

# Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

May 25, 2020

A weekly poetry resource

from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



from *A Forest Hymn*

...Thou art here, thou fill'st  
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds  
That run along the summit of these trees  
In music; thou art in the cooler breath  
That from the inmost darkness of the place  
Comes, scarcely felt; the barky trunks, the ground,  
The fresh moist ground, are all instinct with thee.  
Here is continual worship; nature, here,  
In the tranquillity that thou dost love,  
Enjoys thy presence...

My heart is awed within me when I think  
Of the great miracle that still goes on,  
In silence, round me...

William Cullen Bryant<sup>1</sup>

## Reflections

I am very much missing the church I love. The choir, the organ, the people, yes. But lately I find I am longing for the body of the place—its scent, its darkness, its glass and stone, wood and gold, its echo and mystery, its majesty. I miss it in a way that is unlike my missing of other places, other things. And there are many of both I do miss. The church, though, is like unto nothing. Nowhere else does light look like that light, nowhere else is water that very water. It is like missing a great love—no replacement, no stand-in, no getting-over.

Outside my home I am lucky to have a space to sit, a bench in the sun. What is “mine”—this property—is not fancy nor expansive and sometimes I catch myself wishing for more. A meadow, some acres, a whole forest, a wide field. The deepest part of me, though, knows that all I need is in this very corner, this small square of earth I am but borrowing; the ownerless moon is as beautiful here as anywhere, the sun as perfect. And the wind blows sweet through the hickory tree.

I have been living with this poem (this is an excerpt of a much longer work) by William Cullen Bryant and I am especially drawn to this single phrase: “Thou art here.” I do not even know where first I read it but I say it to myself these days like a mantra. I say it to no one. I

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<sup>1</sup> “A Forest Hymn” by William Cullen Bryant, 1860. Public Domain.

say it to One. I say it without saying it aloud. I say it as private worship. I say it without knowing I am still saying it. And before I think to say it I am already saying it. It is the great miracle—the truth—that the holy is here and going.

Thou art here. Here, where my hands dig in this divine suburban dirt. Here where my feet stand on this moist and mortgaged ground. Here where there is a piece of poetry on my silent tongue. Majesty. This is all I have true to say of living now.

### ✚ About the poet

**William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878) was an American romantic poet, translator, journalist, and the long-time editor of the New York Evening Post, a position he held for 50 years. He helped to establish important New York institutions—Central Park, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the New York Medical College. Later in life, he translated Homer, spending much of his last decade at work on the Iliad and the Odyssey. Bryant died after an accidental fall in Central Park and it is said that all of New York mourned for one of its most respected men of letters.

### ✚ Editor's note

This edition of Wellspring comes during the final week of the spring covenant period at St. Stephen's Church. Typically, this would be the final poetry guide until fall. While there will be no guide next Monday, June 1, this year we're pleased to offer a special summer series of Wellspring, beginning June 8. If you already receive Wellspring emails, you do not need to sign up to receive the summer series—it will be sent you as a Wellspring subscriber.



### **Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey**

by Allison Seay, Associate for Religion and the Arts,  
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