

April 27, 2020

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

These are the opening lines of Walt Whitman's poem of the same name written in the summer of 1865 during a period of intense national mourning in the aftermath of the April 14 assassination of Abraham Lincoln that same year. The poem is a long poem that in some respects follows the funeral train that brought Lincoln's body back to Illinois from Washington passing before thousands and thousands of grieving Americans.

We are all grieving Americans in a time of mourning, intense mourning, which can show it's face in anger and rage, which is usually the face of grief denied.

It is not easy for many of us who live where we live in the style that we live to accept loss or to admit vulnerability, that is not a negative criticism just a fact that I acknowledge in my own life.

The vast majority of people who have lived on this earth lived in a style that included partial or total vulnerability from birth to death, where loss was a chronic factor. It was normal, not an exception.

Huge numbers do today, please remember.

There are almost always reasons of human intervention that create or contribute to this condition and then there are viruses and other known givens in nature that are factors in creating vulnerabilities that cannot be denied.

I am not at all suggesting some kind of cosmic accounting, much less, a Divine intervention to get us "back to God" because what is happening is thoroughly consistent with the workings of science and nature, it is not unexpected to occur even if we forgot but what we have taken to be "normal" you might give some thought to.

This is not my issue and it is not a new issue, since our ancestors started recording their thoughts and thinking about their world questions of the "good life" or the "well lived life" have been a part of the process. People identified "necessities" and disagreed on just what those "necessities" might be from the very beginning.

Pain, fear, and solitude until very recently, relatively speaking, have been considered "essentials" to be taken seriously as components of a "good life" or a "well lived life" not as ends in themselves but as the givens of the human adventure.

If nothing else, every single one of us have ancestors just a few generations back who left everything known, sometimes overloaded with pain and fear and aching loneliness, to come here across that ocean and very, very few of them were received with open arms.

Going back just a little further pain, fear, and solitude were considered to be so essential that they were incorporated into the patterns of common life and ritualized, usually at puberty, so that the individual child would grow into adulthood fully informed and consciously aware of these necessary realities and they would be taught not to avoid them and not to inflict them, but to allow them to teach them.

Obviously, everyone didn't learn the same lesson because an awful lot of pain, fear, and solitude have been inflicted by those who couldn't accept their own vulnerability, so they elevated themselves over others, usually, at great cost to the others.

At the same time, though, there were those like Walt Whitman who was a gay man, a medic in the Civil War, and an American patriot in the honest sense of that word who did learn that pain, fear, and solitude contribute to a good and well lived life and he lead this nation through it, so you might find his poetry helpful.

There are those today who are learning that pain, fear, and solitude do teach as we can learn enmeshed in this trauma even though they don't know it.