

“Beauty is meant to propagate”

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“Robin Song.”

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Mr. Robin yanked with his beak sticks and dried fronds from the stones edging our patio. He flew toward Mrs. Robin, who was ready with mud to fashion their nest. Jays and crows aside, soon their eggs will incubate, hatchlings hatch, nestlings nest, fluffy down becoming feathers, yellow mouths anticipating, catered to by both parents.

The calendar may announce spring has sprung. Robins announce it better. We also look forward to our Azaleas flowering red and pink. The Rose of Sharon beside our driveway was a cutting from a Rose of Sharon the church expansion dug up. Beauty is meant to propagate.

We like our house. Birdsong cheeruping. Squirrels dashing. Hawks soaring. Our realtor, Jack Curry, worried when I put a bid on it before wife got the chance to see it. September, 1989, I had arrived to be examined by my Presbytery to see if they would concur with the congregation’s vote to call me as their pastor. Jack showed me the house before the church elder and I drove to the meeting in Montgomery. I pondered while waiting to be grilled by this gaggle of elders and pastors. The examination got delayed until after lunch. We skipped lunch so I could return and meet Jack back at the house. Before leaving the meeting I told the person in charge to stall if I returned late. I told Jack: “Let’s do it.” He really wanted me to call my wife first. No need. She’d love it. No cell phones then anyway. Pleasant neighborhood. Lovely yard. Fireplace. Within our price range. Best, the kids could walk to Mahoning Cooper School. Come afternoon, Jack celebrated that our bid had been accepted. It would take a month before we all could fully relocate here.

We dream that our kids will be able to afford their own homes, given where they want to live and need to live, given prices, given taxes, given corporations buying available homes to market pick-pocketing rental units. We wish we could help them the way our parents helped us. What did 60 Minutes report the other Sunday? There’s a shortage of over 4 million homes in our country.

We benefit from recalling Roosevelt’s State of the Union address on January, 6, 1941 where he announced his Four Freedoms: Freedom of speech and expression; Freedom to worship; Freedom from want resulting from healthy peacetime; Freedom from fear of violence and aggression.

In my profession, it is a fortunate gift to be able say: “This is our house, this is our chance for home.” Although, for a month after settling in, our three year old youngest kept telling us at bedtime, after stories and lullabies, that she wanted to go home. Mommy finally asked her: “Where’s home?” She couldn’t answer. But she could snuggle into her nest of a crib and hug her precious blankie and cuddle with her special friends, her stuffed familiars: Dumbo, Lambie, Panda, Big Bunny. Safe. Stable. Secure.

Why do kids find a precious friend? For our son, it was his stuffed monkey in striped shirt, coveralls, red cap. For our elder daughter it was a brown and orange Gooney Bird. Tattered remnants of monkey along with Gooney foot are stored in the dresser drawer, our own worn out by love versions of the Velveteen Rabbit.

I've begun to realize what I really believe in. We refuse to let those whose mouths are bigger than their hearts, those who sow ugliness, those who suffer crimped imaginations and predatory ambitions, take away the goodness, our joy, our song. We persevere. Frankly, the idea of God interests me less and less, not that I've turned atheistic. Hardly. It's just that that which we call God is too beyond me to for me to assume I can talk about God or that I can dare talk for God. Listening, paying attention, is another matter. Jesus simply makes more sense. Why? Because he reveals the existential divine essence of religion, faith, church, synagogue, mosque, shrine, whatever. How what matters is us imitating his humanity, us becoming humane.

When you are human, you see the pink bunny along the fence-line of the Sandy Hook Elementary School. You see the yellow stuffed animal abandoned on the grey rubble of what used to be an apartment complex, once the home to many now homeless. When you are humane, you see the child in her mother's desperate arms at a train station in Poland holding on for dear life to her stuffed Teddy Bear.