

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

In Any Direction We Might Choose In 2021

By Ken Woodley

The alarm sounds early on this winter's morning that is still as dark as night.

Sunrise is nearly two hours away and it's so cold beyond this windowpane that even the world's shivers are frozen solid.

A small lamp on my desk near the windowsill shows how busy the cold has been while I slept. The storm window is filled with jagged, deliriously crooked strokes of ice that point in every direction.

Were the design on the windowpane a compass, and were I to follow its directions, I fear that I'd be lost.

Hopelessly and forever lost.

On a morning this cold and this dark, I feel a little lost anyway.

But a new day is coming.

A New Year is on the way.

The 12 months that have been 2020 are going, going, gone.

The year 2021 feels, maybe, like it could be, just might be, coming to the rescue.

But there have been blessings this year and I refuse to allow COVID-19 to erase them. I count them, instead, determined to carry these blessings forward with me into the new year:

I have heard my wife say "I love you," held my two-year-old granddaughter while she slept and played in her imagination, splashing in "sun puddles," after she awoke, heard a black-billed cuckoo sing in the summer woods by a stream...

...Savored the aroma of spicy chicken cooking in the kitchen, basked in the warmth of my 13-year-old dog in my lap, finished writing a novel that had called to me for years...

...Saw the full moon shining brightly among the pastel pinks and blues of dawn-painted clouds and remembered that the sun has risen every day, listened to Patrick Stewart read Shakespeare's sonnets, found out a second

granddaughter will be born next month and began dreaming about her imagination...

...Saw Monarch butterflies in November, cheered as genuine good guy, Clayton Kershaw, won the World Series at last, read new books, re-read the wondrous P. G. Wodehouse—again...

...Sang “Silent Night” wearing a mask, saw mountains suddenly arise in the distance, heard the call of Canada Geese when there were none in sight, shared some words about God and Jesus and felt ripples of peace, spent time with all of you wherever you are, so many blessings...on and on and on...

Out beyond this pane, where I cannot see, I know that the maples and oaks are bare in the darkness, their limbs and branches holding tightly to the secret of spring as if their lives—as if the existence of everyone—depended on it.

I remember last night, standing out in the cold, filling my lungs with its freezing and then filling the darkness with my warm, rising, ghosting breath.

I remember the night before and the night before that.

I remember all of the nights put together as if they were all one long, never-ending night.

I remember the stars making the night sky look like it was breaking out in a rash of ice and I wondered if one day I would fall through the ice into the sky.

Or beyond the sky.

I sit here by the window now, looking at the stained glass cross that is hanging from the window latch; its green and orange, its yellow, blue and purple declaring everything that moments of darkness cannot hide from my soul, even if I cannot see everything with my eyes.

And I know one thing for certain: when the sun rises, the light of this new day will shine toward me, into the frost and through the cross, in the straightest possible line.

With that truth deep in my heart, I am able to decipher the message in the frost that has been painted across my windowpane like the blooms of winter and pointing the clear way forward, despite its zig-zagging pattern:

Any and every direction I might choose is filled with God’s love, in all of my sorrow and all of my joy.

And in all of yours.