

## Newsletter Reflection January 2020

It's a new year, and I am sure I am not the first to observe that 2020 calls us to clearer, crisper vision. We're happy to highlight upcoming seminar opportunities, including seminars this spring in Italy and, this summer, the Justice and Society Seminar (see below).

The new year is always a time for reflection, and in many of my past newsletter musings, I've reflected on our relationship to time, that finite resource. This year, however, I am more and more pre-occupied with space, or more precisely...place. What does it mean to lead (or follow) in place?

I'm sure part of my preoccupation with place is that, like many, I am rarely in one place for an extended period of time. I'm fortunate to live in my home state of Colorado, but I am rarely home for more than a week or two before venturing off to seminars, meetings, vacations. Additionally, when I am in Denver, I'm increasingly conscious of my childhood home nearby—my mother still lives there, and since she's in need of significant care, I find myself at my childhood home much more frequently than in years past.

Louisville, Colorado, has changed enormously since I was a child. What were fields—seemingly limitless terrain for childhood exploration—a are now suburban homes and a golf course. Several miles away, the neighborhood and apartment buildings where I delivered newspapers by bicycle have been redeveloped several times. I suspect my childhood practice of riding my horse along the railroad tracks and into downtown—once tolerated if not approved—would meet with more severe resistance now.

One thing, however, has not changed—the barbershop on the corner of Main and Walnut. I had the remarkable experience last fall of taking my 11-year-old son there for a haircut. The people have changed a bit, and some of the décor (including Broncos memorabilia, thankfully) has been updated, but the barbershop remains effectively as it was 40 years ago. When I was my son's age, the man who cut my hair in the morning was the mayor in the afternoon. Yes, it was (and in some sense still is) a small town, and yes, I feel a perhaps predictable nostalgia for recollected simpler times that were probably not all that simple. But what I've been reflecting on most are the ways in which attachment to place, to geography, to culture—to memory—anchor us in an increasingly untethered world.

Taking my son to my old barbershop was a re-communion with place, and thus indirectly with time. And if the simplicity to which I felt connected is imaginary, historically speaking, it is not illusory, for it is a simplicity—the simplicity of childhood as evoked by place—to which we can aspire. I was reading recently this, from Wendell Berry:

If we are to be properly humble in our use of the world, we need places that we do not use at all. We need the experience of leaving something alone...that we enter in a kind of cultural nakedness, without comforts or tools, to submit rather than to conquer. We need what other cultures would have called sacred groves.

Berry is speaking, literally, of natural places that we have (or ought to have) left alone. The wilderness that still abounds in pockets of the mountains around Aspen, Colorado, and many other places, is comparatively left alone. But Berry's reflection is as much about us and our propensity to intervene, to renovate, to make the world anew...at the expense of humbling ourselves before places that are either not of our making or which require us to be in a different relationship with them. Berry's counsel is to the humility that comes with being a part of a place that is beyond our solitary efforts, a place which

puts us in our place as members of communities, traditions, practices, and cultures. Sacred groves are certainly those elements of pristine nature, but there are also civic places which have their own qualities as sacred groves.

As you begin the year, with lists of how you want to spend your time, reflect also on your own sacred groves—what are those places, natural and civic, that ground you in communion with nature and neighbor? What are the sources of rootedness in place that sustain you—or could sustain you more—in a world that likes to pull things up by the roots? And what are the places, actual places, where you want to lead...follow...grow? Where are your sacred groves?

One of the most haunting lines in the Executive Seminar readings, recently added to our curriculum, comes from bell hooks: “If one has chosen to live mindfully, then choosing a place to die is as vital as choosing where and how to live. Choosing to return to the land and landscape of my childhood, the world of my Kentucky upbringing, I am comforted by the knowledge that I could die here.” Seeing clearly in 2020 means choosing to live mindfully in time...and place.