

“Mysterious Whispers of Life”

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“..let us be completely natural, before we trouble ourselves with the supernatural. I long to get away and lie under a green tree and let the wind blow on me. There is marvel and charm enough in that for me.”

--Margaret Fuller

Margaret Fuller, born to a Unitarian family 200 years ago this month, became in her brief life of only forty years one of the leading American intellectuals of her time, a close friend of Emerson and herself one of the central figures in the religious and literary movement in New England known as transcendentalism.

Among many accomplishments, her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was path-breaking; it is considered to be a key forerunner of the suffragist and later feminist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. As Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton later wrote of Fuller:

“She possessed more influence on the thought of American women than any woman previous to her time.” (from *History of Woman Suffrage*)

Given by her father a quality of education commonly only afforded boys, she became a teacher, writer (on topics ranging from religion to social reform), editor of the transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, and near the end of her life the first American woman war correspondent, sending dispatches to Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* from revolutionary Italy.

An extraordinary woman. Yet her life had a tragic end, as the ship on which her Italian husband and their infant son were returning to New York foundered and broke apart off the south shore of Long Island, all three of them lost – her friends bereft, all of us having lost what would no doubt have been many more years of accomplishment and leadership.

Yes, an extraordinary woman, one of our inspiring Unitarian transcendentalist forebears, whose life still speaks to us today.

In reading through quotations from Fuller’s writing, a four word phrase leapt out at me. It became my title for today’s reflection: “the mysterious whispers of life.”

What did she mean?

Well, I know what I hear in these words. There are moments, are there not, when we hear or feel or sense something usually hidden that for a moment is revealed, or almost revealed, something (the “supernatural” somehow within the “natural”?), something just beneath or just beyond the ordinary, everything we most of the time take for granted – sun, earth, trees, flowers... each other...

Yet for a moment – perhaps alone in the woods on a lovely spring day, perhaps as we listen to beautiful music as we do this morning, or perhaps in the midst of our daily work, maybe with others in conversation – and Fuller was famous for the “conversations” she held for women and in which she participated with both women and men, conversations about things that matter, conversation which enliven our souls... yes, in

one of a myriad of circumstances... perhaps we are surprised... for a moment sometimes... the hidden revealed... if only in mysterious whispers.

And as we move through our lives, the hours and days of our lives so often taken up with long to-do lists, chores, errands – don't we all yearn to hear "the mysterious whispers of life"? To be a little more alive? Wherever we are?

Even if we've been sitting in a windowless room waiting hours longer than we thought we would be, waiting for our car to be serviced... which is what I was doing as I pondered what to say today about "the mysterious whispers of life." Can I hear those whispers even in this windowless corner I wondered? Maybe in between beats of my heart? Maybe in the presence of the other people waiting... maybe in the photograph of the newborn child on the desk of the service manager... and in the look in the eye of that father when I commented on the photo...?

I hope so... I hope we *can* hear the whispers anywhere... and so be more alive anywhere wherever we are, knowing in our bones that from this greater aliveness – a spiritual experience after all – comes... well, everything else? Love... caring... kindness... service... yes, everything else.

It seemed to for Margaret Fuller, no saint but a human being striving to live a full, awakened life:

As in the course of her brief life she gave herself to personal growth ("the only object in life is to grow" she wrote), gave her life to engagement with the issues of her time, from women's rights to slavery, and near the end of her life gave her life more intimately to the love of one other - Giovanni Angelo Ossoli - and to her mother's love of her dear infant son, affectionately called "Nino."

So it is for us, is it not – that listening for and to "the mysterious whispers of life" leads to a fuller life, a more loving life, a life serving life in whatever way *our* unique gifts lead us.

So may it be.