

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, . . . he leads me beside still waters.

Wallace Stevens, a Hartford, Connecticut insurance lawyer who died in 1955, will likely be remembered as one of the great poets of the twentieth century. For Stevens, a true poet must be committed to "finding what will suffice".

Now we live in a world that tempts us to think that money should suffice to make us happy; or that fame and political power should suffice. But what is it King Henry V says on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt? *I am a king . . . ; and I know / Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball, / The sword, the mace, the crown imperial . . . / No, . . . / Not all these, laid in bed majestic, / Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave, / Who, with a body fill'd, and vacant mind, / Gets him to rest . . .*

But if crown imperial and pomp do not suffice, what will? Here's my take on it. When I was about nine years old, I was sitting one evening on our front porch swing on Corlies St. in Philadelphia. It was summer. Kids were playing hopscotch up and down the block of some sixty attached houses. Radios could be heard through screened windows playing dance tunes. My grandmother sat on a rocker opposite me, while my sister chatted with Peggy Dean on the front steps. The sun must have been about to set for there was a violet, twilight tone to everything. And then, suddenly, I burst into tears.

I mean really - tears! I couldn't control myself. The sobs came from deep down. My grandmother, sister, Peggy Dean and other neighbors gathered around me curious, solicitous. "What's wrong?" they asked. "Are you sick?" The crying did not subside. I found myself taking deep breaths between the sobs, only to explode again with unfathomable grief. The episode must have lasted a very long three to four minutes. When it was over, I was asked again, "Why were you crying?" I was as bewildered as they; I said, "I don't know."

I've never forgotten that experience. I suppose some psychologist would trace the episode to a trauma of my infancy. But, as I look back, I don't think there's any great mystery to solve. I think that boy fell apart (much the way Gregory Peck fell apart in the movie *Twelve O'clock High*) because the boy somehow sensed his world was full of violence and loneliness. There was parental friction; a grandmother bitter over the failure of two marriages and the need to house the family of her unemployed son. There was schoolyard thuggery and the tension of classroom and marketplace performance and competition. War clouds overshadowed Europe and Asia. There was the economic violence manifest in the Great Depression. There was the prospect of a literal hell hereafter. There was everything but the one and only thing that would suffice: some irrefutable assurance that he was welcome, that he belonged, he was not expendable but of immortal value, that what he might do or say really mattered.

And that craving for what would suffice finally erupted into sobs, tears that testified to his radical need, his unconscious dream which caused the Psalmist (also in exile from the one thing that would suffice) to lament: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem (that universal city of absolute mercy and mutual love) above my highest joy."