



## **Is There Balm in Gilead?**

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I can only surmise that at some point in each and every one of our lives, we will become aware of the effects of aging...of being removed, little by little, ever so imperceptibly, from those conditions that, heretofore, have made our lives so enjoyable.

Some of us may have even reached a point in our lives, where we have achieved most of what we had ever dreamed of...and we may even begin to wonder...especially as age begins to take its toll...whether there is really that much more to hope for to...dream for ...to anticipate.

There are such moments when I myself begin to wonder, and even to doubt.....more often during the last 10 years or so...but only for a moment, mind you.

Because, at such times, I immediately begin to meditate on the wonders of existence...meditate on the words "infinite" and "eternal".....to absorb the awesomeness and the import of those words as they vibrate and make impressions on my mind, and as they relate to events in my life.

I emerged from a warm and loving womb on April 25, 1928. They say I cried. I can only imagine that I was feeling my first pangs of loneliness as I left the security of a loving presence.

A theologian might suggest that I was feeling the sensation of being "banished from the Garden of Eden."

Rather than abate, a touch of this loneliness has lingered in my subconscious throughout my life.

And I am very thankful for it because it requires me...at all times...to diligently work my way out of such negative feelings.

I help myself by recalling the events of my life that caused me to think...to wonder.

I remember as a teenager attending a stage show at the majestic Albee theatre in downtown Cincinnati. Earl Carroll's *Vanities* was playing. I was able to get a first row seat. The show was similar to the one put on by the Rockettes of New York. I was enchanted by the veiled charms of

fifteen of the most beautiful women I had ever seen at one time...all dancing gracefully to the music of a fabulous ten-piece orchestra. I felt my heart beat faster as I drank in the beauty and excitement of the moment...Let me just say that I really, really felt good to be alive.

...And then, the music stopped...the curtain came down...the show was over. ..and there was silence, except for the sound of people shuffling out the doors.

The excitement and pleasure of the last hour or so was over...completely gone...finished ....Only a memory remained. After all that excitement I was feeling a little bit of that "loneliness" as I walked down the street to board the bus for home at Fourth and Walnut.

And that was the way it was, more or less, for the next eight years or so till I met Mary Ann. Mary Ann filled up ninety eight percent of the void of my life ...but there was still that two percent that kept me alert to the specter of loneliness lingering in the remote recesses of my psyche. That two percent was the part that kept reminding me that I was aging.

I was devastated on my thirtieth birthday...I was no longer a youth...my best days were over. I remember writing a letter to the editor of *The Messenger*, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Covington some years later. They sent a photographer to take my picture to go along with the article. He had one of those Polaroid cameras that you had to peel off the back of the film and watch as the photo slowly developed.

I was shocked when he showed me the picture...*that* certainly did not look like the image I had of myself!...I made him take three more pictures before reality sunk in. Even with luck on my side, my life was already half over!

Truth was evolving all around me...my friends were aging along with me....my loved ones were beginning to die...and I began to wonder...is there really anything in this world that I can set my anchor to...something that I can build my life on...something that lasts?...Is there anything that we can do to alleviate the feelings of loneliness and helplessness that can, ... occur when one becomes aware of the human condition?

There are times when I can feel the agony of Edgar Allen Poe in his poem "The Raven" wherein he, in the throes of passion and despair over the loss of his beloved Lenore, asks the raven "is there balm in Gilead...tell me, tell me, I implore"...And later he begs the raven to ..."take thy beak from out of my heart."

Of course, Poe depicted the timelessness and universality of this feeling when he echoed the words of the prophet Jeremiah from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE: "My heart is wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me... Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?"

Is there a way out...is there balm in Gilead? Is there anything or anyone in this wide world or in the vastness of the cosmos where I might find something...a friend, perhaps...a friend that never for a moment would leave my presence...?

As I ponder these questions, I recall that I myself was created or evolved into this world of matter under the auspices and will of the eternal spirit of unconditional love....*There* was my friend ...I now understand that this friend is the infinite, eternal spirit of love. I understand that I am the product

of the impulse of this spirit. This spirit...this friend, is here, there, and everywhere at all times, and is nowhere absent.

I witness every day the goodness, the lovingness emanating from people who are energized by this spirit. I see it especially in this church. To witness the dedication of so many people working together assiduously to reduce the agony and suffering of so many people is a blessing and wonder to behold.

I see this as unconditional love in action. Where does this will and energy to love and act come from? I sense that it comes from this universal spirit of love...that from which, before all else, just is.

We have all been loved into existence... into a creature imbued with a thirst for happiness and love...with a craving for somethingness and an abhorrence of nothingness.

I could never, even for a moment, entertain the idea that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in life or that nothingness is the destiny of us all.

I can fully understand the nothingness of all things material because I am witness to it and my intellect informs me so. But things of the spirit...my being, your being...now that is another matter.

We all can see the spirit I'm talking about in the faces of our lovely children as they sing our chalice song for us every Sunday. The happiness, the joy of living emanating from those lovely faces spills over into me and invigorates me for another day.

I revel in their happiness and meditate on what it is that enables them to be so happy. I think it is the trust and confidence in their parents that they all have. They all bask in the secure knowledge that everything is all right and always will be so because "Mom and Dad love me."

And it is not just in our children...wherever there is peace in the family ...wherever there is peace in the world, we find this same joy of living in all of the children.

Perhaps this is what the great sage Jesus was talking about when he said..."Unless ye become like little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

I don't think he meant for us to start playing with dolls or horsing around on skateboards...No, I think he meant that we should cultivate a trust in this friend ....this loving spirit that caused us to be and that continues to sustain us.

