

the Refreshing

TO LOOK OUT UPON A CLEAN, SHARPLY DEFINED world, devoid of smog and muck, the view not sterile but wholesomely unsullied by man—that is the gift of living out away from the city.

Here where the immediate neighbors have four legs, there are two bright moments in every year. The first is that glorious splash of warming spring that shakes off the long, winter doldrums, and the second is the refreshing arrival of crisp, dry autumn after a summer of withering heat and humidity. These two moments revive and cleanse not only the world about us, but our lagging spirits as well. Month after month of either oppressive heat or dull, aching cold can slowly beat us down, suppressing the brighter spirit that dwells within.

Months have passed since the first fresh buds of spring heralded new growth after the winter hush. After the dry brittle cold of the white season, even the damp heat that crept unevenly close was a welcome visitor. But the visitor stayed—stayed well-past the point of being a polite guest. It abused our generous nature, settled in and made itself at home.

Now the fragrant greens no longer herald fresh growth, but, old and tired, have joined to feed and be fed with the hovering dampness that pervades the land, the house—and the clammy sheets upon which one seeks relief.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 36:25-26 NIV

Then a new day breaks wide with a cool breeze from out of the North. Suddenly the surrounding greens are once again friends. No longer in conspiracy with the cloying damp, they are now kissed with the fresh clean air that heralds the approach of autumn. Trees gone long without rain, drop their leaves to litter the crackling grass with the dry musk of new mulch.

There are those who see life through the heavy mask of unrelieved sin—oppressive, mind-clouding, unrelenting muck that heaves the soul back down into the damp

earth from which it was born. Philosophy does not conquer their frowning outlook; even their joy is muted by the emptiness of their heart. Discouraged, pessimistic, their days are a clouded blur, the distant horizon shrouded by the heat-shimmering mirage of depressed resignation.

There are others, however, who see life through the colorful prism of unfettered grace—the fresh breeze that blows cool and dry, carrying within it wisps of fragrant hope. Their feet tread lightly, springing easily upon the soil that holds no claim upon them. Their outlook is clean and open, their joy deep and real. Each new day bears new hope, new opportunity. Their horizon is sparkling as crystalline glass, near, and as certain as yesterday. They see each today through the hope and promise of tomorrow.

Remember my affliction and my wandering, the worm-wood and bitterness.
Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.
This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:19-23

This is the refreshment of God's Spirit. And part of the joy in these two seasons is that they represent our eternal longing for that refreshment. Day after day, month after month we are oppressed by the spirit of this world, submitting to the doldrums, living in the smog that we eventually come to believe is clean air.

But twice a year God's nature reminds us that it is all false, all a muck-coated sham meant to numb us to the true brightness of His refreshing Spirit. So we come to Him, bathing in His restorative grace to cleanse away the foul muck that has for too long numbed us to His presence.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.

Psalms 51:10-12

