

A Marriage Old Enough to Vote

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Today is our eighteenth wedding anniversary. I'm writing this in our back yard in Pittsfield Township, sitting out on the deck. The sky is a brilliant blue and at four o' clock in the afternoon the sun is already low and the light is flowing across the yard at a shallow angle, leaving dim hollows in the woods around me. I can hear faint traffic noise — sadly, we can always hear faint traffic noise here — but there are chipmunks zipping around and raptors wheeling high overhead and crows and planes and some other kind of bird that always sounds to me like a big pair of Fiskars shears going “snip, snip, snip” and the orange leaves are lit up brilliantly and it's beautiful here and I'm glad to be a part of it.

Grace and I slipped away briefly to go get some fried tofu and a couple of sushi rolls without the kids. It's become our tradition to celebrate our anniversaries with sushi. Taking the whole crew for sushi is a challenge that neither one of us wanted to take on. So we had a couple of delicious rolls, something with lobster roe and something with raw tuna and three sauces and several cups of hot green tea. Then we went next door to a little vegan juice bar and ordered two shots — Grace downed a shot of wheatgrass and I downed a shot of ginger. I'm fighting a sore throat and trying to get on top of it before it causes me to miss work and use up some of my carefully hoarded vacation days.

Grace says that she is still very happy that I am her husband, and she can't imagine anyone else who would put up with her. I told her that I am still very happy that she is my wife, and I'm pretty sure I couldn't put up with anyone else. And that's about as romantic as I'm going to get, in this newsletter.

Yesterday

Yesterday I got up early and made the family bacon and a pot of steel-cut oats, and had myself a bowl of oats with butter. We make heavy use of our instant pot pressure cookers — we have two on the counter, a smaller one and the biggest one they make. We took the kids out to the last CSA pickup day on our friends' farm in Grass Lake. It was also a day that they let people come glean — pick over their enormous garden. So we brought home the official share goodies — including a small jar of honey and a small package of goat cheese — and also brought a couple of bags of scratch-and-dent produce. There were still a lot of

hot peppers of various types on the plants, and beets and turnips still in the grounds, and a lot of kale that looks a bit worse for wear but will taste great. There were also big bushes of herbs. And we also said goodbye to a couple of very large heirloom piggies that will soon be liberated from this vale of sorrows.

After we left Grass Lake we drove down to Milan and stopped in to Mother Loaf Breads to see if they had anything yummy left and, wow, did they! We got three Einkorn baguettes, a loaf of their yellow sweet-potato bread, and four special ginger/apple rolls topped with a cider reduction and toasted cashews.

When we got back I pulled a package of stew meat from Costco out of the refrigerator and threw it into the pan with the leftover bacon fat, along with big sprigs of thyme and rosemary, just to get a nice sear on the meat, and perfume everything with the frying herbs. Then all that minus the stems went into the big instant pot. Grace put in the last of a big batch of onions she had baked overnight a while back, along with carrots and leeks straight from the farm. While that was cooking we sliced up the sweet potato bread and served that with schmears of the sour goat cheese and a drizzle of honey. I put on one of those sawdust fire logs, because we don't have the heat on yet — we never turn it on before November first, unless it is so cold we're concerned that the pipes will freeze, and that rarely happens in October.

Then when the stew was done, we ate the hell out of it. It was so good, and so very satisfying, along with a little bit of cold beer and buttered baguette, with the ginger/apple rolls for dessert.

If I've made yesterday sound like a perfect day, that was my intent. I've left out the errand to the bank branch inside our Meijer store to get cash for the kids' allowances, only to find out that the bank branch now closes earlier and so the trip was wasted. I've left out the screaming babies, the fighting children, the point where I had to pull Benjamin off of Pippin and tell him it wasn't OK for him to stand on Pippin's head, the disgusting diaper blowout that required an immediate bath, and the endless arguments with our fourteen-year-old over her Halloween costume. I left that out because I'm trying to forget most of that stuff and remember the transcendent taste of a homemade beef stew when one is ravenous, and the color of the fall foliage against the sky that is a shade of blue that there isn't a name for and which, it seems, can't even be adequately captured on any film or digital camera sensor.

The Unjust Judge

This morning I took three of the boys to Mass and the New Testament lesson was from Luke, chapter 18:

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice

against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

Our priest pointed out that the original text suggests that the judge wasn’t just worried that the widow wasn’t just going to “wear him out” — he was worried that she was going to punch him in the face and give him a black eye; I take this to mean that he was afraid of having to appear in public after having been beaten up by a widow whose indignation towards him was entirely justifiable.

In the Jewish tradition, more so than the Christian tradition, we are given permission, even encouraged, to cry out to God, to make demands of him, to hound Him. Interestingly, I don’t think that God ever actually punishes humans for having the audacity to make these demands, even to berate and criticize him and call him unjust, although he does, occasionally, chastise them for having insufficient faith in the perfection of His plan. I think the theological principle at work here is that God will never not be seeking a relationship with us, and in his omnipotence we cannot actually offend Him. But we can certainly withdraw from Him, and do. Even if you are an atheist, there is a lot to think about in this parable; the unjust judge, it is pointed out, did not respect *people*. And I’d go so far as to say that “not fearing God” and “not respecting people” are flip sides of that same coin of withdrawal. And getting too comfortable — with anything, really — lets us attempt that, withdrawing into our circles of friends and our institutions.

I was thinking about this and about what it means to pray as an adult, and not as a child; a lot of people raised Christian learn children’s prayers and many still use them their whole lives, and that’s about the extent of their prayer lives. I hereby give you permission — encourage you, even — to scream at God, to criticize God, to berate God, to express your anger at God, if you believe in Him, and even if — *especially if* — you don’t. If he doesn’t exist, then he can take it, and you might feel better. And if He does exist, He also can take it, and look at you — you’ve been praying!

In the News

This was another one of those weeks when it seems like things are happening constantly, piling up too quickly to keep track of, while at the same time, everything feels strangely static, like nothing actually changed.

Frail, elderly Bernie Sanders, supported on both sides by his supporters, half climbed, half was carried up the stairs to a platform in Queens where he

addressed a small audience of bearded, sexist, racist white “Bernie bros,” pausing occasionally to clutch his chest and wheeze as he caught his breath after each vigorous hand gesture.

Or at least that might be what you’d conclude, if you followed cable news. Mainstream news organizations barely covered Sanders this week, aside from attributing one of his best comments at the debate, incorrectly, to Elizabeth Warren.

In reality, Sanders led a rally of twenty-six thousand people, and it’s encouraging to see. Gothamist has a great set of photos.

The Very Serious Pundits are very concerned that Sanders had a heart attack and thus it is clearly far too risky to vote for him, as he will obviously die in office, perhaps during his inaugural address. In reality, of course we should be concerned that all the front-runners are septuagenarians. Warren is 70; Biden is 76; Sanders is 78. But it is Biden who can’t seem to string two sentences together in a debate answer without getting lost, and whose eyeball was visibly hemorrhaging, turning blood-red, during a previous debate. And of course I’m concerned about Sanders’ health. But all heart attacks aren’t the same, and very often someone who has had a stent successfully placed will in fact be healthier than before, and at a lower risk for further heart problems than before the stent; that’s why they use them.

I do think that Sanders’ choice of running mate should get extra scrutiny. It should get a hell of a lot more scrutiny than Obama’s choice of running mate did. If Sanders wins the nomination but chooses a useless centrist for this important role, we’ll know that the Very Serious People got to him.

I think it’s interesting that these Very Serious Pundits treat the presidency like a monarchy, pretending that it is, and should be, all about the radiance of the King. Sanders will die at some point, but if his immense popularity is actually a sign of a genuine left-of-center insurgency, it doesn’t matter. He’s just one guy, but we are many, and it’s about all of us.

I don’t have a transcript, but if you’d like to hear episode 49 of the Grace and Paul Pottscast, which features my recording of a Sanders rally in 2018, you can find the episode blog page [here](#).

The world is burning. One of our friends has just become homeless. Health care is out of reach for many of us. Scream at God. And organize.

On Deck

Slavoj Žižek was on Chapo Trap House this week and he was funny and interesting, although I wouldn’t call him a role model. He’s so close to being a self-parody that for the first ten minutes or so, I was convinced that James Adomian was doing an impersonation of him, and only gradually became convinced that it was the real Žižek.

I had a number of small items to talk about, but the news cycle has steamrolled its way over most of them already.

As far as books and music and other media, I have some things on deck, waiting for me to complete them and/or review them, but I've continued to work far too many hours and so I haven't finished much. I received a copy of *Hainish Novels & Stories, Volume One* by Ursula K. Le Guin. That's one of the collections published by the Library of America. It's a very nice edition, with a new introduction by the author and illustrated end-papers showing maps. I've read Le Guin's most famous works, including *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *This Dispossessed*, but I certainly haven't read all the Hainish stories, and it's been decades since I read *Rocannon's World*. Her prose is amazing. So if I can, I will read this volume soon, and write about it.

I keep hearing good things about *Downton Abbey*, so I picked up a discounted DVD set of the first few seasons and finally watched the first episode. I was favorably impressed. I'm a little late to this party, so probably won't be writing detailed reviews of these episodes, but I thought the screenwriting was very good.

I was excited to learn that the Metropolitan Opera is staging Philip Glass's opera *Akhmaten*. There is no way in hell I would be able to go see it in person, but there is good news — one of the performances will be streamed live to the movie theater just a couple of miles from our home. So I'm planning to take Grace and go see it. Anthony Roth Costanzo will sing the title role, and he's astounding. Now we just need a babysitter, as it's quite long.

I've been at this for almost two hours. The sun is getting low, and a damp chill is moving in. It's time to go inside. And so I'll leave it there for now — have a good week, and keep the faith!

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