

And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own.
I would have written of me on my stone:
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.

(Robert Frost)

December, 2004

Dear Friends:

They turned on the holiday lights at the Embarcadero Center the Friday before Thanksgiving. The Christmas tree at Union Square lit up a week later. But my own, personal holiday lights – the interior ones that are wired to the lump in my throat and the tear ducts behind my eyes – got plugged in a week after that. It was the first Saturday of December and we (Loaves & Fishes at the Newman Center) were hosting our annual early holiday celebration for our poor and homeless neighbors in Berkeley. Just as things were reaching a frenzied pace - lots of guests arriving, volunteers feverishly wrapping gifts for Santa to give to kids we'd only recently discovered were coming, the toilet in the rest room overflowing, the U Cal Golden Overtones looking for a place to warm up for their after dinner entertainment - one of our old friends showed up. (Marsha has survived a difficult ordeal. Severe depression has cost her everything that was dear to her – family, friends, jobs, places to stay. For several years she was on, then off, then on the streets again. But even during her darkest days, there was always light – not to be confused with lightness – in her heart and spirit.) When she arrived at Newman that day, Marsha was in a bright mood and pulled me aside and reached in her bag for a gift she'd brought me: a thick and heavy book on The Kennedys. When I thanked her but protested that she shouldn't be spending her limited funds on a gift for me, she took my arm and with great intensity said, "Fitz, do you remember when you worked at The Food Project, and there was that awful month when I didn't have *any* money at all? Every evening that month, as people lined up for the Quarter Meal and gave you their 25 cents to get in, when I would get to the front of the line you'd just give me a big wink and wave me in. I've never forgotten that and have wanted to find a way to say 'thank you'." And for the umpteenth time in my life I was reminded just how wise that itinerant rabbi from Nazareth was when he began the Sermon on the Mount by saying "Blessed are the poor."

As our days have been shrinking and our nights stretching, I've been thinking about Marsha, and so many others like her whom I've been privileged to know. Their blessed presence in my life has amounted to an ongoing sacrament – a glimpse and a taste and a whiff of something so lovely that I dare once again to dream about a kingdom yet to come. And made bold by that dreaming, I choose to keep on hoping and waiting and working to make that dream come true.

I spent a good part of the past year embodying a verse that Paul Simon gave to Leonard Bernstein years ago. (He used it in his theatre piece called MASS.)

Half the people are stoned and the other half are waiting for the next election.
Half the people are drowned and the other half are swimming in the wrong
direction.

I haven't been stoned in a long time. (15 years clean and sober last April 17th.) But I sure as hell was waiting for the next election! No one who knows me will be surprised to learn that I was less than thrilled with the results. Why do we keep electing to office people who make such terrible choices about how to spend our common wealth? (Someone has estimated that if we spent just 6% of what we've used to destroy Iraq, we could have provided housing with support services for every single homeless person in America!) The only moment in the entire campaign that I heard *any* mention of "the homeless" was in Barack Obama's Keynote Address at the Boston convention.

Yes, I still share Robert Frost's "lover's quarrel with the world". How can we not? And I keep rethinking just what it is I am *waiting for* in this season when we celebrate waiting. Not a return of the 60's. Not a John XXIV or a Vatican III. Not a liberal/progressive triumph at the polls. Not some avenging force to come "trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." (Ouch! Some of my *own* angry Concords might get stomped on!) What I *am* waiting for is, simply, the coming of the Kingdom of God! I continue to dream about that peaceable kingdom Isaiah envisioned – where swords get hammered into farm tools, where the earth flows with milk and honey, and where even lions and lambs cozy up to each other. I actually *expect* that extravagant dream to become real some day! As my hair gets whiter, and as my legs complain ever more bitterly about the load they've been forced to carry around all these years, I grow less confident that I'm going to see it materialize during my own days on this earth. But on regular, even frequent, occasions – like Marsha's gift of gratitude earlier this month – I am reassured that *IT IS COMING!*

In the meantime ...

With love,
Fitz