

Thoughts from the Garden – May 2016

The garden is a sacred space for me – a place where I live and love most authentically – a place of light and life. This holy ground and the life that we reverence here have been violated. Within three weeks, we lost four rabbits (Max, Ruby, Pumpkin and Serendipity) and a goat, Amiga. The first Sunday night, two rabbits went missing – the wooden bottom boards of their hutch removed in such a way that we thought they were stolen by a person. The next Sunday night, two more rabbits were gone, and their hutches were torn apart by an animal. The Friday night after that, Amiga the goat was viciously killed, and loud barking was heard during the night.



Saturday, the day after the goats were attacked, was a terrible day. It involved making phone calls to animal control, animal shelters, veterinarians, police, and those who needed to know about what happened, waiting for people to come or call back, asking visitors to stay away from the goats, ‘closing’ the garden for the first time ever, giving shots to the goats, explaining over and over the ugly details of the past few weeks, and burying Amiga’s body. The other two goats were traumatized; on high alert, they wouldn’t eat or rest, and they startled at every sound and movement. Josefina was wounded with gashes on both sides of her body.

The day is a blur of tears and activity in my memory, but the night remains clear. The vet told us that we needed to close the goats in their shelter during the night to keep them safe. Saturday night was rainy and cool. It was nearly impossible to get both goats to go inside their shed at the same time. At one point I stood sobbing in the shed with Elsa and pleaded with Josefina, “please come in; please just come in.” Once I finally got them both inside with the doors closed, they cried and pushed against the doors so strongly that I knew it wouldn’t hold them, or any dog that might be after them. I went back home and returned with the car to begin a night watch. With the rain tapping the top of the car, I faced the goats and followed every frightened move they made, straining my eyes into the darkness towards the now offensive and alarming sounds of a typical night. For the first time – alone and unable to do anything but look – I was exhausted and scared. I didn’t know what I was watching for, except something that killed to kill, not to eat. I only felt that nothing in this beloved place was safe from harm.

Over the next few days, I jumped every time I heard a barking dog. I viewed everyone with suspicion – wondering if they were the owners of this creature who behaved so viciously, wondering if the dog was abused or neglected or trained to kill. I was angry at the owner who, at best was neglectful, or at worst came and watched the violence. I was angry at the security guards who missed all three episodes. I was angry at myself for not being able to do anything to keep the animals safe. I was also terribly sad, especially when observing the trauma of the surviving goats, when I had to tell people and children who love those goats that they had been attacked, or each time I accidentally filled three bowls with food instead of two. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Amiga’s dead and desecrated body and I worried what would happen next.

I’m writing these garden thoughts before any of this is resolved. I don’t know if we will ever catch this animal or figure out the mystery of these weeks. I am apprehensive about the safety of the animals, and I am concerned about keeping up this pace and responsibility over the long run. My anger has mostly dissolved into heavy lifting and hard work at the garden, but I am still sad. I’m grieving the loss of the animals as much as I am grieving the desecration of our sacred space through violence. On Saturday, Mary Lou kept saying, “Something has changed. It’s different, and I don’t know that it can go back to the way it was before.” She’s right. Maybe that’s the lesson. Just before this all happened, I was shoveling woodchips with a volunteer and thinking that I didn’t want any of my life at the garden to change. I wanted to bottle it up, just the way it was, and keep it forever. Well, things change, always. I’m being reminded, once again, to appreciate every moment and live fully because the world can be altered completely overnight. I need to hold all that I treasure with open hands, grateful for each gift for as long as it remains. I’m being challenged to allow myself to be loved by the people around me, which means opening myself up to be vulnerable. I’m being invited to live peace and compassion now, when it is hardest to live. Here in this darkness and worry, I’m being asked to live the faith I profess, and give myself to God who is working through all the mess. I’m living here in the darkness outside the tomb, anxious and sorrowful, trusting in the dawn of resurrection.