

## Lost and Found

In his poem called "Michael", William Wordsworth tells of a shepherd in England's mountain country who had a son in his old age. Over the years the shepherd taught him all there was to know about pasturing. And then along came bad news. A relative had defaulted on a loan. The shepherd had been a co-signer. The only solution: the son's going off to London to work off the debt.

On the day before his departure the father took the son to a meadow where he intended to build a sheepfold. He asked his son to lay the first stone as a way of recalling his son to mind while he was away. *When thou return'st thou in this place will see / A work which is not here, a covenant / 'Twill be between us - but whatever fate / Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last.* Off went the young man, wrote cheerful letters - and then silence! He had fallen in with bad company and sailed off to some distant continent, never to be seen again. The poem then tells of the father's visiting the unfinished sheepfold every day until he died.

I had a similar experience with my younger son who – in the lingering mix of the Haight – at age 14 – became lost amid the drug culture of the 1980's. Unlike the father of Wordsworth's poem, I went looking for him – indeed got to know the nooks and crannies of San Francisco very well. Eventually enrolled him in a program that made a difference, but too late. He died at age 23. My lost sheep, my prodigal son.

The Gospels have some very wise things to say about human existence – things linked to what we call nature, organic metaphors. As human beings we arrive scattered all over this world like seed thrown. Some take root, finding good soil, becoming productive, a humanity that is true, chastened by experience, caring, roots sunk deep into wherever we came from – the Being that characterizes all things. Others fall upon worn paths, swept up upon the thruways, avenues, crowded venues, super-this and super-that: lost and faceless, a statistic. Others succumb to the appetites of the birds of the air: robocalls, digital communication (press 1 etc.) designed to *prevent* communication, twitter, celebrating transient celebrities. Others of us fall upon rocky ground, no moisture, we tend to shrivel up; the world is too much for us. Others fall among thorns: everyday conflict, clashes of personality, us versus them, the strife of politics – and we choke on it.

We have somehow lost any deeper sense of why we are here, what is our essential reason for being. Even institutions like churches get worn down over time in a routine that's forgetful of why a church exists – for instance to reveal we have souls, some kind of grounding in a Source more intimate to you and me almost beyond belief! – akin to that intimacy we experience with someone we love that can make such love profound. In other words: we are rooted somewhat like that bush Moses saw in the desert that burst into flame. So too each of us has grown out of an abyss of light emerging from the veils of a mystery of which Jesus said: *So let your light shine [become unveiled] before men, that they may see your good works, experience your own creative, mysterious being.*

PS: Re my "lost" son, in searching for him I also found my "lost" self – we discovered each other at a level more inexpressible than biological.

**Geoff Wood**