

The World I Want to Live In
Psalm 23 & 1 John 3:16-24
Alan Claassen April 26, 2014

Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters,

I want to share a story with you written by poet, Naomi Shihab Nye.

Naomi Shihab Nye was born on March 12, 1952, in St. Louis, Missouri, to a Palestinian father and an American mother.

During her high school years, she lived in Ramallah in Palestine, the Old City in Jerusalem, and San Antonio, Texas, where she later received her BA in English and world religions from Trinity University.

Nye gives voice to her experience as an Arab-American through poems about heritage and peace that overflow with a humanitarian spirit.

About her work, the poet William Stafford has said, "her poems combine transcendent liveliness and sparkle along with warmth and human insight.

She is a champion of the literature of encouragement and heart. Reading her work enhances life."

This morning, during this One Great Hour Of Sharing, followed by the CROP Walk,

I want to share with you a story that she tells about her experience, wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal.

But before I tell you that story I want to share a thought that came to me this week
Maybe now we are ready to look at the cross...

As you hear this story hold gently in your heart a person or a place...

After learning

my flight had been delayed for four hours, I heard an announcement:

"If anyone in the vicinity of Gate 4-A understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately."

Well--one pauses these days. Gate 4-A was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly. "Help,"

"Talk to her." said the flight service person.

"What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke to her haltingly.

"Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti?

Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?"

The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying.

She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely.

She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son and I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and would ride next to her.

She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it.

Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends.

Then I thought just for the heck of it

why not call some Palestinian poets I know and

let them chat with her? This all took up about two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then.

Telling about her life, patting my knee, answering questions.

She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies—

little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—

out of her bag--and was offering them to all the women at the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one.

It was like a sacrament.

The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the
lovely woman from Laredo—

we were all covered with the same powdered sugar.

And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free beverages from huge coolers
and two little girls from our flight ran around serving us all apple juice
and they were covered with powdered sugar, too.

And I noticed my new best friend--by now we were holding hands—
had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing,
with green furry leaves.

Such an old country tradition.

Always carry a plant.

Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought,
This is the world I want to live in.

The shared world.

Not a single person in that gate

--once the crying of confusion stopped—
seemed apprehensive about any other person.

They took the cookies.

I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere.

Not everything is lost.

In 1946, Episcopal Bishop Henry Sherrill made an appeal on nationwide radio to raise “one million dollars in one hour” for relief and reconstruction after WWII.

The appeal soon became known as **One Great Hour of Sharing**, an ecumenical offering that now supports projects in over 100 countries. Give to One Great Hour of Sharing.

Also in 1946, Church World Service was founded as a cooperative ministry of 37 Christian denominations and communions providing sustainable self-help, development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance around the world.

The largest fund-raising events for Church World Service are CROP Hunger Walks. The first **CROP Hunger Walk** was in the 1960s. Now more than 2,000 communities across the U.S. join in CROP Hunger Walks each year, including Sonoma. Up to 25% of the money donated is given to local hunger fighting agencies which include food banks and community gardens.

From the global heartbreak of WWII

One Great Hour of Sharing and Church World Service

were two resurrection responses from the human heart,

that chose love, chose light, that chose life.

In the reading from the 1st Letter of John read by Jaime this morning we heard these words.

“We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

One Great Hour of Sharing and Church World Service are two life-affirming and life-changing examples of loving one another in truth and action.

We look at the cross of hunger, homelessness, and rather than turning away, we respond.

Our broken hearts are broken open for a wider circle of compassion, that turns all people into our kin, our tribe, our community.

In the 23rd Psalm we hear familiar words presented in a new way by Nan Merrill

O my Beloved, you are my shepherd,
I shall not want; You bring me to green pastures for rest,
and lead me beside still waters renewing my spirit,
You restore my soul.
You lead me in the path of goodness to follow Love's way.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow and of death,
I am not afraid;
for you are with me forever;
your rod and your staff they guide me,

they give me strength and comfort.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of all my fears;
you bless me with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the heart of the Beloved
forever.

The Beloved, Jesus, The Beloved Soul of Creation, The Beloved Holy Spirit
brings us beside still waters,
and beside death,
and beside our fears
-which surely become our enemies,-
and yet, even there,
may be a moment
where our souls can be restored.

When we lay down our lives for one another, with one another
as perfectly imperfect as we are,
we catch a glimpse of the beloved community and our souls are restored.

When we love in truth and action, with one another,
as perfectly imperfect as we are,
we catch a glimpse of the beloved community our souls are restored.

When we ask for the help that we need,
when we pray even not knowing what to pray for,

when we let go of our plans and expectations,
and open our hearts to receive guidance from
living presence of Jesus who is still, somehow,
our teacher and healer and companion our souls are restored.

When we see a brother or sister in need,
and we sit beside them, know that we hear their cry,
and receive from them a sugary powdery cookie,
we will dwell, for a moment, in the heart of the Beloved
our bellies are filled and our souls are restored.

For almost seven decades now, nine denominations in the U.S.,
united as one,
have together been connecting people through
the One Great Hour of Sharing and Church World Service.

Sisters and brothers living in poverty, who would have been otherwise
overlooked, or outright forgotten, have been empowered by our gifts.

Each time a gift is given, a connection is made. Every single offering builds
another bridge and tears down another wall.

Each donation no matter how large or small,
reveals our unity, we are one community of beings.

Together, we are much stronger.

Together, we have raised hundreds of millions of dollars to assist and to
connect with those whose lives have now been forever changed.

But it doesn't take millions of dollars to change someone's life.

All it takes is sitting with them

and letting them know you hear what they are saying
and offering whatever you can,
and receiving the gift they have to offer to you.

In her story from gate 4-A in the Albuquerque Airport Naomi Shihab Nye closes with these words,

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought,
This is the world I want to live in. The shared world.
Not a single person in that gate—
once the crying of confusion stopped—
seemed apprehensive about any other person.
They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.
This can still happen anywhere.
All is not lost.
May it be so.

What world do you want to live in ?

Well then, live in it!