also gather here.

A warm place with a light in the window so we will not be lost,
a hand to hold or a song to sing when the pain becomes too much or the questions threaten to pull us
under.

This child, God's YES to the world in spite of everything
will gather us and gather us again.

Will reach out his tiny fist and grasp life
and ask you to do the same.

His work will be to bring us together. He will reawaken us to awe.

He'll gather us....

back to our true authentic selves and our will and passion to live
back to the dream of God "Peace on earth, good will to all"
back to the centre, the source, the Creator.

This is his work. He gathered them at the manger – what an unlikely lot!

His work, his life is to lower our eyes, patiently connect what has been severed,
and bring the world together.

You think he can't do that?

and look at US– he's done it again!