

Watch this space

Rev J Shannon

Yesterday, I found it really hard to be creative and I wondered why the well is so dry. So, I spent the morning reading old reflections and every one of them started with

A film I'd seen

A book I'd read,

A Live performance

a Conversation

an observation

on a walk

or a journey.

Roald Dahl used to say, writing was easy. You just put a piece of paper in the typewriter and stared at it until your forehead bled.

This morning - while still agonising, I remembered my creative writing classes from way, way back.

We were wild youth, full of ideas and compelled to write. Writing was easy, it poured out of us like sweat - and was probably just as smelly.

The teacher gave us assignments that intentionally restrained us. It was like tying one arm behind our backs to make us exercise different mental muscles. to REALY look and REALY see; to appreciate each and every word.

He would limit our tools and options to make us think carefully...to ponder before we committed anything to paper. He fired our imaginations by putting us in 'dark rooms' and 'empty spaces' in our minds - and he made us look around.

so, I am looking around.

I see the empty dining table and I can hear the echoes of the last lunch. The laughter that went until 4 in the afternoon.

I'm can peer into the liminal space we're in and I see coffee cups ready and ovens warming. Like the flowers around us crouched and blooming – everything is ready.

As I look around at the empty rooms – I know that I am not alone in this space. Indeed, it's crowded with zoom and phone calls; with lists and jobs to be done. Friends are calling from all over the world, families are taking more care to make contact.

As I stare out the window, I hear people doing it tough. They peer into the empty streets and see nothing but emptiness. I remember a dyslexic friend saying when he opened a book, he all he saw was the white patterns between the words – patterns that squiggled all over the page. It was really hard to focus on the black letters that formed words - words in rows that went left to right. His eyes had to be trained from seeing a page from up and down to a coordinated gaze, intentional, from left to right.

Now more than ever – words matter. I find myself taking time with scripture. Mulling, chewing, contemplating, sucking on words that may be mysterious or even annoying – but tasty and worth it. They are jumping out at me...like yesterday's reading from 1 Thessalonians 5 that started with. "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to anything written to you...for you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come..."

And there I was beating my head against the keyboard.

I woke up this morning with stories jumping from my head. The Beast of the Burbs gnawed its way up the street and ate my rubbish bin. Growling, it sprang on the next bin and the next...

Life is full of liminal spaces. They may be filled with anything from joy to terror but the one thing they all have in common is discomfort.

We are in a liminal space right now so we might as well have a good look around. It's one thing to scratch through the old straw that is past writings or memories but entirely another to let the imagination run safely wild in the quiet and slowness that is a gift. The connections and phone calls we did have time for in the old times. I want to use this minimal space to see things differently.

A wise man told me that the role of a minister is not to be a thermometer that reads the people's temperature— but to be the thermostat that gently moderates the atmosphere.

While scratching through the old writings, I came across a prayer I wrote for another time –
I will leave you with it today.

Gracious and loving Lord, as we move between your death, resurrection and birth, we cycle through the knowledge that there is, indeed, a time for everything...

And a time for nothing –
the hole we fill with doubt and fear as we bury the discomfort of in-between.

Precious Lord,
help us put the shovel down and sit in the liminal space.

Help us be, simply be.

Give us a time to name the sensations and feelings.

Let us sit in the quiet that we might hear your voice.

The sweet, sweet song that calls us forward.

Amen