

## Jim Thompson's Spiritual Poetry Class #56

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

5 pm PT

Dear Friends:

I just returned from a 10-day trip to participate in the Stop-Enbridge-Line-3 protests in Minnesota. I hope you read some poems while I was gone.

I went intending to be a supporter of those who were "arrestable," meaning they intended to get arrested. But when push came to shove, I transitioned into being "Red," the term for those willing to get arrested (Green = supportive but not get arrested; Yellow = Not looking to get arrested but can handle it if it happened).

I took a bunch of poems with me and shared them with our affinity group each day so I wasn't exactly in a poetry dessert. But I did miss our time together to appreciate and interpret great poems.

To transition back to regular life, I picked out three favorite songs each with lyrics containing brilliant poetry. All are counter-culture in some way and feel like a good entrance back to our class. Don't worry, we will say them rather than sing them!

- **With God on Our Side** by Bob Dylan. More than 50 years ago a very cool junior high school friend mentioned the title of this song and I thought, "Why would I want to listen to a hymn?" Well...
- **Hammer and a Nail** by Emily Ann Saliers of the Indigo Girls. I know how much Dana loves Indigo Girls so I feel kind of bad doing this song while she's on vacation, but...
- **In the Big Rock Candy Mountains** by Harry McClintock. How do people with little hope for a prosperous life keep on keeping on? I love this fantastical take on what life could be like.

Here's the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81374816274?pwd=eG1PRUxoWC9iTjFaTHFBNTBrNkIvQT09>

Passcode: **704824**

Note: This link and passcode are good for classes through July 28, 2021.

+ + Jim

# With God on Our Side

—Bob Dylan

Oh my name it ain't nothin'  
My age it means less  
The country I come from  
Is called the Midwest  
I was taught and brought up there  
The laws to abide  
And that land that I live in  
Has God on its side

Oh, the history books tell it  
They tell it so well  
The cavalries charged  
The Indians fell  
The cavalries charged  
The Indians died  
Oh, the country was young  
With God on its side

The Spanish-American  
War had its day  
And the Civil War, too  
Was soon laid away  
And the names of the heroes  
I was made to memorize  
With guns in their hands  
And God on their side

The First World War, boys  
It came and it went  
The reason for fighting  
I never did get  
But I learned to accept it  
Accept it with pride  
For you don't count the dead  
When God's on your side

The Second World War  
Came to an end  
We forgave the Germans  
And then we were friends  
Though they murdered six million

In the ovens they fried  
The Germans now, too  
Have God on their side

I've learned to hate the Russians  
All through my whole life  
If another war comes  
It's them we must fight  
To hate them and fear them  
To run and to hide  
And accept it all bravely  
With God on my side

But now we got weapons  
Of chemical dust  
If fire them, we're forced to  
Then fire, them we must  
One push of the button  
And a shot the world wide  
And you never ask questions  
When God's on your side

Through many a dark hour  
I've been thinkin' about this  
That Jesus Christ was  
Betrayed by a kiss  
But I can't think for you  
You'll have to decide  
Whether Judas Iscariot  
Had God on his side.

So now as I'm leavin'  
I'm weary as Hell  
The confusion I'm feelin'  
Ain't no tongue can tell  
The words fill my head  
And fall to the floor  
That if God's on our side  
He'll stop the next war

## Hammer and a Nail

—Emily Ann Saliers (Indigo Girls)

Clearing webs from the hovel  
A blistered hand on the handle of a shovel  
I've been digging too deep, I always do  
I see my fate on the surface  
I look a lot like Narcissus  
A dark abyss of an emptiness  
Standing on the edge of a drowning blue

I look behind my ears for the green  
And even my sweat smells clean  
Glare off the white hurts my eyes  
I gotta get out of bed and get a hammer and a nail  
Learn how to use my hands, not just my head  
I think myself into jail  
Now I know a refuge never grows  
From a chin in a hand in a thoughtful pose  
Gotta tend the earth if you want a rose

Had a lot of good intentions  
Sit around for fifty years and then collect a pension  
Started seeing the road to hell and just where it starts  
But my life is more than a vision  
The sweetest part is acting after making a decision  
I started seeing the whole as a sum of its parts

And I, I look behind my ears for the green  
And even my sweat smells clean  
Glare off the white hurts my eyes  
I gotta get out of bed and get a hammer and a nail  
Learn how to use my hands, not just my head  
I think myself into jail  
Now I know a refuge never grows  
From a chin in a hand in a thoughtful pose  
Gotta tend the earth if you want a rose

My life is part of the global life  
I'd found myself becoming more immobile  
When I'd think a little girl in the world can't do anything  
A distant nation my community  
A street person my responsibility  
If I have a care in the world I have a gift to bring

I look behind my ears for the green  
And even my sweat smells clean  
Glare off the white hurts my eyes  
I gotta get out of bed and get a hammer and a nail  
Learn how to use my hands, not just my head  
I think myself into jail  
Now I know a refuge never grows  
From a chin in a hand in a thoughtful pose  
Gotta tend the earth if you want a rose

## **In the Big Rock Candy Mountains**

—Harry McClintock

One evening as the sun went down  
And the jungle fires were burning,  
Down the track came a hobo hiking,  
And he said, "Boys, I'm not turning  
I'm headed for a land that's far away  
Besides the crystal fountains  
So come with me, we'll go and see  
The Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,  
There's a land that's fair and bright,  
Where the handouts grow on bushes  
And you sleep out every night.  
Where the boxcars all are empty  
And the sun shines every day  
And the birds and the bees  
And the cigarette trees  
The lemonade springs  
Where the bluebird sings  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains  
All the cops have wooden legs  
And the bulldogs all have rubber teeth  
And the hens lay soft-boiled eggs  
The farmers' trees are full of fruit  
And the barns are full of hay  
Oh I'm bound to go  
Where there ain't no snow  
Where the rain don't fall  
The winds don't blow  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains  
You never change your socks  
And the little streams of alcohol  
Come trickling down the rocks  
The brakemen have to tip their hats  
And the railway bulls are blind  
There's a lake of stew  
And of whiskey too  
You can paddle all around it  
In a big canoe  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,  
The jails are made of tin.  
And you can walk right out again,  
As soon as you are in.  
There ain't no short-handled shovels,  
No axes, saws nor picks,  
I'm bound to stay  
Where you sleep all day,  
Where they hung the jerk  
That invented work  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

....

I'll see you all this coming fall  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains