

Bethel Reflection May 16, 2021
“Pandemic Kaleidoscope”

This reflection of free verse came first as aural celebrations
by inspiration in the Chihuahuan Desert
this February while reading Brian Doyle’s
The Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the World.
This wonderful book was a Christmas gift from Pam.
Three quotes of that book’s narrator, Robert Louis Stevenson,
provide some insight into where this narrator is planning to take you.

*“In a real sense a story is a dream that I am asking you to share.
But to dream in your own fashion, and not so much mine; a story
is a willing partnership, which you join with a will, or decline.
pp195-6*

*“We do not acknowledge enough, I think, the clan and tribe of our friends, who are not assigned
to us by blood, or given to us to love by a merciful Creator, but come to us by grace and gift from
the mass of men, stepping forth unannounced from the passing multitudes, and into our lives;
and so very often stepping right into the inner chamber of our hearts. In so many ways we
celebrate those we love as wife or husband, father and mother, brother and sister, daughter and
son; but it is our friends whom we choose, and who choose us; it is our friends we turn to
abashed, when we are bruised or broken by love and pain; it is our friends whose affection and
kindness are foods and drink to our spirits, and sustain and invigorate us when we are worn and
weary.” p. 203*

*“But if ever a human condition ought to be viewed with the most withering suspicion at all times,
it is that which we call sense; which is quite often only the frontier of our imagination, sometimes
a prison wall we erect around ourselves, fearful of what is beyond.” p.207*

1.
Gather, friends!
There is a trip to be taken lightly,
To stroll beyond the gate, sprightly, to the rollercoaster,
to a visual tintinnabulation, silent, invisible explosions,
of racial and spatial introspections,
into your wildernesses,
vibrant tessellations,
optics to haptics:
tastebuds savoring stars and symphonies,
and whether you be reticent or rather bold,
hurry over,
run like a Kerouac sentence,

step lively, presto pizzicato!
There is a rambling talker to endure,
your burden for the next while.
We are so weary of pestilence and violence,
of political jousting, trial by combat,
ongoing duels of knife throwing pundits,
killing us slowly with words of hate,
with rubrics of Antebellum social order,
with swastikas and automatic weapons.
The pathos! The passion!
We have witnessed the crucifixion!

2.

We have added a new disease to the natural mysteries of our world,
that changed you, and consequently changed your neighbor, your sister,
her pen pal, all her Zoom sisters and brothers.
Today we try to hope, our druthers, to find some comfort in its waning.
Discarding malaise,
some of us giddy, some leery, some swoon at the possibilities of regained liberties,
self-denied nobly, altruistically.
We have been flummoxed by societal prestidigitation,
stymied by political sleight of hand,
our mantra, "Enough is enough!"
We have spent a year with our television's screen aflutter
the vertical hold zooming endlessly,
the computer screen pixelated,
its Microsoft sky of square stars with no known god,
alone on
islands of grief,
grappling the monster of self- pity.
Our glasses and binoculars and telescope have all fogged up
from a year of heated angst and hazy introspection.
But *terra firma* is in sight!

3.

Be my companion; let us break bread together through sounds
and tastes and smells,
however uncertain or reliable they may be.
Regardless, your imagination has no bounds, no rules.
Be playful now. Let us play in congregational fellowship.
Let us leave the loneliness of individual humdrum sanctums.
We do walk through this Pandemic together.
Bethel gifts you a united means with which to see, community.
Our ancestors were bedazzled by the camera obscura and the stereopticon.
I am old.
Do I recall, "Give a show, give a show, give a show projector!"

Prepare to be confounded by the deconstructionist kaleidoscope!
It fragments all you know, all you see,
and what remains are shards of puzzle pieces
that may not please.
But, it is our world today
and we must play the cards we're dealt!

4.

