

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

June 2017

Dear Friends,

Now summer is all around us.

I was sitting on the porch early this morning, sipping a cup of tea, enjoying those very early moments before the sounds of the city have ramped up, before I needed to rush into the day myself. In the cool of a summer morning, I was loving the birds singing joyfully, trying to outdo one another in the trees in our yard. Such a hopeful, lovely sound. The fragrance of summer flowers wafted over me from a hanging basket nearby. A butterfly fluttered by in its whimsical “what-are-you-worried-about” careless way. For a wonderful, lingering moment, it all felt brimming with promise.

Not just the promise that it’s going to be a good day, but something richer, deeper. The promise that *everything* is going to be wonderful.

You’ve probably felt that promise, too, as you stood in some favorite spot—watching the beauty of the waves, spring flowers in the desert, walking the streets of Paris at night, or sitting in your garden with a cup of coffee. Something keeps whispering to us through the beauty we love; something seems to be “calling” to us through the beauty and goodness summer especially brings. “Many things begin with seeing in this world of ours,” wrote British artist, Lillias Trotter. “There lies before us a beautiful, possible life.”

I love summer. I love the lushness of life it brings. I love the sense of promise nearly every summer morning proclaims. But most of us—while we sense the promise—are not really sure what to make of it.

There was an old, wooden bridge on my grandfather’s ranch. It crossed a large irrigation canal the size of a good stream, which flowed constantly with milky water, the color of well-creamed coffee. Cottonwoods grew in the rich, loamy soil along the canal, and their huge boughs covered it in shade all summer long. Even in the dog days of August, it was always cool there, and the waters made the quietest lovely sounds as they passed under the bridge. It was a magical place for a boy. Coming in from the fields, we would race the last hundred yards, galloping our horses over the bridge, which boomed and echoed under our hooves with a marvelous deep sound like thunder, or cannon fire from the deck of a great ship. Swallows would shoot out from under either side, spinning away up and down the canal. As far as I was concerned, in my seven-year-old heart, that bridge had always been there, and always would be.

Wallace Stevens shared a similar experience from his boyhood,

I still sometimes dream, occasionally in the most intense and brilliant shades of green, of a jungly dead bend of the Whitemud River below Martin’s Dam. Each time I am haunted, on awakening, by a sense of meanings just withheld, and by a profound nostalgic melancholy. Yet why should this dead loop of river, known only for a few years, be so charged with potency in my unconscious? Why should there be around it so many other images that constantly

recurring dreams or in the phrases I bring up off the typewriter onto the page? They live in me like underground water; every well I put down taps them.

Some sort of Promise seems to be woven into the tapestry of life. It comes to us through golden moments, through beauty that takes our breath away, through precious memories and the hope even a birthday or vacation can awaken. It comes especially through the earth itself.

That Promise fits perfectly with the deepest longing of our hearts—the longing for everything to be good.

The experience of this “Promise” is one of summer’s greatest gifts to us. But few know what it means. Does it ever come true? That’s what our hearts long to know—*does it ever come true?* Why did God put this Promise in the earth, and in the human heart? Part of the answer is revealed in Romans chapter eight:

The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens (19-21).

Paul believed that all creation was trembling with anticipation, because nature knows some great secret we do not. Jesus revealed the secret very clearly:

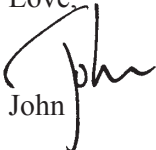
“I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne...everyone who has given up houses or...property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return...” (Matthew 19:28-29 NLT)

When the world is made new. At the restoration of all things. This is the great secret of creation. This is the great hope of our faith.

I now understand, some fifty years later, that the wooden bridge under the cottonwoods was filled with “a sense of meanings” and “charged with potency” because the Promise of the restoration of all things was coming to me through that place. It is coming to us in many ways; it is coming to us through the glories of summer.

I share this in hope that you and I will begin to understand the whispers of the promise that are coming to us, that these gifts will fill our hearts with hope. “The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what’s ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we’ll never settle for less” (2 Cor. 5:5).

May summer whet your appetite. May it assure you completely of the Great Restoration that is nearly upon us.

Love,

John

PS. Go to allthingsnew.com for a beautiful video of a talk I gave on the Great Restoration.