

Pentecost

Weary of strident voices
and grindings of machines
I take to the high desert,
at first light;
follow a clear
box canyon creek
upstream
seeking a sign
of hope,
even,
if it be God's Holy Will,
of unconditional love.

Behind me,
below me,
a vast arid plateau
extends for miles,
sparsely dotted of
stunted
piñon and juniper,
narrow leaf yucca,
scattered tufts of desert grass;
all so dry,
so very dry;
holding on
for dear life.

Here, in the canyon,
thin though the creek
may be,
along which I make my way,
rise piñon and juniper
high and thick;
great cottonwoods
eighty feet tall,
crowns as arms uplifted in prayer;
aspen in profusion -
bright green leaves shimmering
in fresh sunlight,
fluttering like a cacophony of tiny wings beating
in the sweet morning wind
that runs down the canyon
as a cool stream of its own flowing;
sweet wind.

By my feet,
to either side of
the sandy, creek-side trail,
evening primrose greet me,
creamy white;
as do
desert paintbrush,
scarlet-tipped;
blue penstemon;
bright goldweed;
cluster upon cluster
of lemon-flowered rabbit brush.

I pull up
for a respite
at the foot of
a thickly trunked
old juniper
which they say
can live to 500 years;
my seat a sandstone boulder
tumbled down
from above,
eons ago;
perhaps in the time of Christ,
carried along in furious flood;
brought to rest here.

No fury now,
not here,
not in these moments;
rise and fall of
light canyon wind
moving over the waters
the only sound.

I sit,
simply sit,
hold silence;
commit to utter stillness;
watch;
listen.

Charee-charee
charee, charee
two rock wren
call back and forth,
out of a broad, multi-branched piñon;
song on the breeze;
charee-charee
charee-charee
over and over they call.

I hold my silence.
I do not move.

It is then that a visitor arrives:
a butterfly,
an ebony swallowtail -
iridescent blue and gold
shimmering on the
underside of dark, delicate wings -
flutters my way,
riding in on that wind;
alights upon
my shoulder.

I hold my breath.
the swallowtail
holds tight.

I must breathe;
ever so soft breathings;
the swallowtail remains.

Such it is that we two,
simply sit,
deep within a far box canyon
by the edge
of the high desert:
swallowtail
and I,
as the canyon wind,
fresh and light,
breathes upon us
both.

Doug Dunlap

Doug Dunlap lives with his family north of Farmington, where he takes daily walks in the woods. Once a dweller of the West, he returns there from time to time to walk in the high desert. He is an Ordained Minister in the United Church of Christ.