We'll seek new eyes for life beyond our suffering plague,
so each of your imaginations receives a kaleidoscope.
Pick it up, place it to your eye, turn the cylinder,
stake out the dimensions of your new universe,
its new chaos and unknown order,
where all is surprise.
Let us look up to the mysteries of the black holes of the cosmos,
down to the sulfuric caldron of churning magma.
The kaleidoscope, of course, changes everything!
An octagon was once a ring,
a straight line is now jaggedly serpentine.
All the tents along the street are pretty polka dots!
Don't you hear,
the street protesters and rioters in harmony
singing ditties and mindless limericks,
the calamities and indignities of degradations behind us?
Taste the humble pie served to us on the paper plates of the shelter!
You find yourself in a jumbled world
that is a cubist painting
in a culture guided by Dadaist sensibilities
in a society chopped up and glued together again
by anarchist bureaucrats.
That's our new reality,
always punting to keep the team's hopes alive.
Now you see your responsibilities, the hobbies that keep you vibrant,
that let you thrive,
the actions of your faith form a distorted new obtuse angle.
So, you must adapt to all new tangents thrown at you recklessly.

5.

The kaleidoscope shifts and dices every familiar comfort:
If the alchemists among us
could boil down Christianity
to its basest elements,
would it not be
our Golden Rule?
And if there is an ounce or gram of truth in this,
then the faith is just as a mirror and we must

lead and follow through this rotating nihilistic looking glass,
where all becomes backwards,
where left is right,
and all of us question
the perceptions of our sight.
Twist: exhilaration. Twist: annihilation. Twist: expectation. Twist: frustration.
Can we take the leaden weight of this pandemic
and transform it into a golden rule universal elixir?
In the streets is that the devil I see?
You can level with me,
yet perhaps it is just a demonic fantasy.
I mean, is there a dietistic duality in such heathen chemistry?
If we have our yin, must we not have our yang?
Turn the tube's ratchet a click or two.
Gatekeepers take five!

6.
Lest we forget our quest for vision through worship,
let us reflect with this simple mechanical device,
This one designed to view the world in splintered ways,
other worlds for you with twists gyrating
your kaleidoscope,
this cylinder, your baton, your scepter.
you ratchet to left or right
you need not be deft
you are fine as hefty or slight.
In short,
the kaleidoscope is equally suited to all.
Jibber, jabber, jibber jabber!
Liberty! Equality! Brotherhood and sisterhood!
All who seek a journey to another yet unruptured place,
surely come
with some patience and with grace.
The contagion quells...
Us? Itself?
We just know our souls need some sleep
without dreams of various dooms,
catastrophes, and those gnawing
anxiety nightmares worried through in tossed slumber
in isolation.

7.

With my kaleidoscope now
I look through the lens
of my personal bias,
anachronistic ideas that eat upon the commonweal.
Do I hear the Crow named Jim caw
at my white lies,
genteel deceptions,
the gray areas of my decision-making?
Ulysses, do the Sirens lure you?
Imagine the black man driving, the terror of the sirens.
What is alluring, what is despicable?
What is nurture; what is nature?
Which strangers hear the visibility of our Bethel civility?
My flashing lights may be the dread of TIA worrying our minds,
but for the driver of color may be the
coupe de grace, the bleak exit of her earthly existence.

8.

And the black of night
which you naturally fear for
its lack of discernable features
upon a veiled landscape
of hungry lion and tigers and bears
where each tree looks like another
and owls call our name—
or perhaps it is the boogey man,
who is famished and may devour us.
We have been turned topsy turvy by this blindness of new, altered vision.
Yet with our kaleidoscope
with rainbows and its spectrum of colors
stare new meaning into the prisms
of mirrors and glorious fractured translucence
that startle and confuse.
There should be no dearth of marvel.
We are alive!

9.