The spirit of love that I'm talking about, and I think that Jesus was talking about, is not alien to our nature...It is as natural as the earth we walk on...as natural as the air we breathe... as natural as a fire that warms us...as natural as the water that quenches our thirst.

Sixty years ago, come this January, I placed my complete trust in this universal spirit of love when I entered into holy wedlock with Mary Ann and I have been happy ever since...I do hope that Mary Ann can say the same thing.

And it was in this same spirit that I placed my trust three years later. My younger brother and I deposited our life's savings of two hundred dollars into a checking account to use as capital to start a house painting business. That was in the winter of 1954...Mary Ann would give birth to our second child in three months...my brother's wife was pregnant with twins and we were all saddled with hefty mortgages.

Our trusting in this spirit of love...this friend, has never let us down.

And when I meditate on the idea that this spirit of love exists unconditionally...independent of any of the 100-plus elements that make up the cosmos, my mind, my soul relaxes and I begin to savor the moment.

I feel strongly that there is absolutely no valid reason for the abiding pessimism that seems to be so rampant in the world today.

I think this pessimism is fueling men's ambition to acquire fame and fortune, at any cost... in the hope, thereby, to distance themselves from the fact that they are mortal.

Pursuing this course of action, we know by experience ... is futile. The void in our lives can never be filled by material acquisition or intellectual pursuits.

When I consider the notion that this spirit of love continues to sustain us with its breath and with its zest for living...I just can't imagine for a moment that this friend with whom we share such an intimate life, would, all of a sudden, decide to end the relationship, withdraw its support and discard us on the ash-heap of history.

I reason that this could never happen because our relationship with this spirit of love has grown so intimate over our lifetimes, so much so, that we have become one with it, and therefore any notion of discarding or separating is out of the question...because we need each other to be happy and to enjoy our existence.

I see manifestations of this spirit of love in the mothers and fathers of this church as they shower their children with love. I see it in the members of this church community as they support each other in a loving manner.

Now, it just does not make sense to me that a creature, such as we are, could be *more* loving than the eternal spirit that first loved us into being.

All of this begs the question...where was this spirit during the Holocaust...or right now with all the slaughtering that is going on?

This eternal spirit of love, our friend, was there and is here now. Our friend was freely being ignored then and is freely being ignored now by ruthless men who have freely chosen to focus all of their time and energy in acquiring money, power and prestige.

Now I know that the question of "free will" has been debated since time immemorial. Even so, I tend to think that were it not for our "free will" we would never be able to love anyone but ourselves.

The question ..."Where was this spirit during all the Katrinas ...tsunamis...and all the earthquakes that continue to plague us?"... is beyond our capacity to understand. However, this not-knowing is no cause for us to lose any confidence in our friend, the spirit of love.

Our friend has sustained us throughout our lives ...and I'm confident that this spirit will continue to do so.

Could this friend be a product of a vivid imagination? I don't think so.

Consider every thing that has ever been built or is being built, starts out as a thought and that this thought has to be rendered by architects, engineers, scientists, and chemists into a coherent set of plans before anything can be built.

This is obvious to us and is universally accepted as being within the bounds of sound reasoning.

But what happens to the bounds of our sound reasoning when it comes to the phenomenon of existence...the phenomenon of the cosmos...the phenomenon of the human body?

Just because we are unable to comprehend how anything exists is no reason for us to assume that all of the phenomena that we can and do comprehend is somehow just an accident...that just happened without any forethought...or without any input from any source whatsoever. Now *that* would be contrary to sound reasoning, in my opinion.

I think that the greatest obstacle that stands in the way of humankind in general, is the notion that nothing exists beyond what can be apprehended by our five senses. Any idea of a spiritual realm is dismissed out of hand.

Having generally accepted such a premise, humankind has crippled itself so much so that, in a sense, it finds it hard, if not impossible, to make any progress on its journey toward wholeness.

In my view, we all have a sixth sense...our mind.. I believe our sixth sense trumps all the rest because it is our mind that takes in all the information presented to it by our other five senses and renders it all into one coherent whole.

This sixth sense prompts me to consider that those of us who have loved ones living in different parts of the world are happy in the knowledge that our loved ones are still with us. We take this bonding of love for granted. We are happy even in their absence because we, at all times, anticipate the joyousness of our next get-together.

I find it helpful to consider the multitudes of our loved ones who have gone on before us on that extended vacation, so to speak. I take it for granted that the bonds of love we forged during our times together are eternal. This thought makes my life ever so much more enjoyable. I have the feeling of already living in eternity...roaming the rooms of the Mansions of reality...enjoying the comforts of those around me here and now as well as the comforts of those on that "extended vacation."

I look upon death as the metamorphosis of the spirit...the time when our spirit, our soul, walks out of one room into another...a room where a party is in full progress.

It is the reunion of all of our friends and loved ones celebrating the joys of their youth. It is the reunion of love that we created during the time we had the use of our material bodies.

I firmly believe, with all my heart, that all of us are destined to experience a joy that transcends anything imaginable...where the excitement of the music and the dance of life never end...where the curtain never comes down, and the party is never over.

I do not consider any of this to be a figment of my imagination.

I consider it all to be the manifestation of the Eternal Essence of Mind, that which, before all else, just is.

Yes, my friends, there is balm in Gilead...I am soothed by a good portion of it every time I see and hear our children sing the chalice song.

Peace,...and so be it.