

November 13, 2016

## **Reflection “The Lark Ascending”**

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Vaughan-Williams took this poem the Lark ascending and put it to music in 1914 as the First World War was started. In the piece the composer attempts to match the song of the skylark into violin and piano that which the Poet put into words. Both the music and the words work as perfection. The time was not as perfect. It was written during the lead up to the First World War, and the composer was said to have written it while watching military ships on exercises prior to the war. It was a time like today when nationalism was on the upswing. It was a time when citizens felt pride to be British. After Vaughan-Williams composed this piece he enlisted at age 42 in the ambulance corps and spent the war in France. It was not performed until after the war. Certainly in the music you heard the uplifting tones of the skylark as the Bird climbed into sky. These uplifting tones expressed the feelings of many that signed up to fight the unholy enemy, the Hun.

This week, though half of voting America felt as a lark ascending, since Tuesday I have not felt uplifted. I felt that I have been caught off guard and lost something significant. Not like the winning Cubs or the losing Indians for both are really winners, but I lost something of my soul.

Now, the first of the month Melissa and I went up to a ministerial retreat and training in multi-cultural worship in Greenfield New Hampshire. For the last six months I haven't been out of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Boston or the Cape of Massachusetts. I've been breathing what I now realize was a rarefied liberal air and listened to a news media which re-enforced my view of reality. On the drive-up once we got north in Massachusetts we were met with Trump signs in abundance. This is something I didn't notice in the areas I've been living. What was interesting was the Trump signs were in yards and in front of buildings that could use repair and many cars in the front yard were on cinder blocks. This was not the America of Wall Street Banking where this year's average salary is \$450,000 with yearly bonuses of only \$140,000. This is the America where \$70,000 in wages took a family of two working full time to accumulate and maybe get benefits. This is the America that lost their homes to the financial crisis of 2009, and watched Wall Street get relief, and Washington insiders get a quarter of \$1 million

for an hour's keynote address to a New York bank. This is the America who sent their sons and daughters to a desert war in the 90s and after 9/11. This is the America that was ripe for the picking of a modern-day PT Barnum. This is the America who remembered the 1950s when American flags flew from front porches and a single wage earner could support a house, and an occasional new car, and who could earn a year's college tuition doing a summer job. This is a patriotic America who listened to their politicians of both parties for the past two generations promising prosperity and telling them that the American dream is within their grasp if they just vote for their respective candidates. This is the America that saw solutions to complex and possibly unwinnable dilemmas in bumper sticker slogans rather than thoughtful multifaceted proposals. This is the America that doesn't know that under 5% unemployment is the best you can expect, and trade pacts help growth industries rather than dying ones. This is the America that equated strength of character with a bare-chested John Wayne on a horse, and good diplomacy with a Marine expeditionary force. I was not connected with this America.

Like the era that Vaughan Williams wrote about in the Lark ascending, there was a surge of Nationalism named Trumpism that identified an enemy that could be seen; the immigrant, the refugee, the established bureaucrat in Washington, a trade policy, a more universal health plan that cost everyone, or the individual with a different colored skin or one whose first language isn't English or a Jewish banker.

Like many of the rest of you I was disheartened with the election. Secretary Clinton didn't just win the popular vote by more than 2 million votes, she beat out John Kennedy's margin in 1960. This plurality in a normal election could be seen as a mandate for her vision of America. The policies, the America, the female presidency, that Mrs. Clinton presented to the American people was desired by a substantial portion of America. If President-elect Trump's stated desire to be president to the whole United States is more than just rhetoric he must address this mandate. Being basically rational, I cannot tell you I understand how probably the best qualified presidential candidate ever didn't get elected, or why the voters couldn't see through the smoke screen that was created around Mrs. Clinton. I can't tell you why substantial programs and policies were beaten by vague promises and flimsy hopes. Maybe the hope that buys lottery tickets is a stronger motivator than ideas and logic, but this isn't the first year the voting public has gone against their own best interests. But they did. From both sides this was not an election of

ideas as many of us would have liked, but an election of the heart. We Universalists should understand this viscerally.

So in our Brexit moment, the American people allowed the people's house to be occupied by the biggest uncivilized demagogue since Andrew Jackson slopped a beer on the white house ballroom floor two centuries ago. We allowed the ranting against Globalization knowing that the Silk worm could never return to Mansfield, that the Steel industry with the great open faced hearths would never open again in Bethlehem or Pittsburgh, and the great power stations along the Ohio River that supply America's electric would not replace their new natural gas generators with ones that burn West Virginia coal. The America that Mister Trump promised will be a hard one to achieve. Healthcare, foreign alliances, illegal immigration and the mess we have in the Middle East will not be stopped or changed by bluster. Globalization is a process that you can't stop just by wishing. Globalization will occur even if we're not involved through isolationism. The Trump administration will find changing things in Washington slower and harder than they imagine. It's like trying to turn an aircraft carrier which is moving in one direction. We will see President Trump's real agenda isn't consistent with conservative or Republican policies. When we see that real agenda, I suspect it will revolve around what is personally advantageous to Mister Trump, with a few bones to his conservative supporters and less substantial to his voting consistory.

Our task, I believe, will be in the next two years to vocalize and use the courts to keep us moving towards a gentler and a more humane country. To work within our community and with like-minded partners to support a loving agenda and fight an agenda of division and hate. Of which One Virginia voter said, "I guess hate is now state-sponsored." The America that got Mister Trump's vote is an America that needs our support. This is the America that keeps getting left behind. While I hate the image of the divisive America that Mister Trump painted, his voters needs our support, but not as an insult to their needs, or to their intelligence, or to their fears, or to their vote. This last week Salena Zito at the "Atlantic" said "to understand this election, critics of Donald Trump take him literally, but not seriously. His supporters take him seriously, but not literally." If we are to get anything good from the election, it will be to understand and support the needs of the America that voted Mister Trump into office and be ready for the election of 2018. In an ever-evolving and never ending world. Amen.

