

## **Bravery and Balm**

Two weeks ago when Michael Bischoff spoke, we sang of the balm in Gilead. I wondered, "How are things in Gilead now? What offers balm for the life threats we face, as individuals and as a planetary whole?"

Here are sources of balm I have found, offered now, not for numbing, but for renewal of courage and strength.

Balm of possibility. Through the silence that day, came a flow of stable earth energy. Michael, even with a tumor, may live long. You may each live long. I, with my new diabetes, may live long. Our children may live long and well. Many futures, even miraculous ones, are possible if we turn toward them.

*Balm of possibility and of work*

### Balm of Tears

No one seems to cry anymore.  
Too scared, I guess.  
Used to be, we cried,  
Then laughed and felt better.

Now we laugh and feel better first,  
Afraid the crying won't stop.

But there is balm in tears.

Cry for the children,  
Cry for the whales (too big for comprehension, not too big, though, to understand, to stand up for, to swim beneath).  
Cry for yourselves, who want children and the earth to go on and on and on

and on

Cry for the children of bees.

These tears, our tears, are honey.

Each tear is a prayer, each tear.

*Balm of tears*

Balm of acceptance and memory. Any of us, in fact, all of us, may pass on early, as some who lived among us have done. And yet those beloved are still, in many senses, here. Through us, they re-speak what they have spoken, they re-mind

what they called us to before, they comfort, they nudge. “I will live on,” Elaine Carte said, “as long as I am remembered.”

Granted, memory is frail. Many of you did not know Elaine; thus you cannot remember her. Perhaps the rocks remember, perhaps the wind.

*Balm of memory let go*

### Balm in New Stories, New Songs

The old stories, the old songs often fail us. Even “Balm of Gilead” has troubling, untruthful lines. Those called up in me another song I learned in Sunday School. —“Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm. Dare to make it known.” I have often, that song bolstering me, been a Daniel, stood alone, made my firm purpose known . . . and, like my ancestors and my culture, I have often caused harm with my courage.

This week, when I re-read the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, I heard it from the side of the trapped and intentionally-starved lions, heard it from the side of the women and children and men fed to those lions. I could still hear the message intended by the self-righteous humans who told it, but I no longer honor them.

No. If we are to save this earth and its beings, we have to weave new stories. “Dare to be a witness. Dare to turn around. Dare to alter your whole life. Dare find your ground.”

I tried to write a new hymn.

Spawning Life, all thanks be given  
for this teeming, living earth!  
Dawning Light, we see we've riven  
holiness from wondrous birth.

If we turn and live more humbly,  
could our earth once more be saved?

Wondrous Mother, womb of plenty,  
is there succor in thee yet?  
Might our errors, though most heavy,  
mild correction from thee get?

If we turn and live most humbly,  
could our earth this time be saved?

We must learn we are not better  
than the soil we've trodden down.  
Fearsome Father, wild begetter,

we have stolen, hoarded, raved.

If we turn and live more humbly,  
could our earth yet now be saved?

*Balm of story and song*

### Balm of Reflective Humor

Coming home from meeting that day, I felt a light appreciation for the past when things seemed secure, a past that even my sister was not born early enough to share. So I called her.

In attempting to explain how very long I've lived, I told her that my password hints for credit cards and banks have become difficult. I am asked for my paternal grandmother's maiden name--and I have to ponder . . . "paternal?" That would be dad, but he's gone; can't call him to ask. And his grandmother, is that who they want?-- which would be difficult, I think, because she died even before telephones. No, they are asking for his mother's name, my grandmother. Vera, my grandmother, died in 1960, and I don't remember her using a phone.

So many of my password hints are obsolete! Yet, I cannot easily pick more up-to-date security questions as I have no spouse to tell the bank when I met, I have no place where I took a honeymoon (unless it be this first year of diabetes, which is called "the honeymoon phase"), and even no name for the street on which my childhood home stood.

My sister laughed. "Surely there was a name to the street. How did people find you?"

"No," I said, "there was no name. Our telephone number was Oxford 44295. But our street had no name."

"How did the mailman deliver the mail?" she asked.

"We went to the post office for it. I remember turning the gold dial to open the small black and silver box."

To check my memory, I called our mom. How did we sell that house with no address to indicate its placement on earth?

"No, we didn't have an address," Mom said. "We lived across the street from the school."

"Yeah, I know that," I said. "But didn't we have an address?"

"Everyone knew where we lived," she said. "We lived kitty-corner to the dentist."

"And we went to the post office to get our mail, didn't we?"

"Yes. Dad would come home from the school, I would leave you kids with him,

and I would walk to the post office to get some fresh air. People knew where we lived."

After I got off the phone, I put Chopin's waltzes on the record player, an old record of old waltzes played by some person now passed away. I think I played those waltzes on Grandma's piano once, at least some of them, at least some simple version of them. But I'm not sure. That was so very long ago.

That time, when the earth was fresh and breathing. When everyone, we thought, knew where they lived.

*Balm of humor reflected*

### Balm of Nature, Even When Stressed

Early in January, I went North with the challenging task of ceasing to let my new disease eat up quite so much of my body and time.

The first night, stars spread the sky. Orion led me home from the job site to the lake. Later a sliver of waning moon rose.

The next evening when I threw the dish-washing water onto the snow bank, I heard a soft keening of a unfamiliar wandering bird. Then the chatter of a red squirrel. Also the caw of a crow.

Later three deer walked down toward the house, hungering. By the time I spread corn in the trough, they had gone.

Two nights later snow fell slowly through the birches and spruce and over the finally-frozen lake. The island across appeared as a muted green shadow. A flock of perhaps fifty small birds, maybe finches, flew past, from the western cedars on the left, across the open lake-view, into the cedars to the east.

I rested in the quiet. I returned to this life.

*Balm of nature*

***"I am convinced" wrote Joanna Macy, "that if the world is to be healed through human efforts, it will be by ordinary people, people whose love for this life is even greater than their fear."***