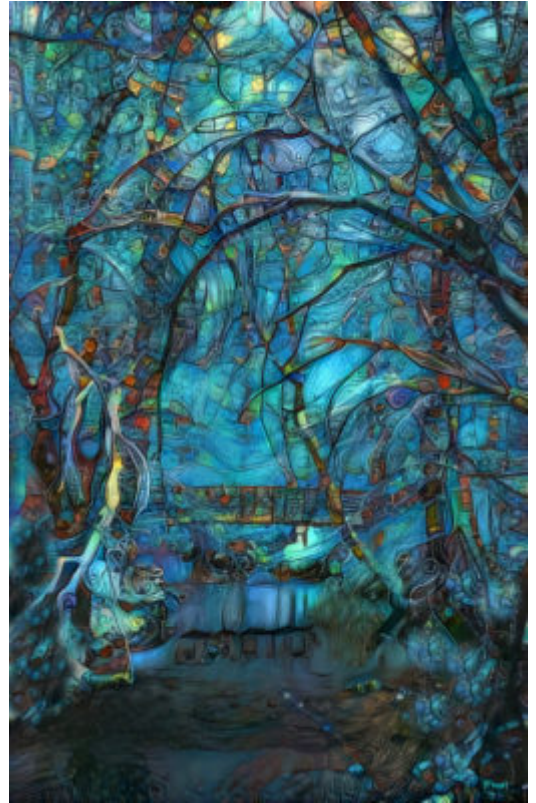


“Thanksgiving Eve Reflection” by Amy Moffitt

November 25, 2020



So, I've kept a gratitude journal off and on for years. I'm sure you're aware of what a gratitude journal is, but if you're not or you need a refresher, a gratitude journal is a book in which you write at least three things every night that you're grateful for. I think Oprah recommended it at some point, and I've seen lots of articles from the various mindfulness and Buddhist type email newsletters that I subscribe to about the benefits of keeping such a journal. There's a whole non-profit devoted to promoting gratitude practice that I also follow, and I'm pretty sure it's not the only organization devoted to promoting the benefits of gratitude. A daily gratitude practice is a very basic, very healthy habit that benefits one emotionally and spiritually. And this year, it has absolutely not worked for me.

I started keeping a gratitude journal about 15 years ago to counter a natural tendency I have towards dissatisfaction with my life. It has served as a gentle cognitive chiropractic therapy of sorts, readjusting a continuous low-grade internal complaint about the various disappointments that life offers up. But this year, writing down that I was grateful for my cats, my bed and the fact that I have a job every night wasn't offering me much comfort, because this year, more than perhaps any other up to this point, my internal distress over life is only incidentally about *me*. It's more about *us* –all of us– and what future there is for the U.S. and everyone the U.S. affects, which is a lot of people.

By definition, I'm not alone in this, and I've spent a lot of time wondering about what internal mechanisms are effective for all of us in dealing with this unusual situation. We all have to figure out a way to move forward from day to day. What actually works? What brings some peace and effectively beats back the despair, fury and anxiety that quite reasonably arise as a result of just paying attention to the news?

A few months ago, I was at a gathering of Wild Earth Spiritual Community at Carderock, near the Billy Goat Trail. We were wandering around the woods, meditating, and I was stewing in weariness with life, somewhere past ennui but before despair. I sat on a rock overlooking the Potomac, thinking about middle age and loneliness and the pandemic and the broken American political system and the broken American church, and the phrase came to me: I want to know what happens next. I'm tired, but I want to see the next chapter... I'll bet there's a plot twist.

The thing about having a faith where your God comes to earth and ends up turned over by an angry mob of the very people He'd helped to authorities that then torture and murder Him is that it sets your expectations for just how bad things can get before things get a whole lot better. In other words, it asserts that even when things seem the most meaningless and

hopeless, there is meaning and there is hope.

One of the things I loved about seminary is that it introduced me to views of the crucifixion that state that God didn't pre-determine the torture and execution of Christ. You don't have to believe that God murdered God in order to be a Christian. But God did *use* the crucifixion to overcome death and effect His purposes. I don't believe that God has caused COVID-19, and I don't believe it's "His Will". I also don't dare trivialize the hundreds of thousands sickened and dead, but my faith offers me the constant possibility of a next chapter, a place where this nightmare does not have the final word. It offers me a God who hates this as much as I do, even more. Perhaps infinitely more. A God whose heart breaks at the preventable loss of so many lives. It offers me prayer, where I can appeal to this God to intervene in this situation, and that ability to petition God also offers me hope.

I have many more atheist and agnostic friends than I do Christian, and on the rare occasions where I do bring up my faith, I have noted repeatedly that while I can understand and honor their doubts about faith, I have no motivation to give mine up. It offers me too much. It offers me a universe full of meaning and a loving and personal God who cares about the suffering of humanity. It offers the possibility of a purpose to my life despite my tendency towards whininess about it even when things are going pretty well. It offers the possibility that I and others may, in the end, learn to be our better selves. It offers hope. It offers hope. It offers HOPE.

This year, that is more or less what is working for me, most days. Not a daily list of small things, but one big thing. Things are horrible. They actually are, I'm not just imagining it. But I have a God who conquered death and who cares about what is happening, and does have power, and that means I have HOPE. Thank You, God. Thank You for this most precious and essential gift. Have mercy on us.