Look! All binaries are pulverized.
Black and white, good and evil
now a trillion shades of gray.
Yin and Yang of the universe now a rainbow of nuances,
and within you Anima and Animus the same.
We'll shattering a looking glass ceiling,
a fracturing so healing, so revealing
in leaping in faith
by inviting a stranger to our table.
To think, nay, rather feel,
not unlike galloping on a horse
or sailing down a hill on a bicycle
where the *Force* is with us
we may hear a truth or two
perhaps as melodies:
As a jig or reel or tv theme song.
Let time pass without our turnstile.
Gatekeepers take five!

10.

Feel a soothing beauty of a breeze across your brow,
at the nape of your neck
when your guide commands,
"You must accept whimsey at the death of your ego!
Let blue and pink become green and orange,
Allow mystery and levity:
the winds that fill the sails of your clipper grows and expands to include your neighbor.
Allow your mind to play
its glorious, spiritual imagination.
Go to your place
Where a motorcycle revving is a dog's bark,
and the dogs are rather chickens.
Imagine yourself as a child on a swing,
the smells of nature and the breeze instilling
Your thoughts with lofty gaiety!
The lilac, the native plum, the rose!

Your place where gray is azure and magenta,
yet, you are now still a child
when black remains black and white white.
And is it so, that dissonant noises of roosters are the utterances
of white men with status in society,
Statues of dead men talking, keeping traditions alive and laws in favor of the statue keepers—
our collective calamity.
Quell the snide voices that chide, that deride!
Gatekeepers take five!

11.

The cacophony of dogs in neighborhoods,
the Towers of Babel that may be ours
in workplaces,
indecipherable meanings of making money
to put bread on our table,
oh, family!
Yes, so many borders to cross to feel safe.
If nothing else, the pandemic has made you better at facing loss and feeling lost.
One frontier looms now,
embracing this cacophony of the canines and
the vast variety of voices outside our circle.
Inside the ring of retirees and young families we seek growth.
To expand the circle, our choices.
Can we Zoom Believers
welcome the tinker, the tailor, yes, even the candlestick maker,
the challenged one, the challenging ones,
for when **are** we at our best?
For the table, invite a stranger,
invite a waitress or a Texas Ranger,
Invite Odysseus or Medusa with her snaky hair,
a biker or a gamer,
Dante and Virgil,
Dopey or Grumpy or Snezy or Doc.
Not only the thrivers, but, of course, welcome the survivors.

12.

Our oldest elders
are as our youngest youngsters,
able to see through the tunnel to the light,
Blessed with brilliant visions through planes of translucence
through which to see the everchanging, rotating kaleidoscope views of our dynamic universe
which welcomes them to come—

to come enter and explore.
This Pandemic has brought us much to deplore,
but so much to be thankful for,
Another day, another spring, another blooming meadow to explore.
Chitter, chatter, chitter chatter!
Here, what place is this of light and color,
this kinesthetic marvel of traveling in place, when all we pray for
is silence and space?
A little grace.
Can darkness fill us as well?
May we see with trust or hope,
and not be lost and grope because
our one driving fear fills our view as a thousand,
An amazing multiplying jar of dread,
becoming anger and anxiety and frustration and envy.
These mites, these parasites gnaw upon our otherwise robust souls.

13.
All stories must conclude, like lives, as ours will unravel so.
For a faithful Christian
is there nothing so sweet as the end?
Ahhhh, the paradox.
Cessation or liberation, we ponder.
As we stare down this barrel of schismed gleam with altered eyes,
look yonder, is that perhaps
genuine light at the end of the tunnel?
A deam for lightness?
No longer emotionally chaste,
No longer chased by the Big Bad Wolf and your boogey men,
No longer chasing the Gingerbread Man.
You have tired of
'Run, run, as fast as you can,
You can't catch me!'
Yet we have never been alone!
Is there nothing quite as nurturing
as our sharing of community?
While each sees with different eyes,
different childhood schemes and nightmares,
aspirations and frustrations,
we worship here as one.
There is room for all at this expansive table of ours.
Invite a stranger to join us!
May peace—through clear vision and action—be with you.
Amen.

