



SIEBENQUELL

Earth's crammed with Heaven



SOURCE: MÖNNERJAHN 2017

Half way through the 40 days of our Lenten Spring, I find myself pondering the words of William Butler Yeats, »Gaze no more in the bitter glass«. It is his warning to his beloved, not to stare into the »dim glass the demons hold«, because it makes her eyes »grow all unkind«. I ponder his words, because I find myself surrounded by those who do nothing but stare into the bitter glass.

People sit at richly laden tables and all their table talk is of complaint, disagreement and a general sense that they have somehow been cheated out of some undefinable birthright. Travelers return from expensive holidays and gripe continually of the fatigue their luxury has exacted from them. All around me are the voices of discontent, who want to be elsewhere, to own something else, to be someone else, to live something else.

The only conclusion that can be drawn, is that the earth has little to offer that can console, gladden or excite the human heart. Just beneath the surface of this culture of complaint is the dangerous conviction, that something is seriously wrong with the world.

All the greater was my joy and delight, as a German confrere asked me if I knew the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning. Indeed, she is one of my favourite poets. The confrere went on to quote several lines from her work »Aurora Leigh«.

Earth's crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with God:
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
 The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries...

Bk. VII, l. 812-826. Aurora Leigh

Then he went on to tell me how he was carrying these words through his Lenten journey, and how these words were carrying him.

I admire him for it. It is way of resisting the temptation to continually stare into the bitter glass. There is nothing seriously wrong with the world. There is something seriously wrong with us.

The earth is crammed with heaven, but it is hard to see when your life is crammed with superficial junk.

There is holy ground under our feet, but without the sensitivity of bare feet, we trample over the delicate, the finely crafted and fragile beauty, never even noticing what is crushed beneath our booted feet.

Every common bush is afire with God, but if our lives revolve around securing ourselves and protecting our interests, then we are more likely to talk about fire insurance and smoke detectors.

Elizabeth Barret Browning leads us to the quoted lines of her poem with a few powerful lines of advice:

And truly, I reiterate . . . nothing's small!
 No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,
 But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;
 No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere;
 No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim:
 And, — glancing on my own thin, veined wrist, —
 In such a little tremour of the blood
 The whole strong clamour of a vehement soul
 Doth utter itself distinct.

Indeed, if we gaze at the world like that, we will see that earth is crammed with heaven. So, for remainder of the forty days, my advice is simple and clean: Gaze no more into the bitter glass. After all, those who pluck blueberries next to burning bushes, are not very likely to see resurrection at tables, on shores, behind closed doors, during walks through the countryside or in the breaking of the bread.

Erik Riechers SAC

Vallendar, March 15th, 2018