

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Wednesday,
March 8, 2017**

Mr. Laurini

By Mary Jo Williamson

One afternoon in 1966, as I was leaving school at the end of the day, I walked by the doors of the auditorium and was stopped in my tracks by the rich tones of a cello being played on the stage by a lone figure. I slipped in and took a seat and listened as an elderly man with white hair sat and played. My only exposure to live performance by strings had been the N.C. Symphony concerts that all school kids enjoyed then. This seemed to be my own personal concert. He leaned into the strings with his whole body and seemed to draw out notes of such beauty. Bach's Cello Suites reverberated in the empty auditorium and more people began to drift in and share the magic. We learned that his name was Peter Laurini, and he was going to teach strings.

By the end of the next summer he had taught a large group of students, myself included; violin, viola, cello and bass, to the point of giving a wonderful concert. featuring his own arrangement of songs from *The Sound of Music*. I was fortunate enough to have taken some private lessons that he offered to his students. In those lessons I learned to approach life with a little timidity and more of the fearless confidence that he demonstrated to me as he played. He showed an interest in my large family, having come from a large family himself. Seven sisters and two brothers, he had as his family arrived on the boat from Italy in 1902, enough to form their own orchestra. He told me the story of seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time and how a stranger had handed him a coin and he had said, "Onay Chent?" as he looked at the One Cent piece and wondered what it was.

At the end of a lesson one day, he sat down and told me that he would be leaving soon and going back to Rochester, New York, for some medical treatment. I later learned that he had advanced cancer and went to have the most advanced treatment for that time, cobalt radiation. He sent me a postcard which I still keep, written just before he died. In it he advised me to continue my music and asked after my family and expressed his complete confidence in God to take care of him. He died in February of 1968. I will always feel honored that he gave so much to me. Once my mother had walked in to pick me up and sat at the back of the room, listening. When Mr. Laurini finished and I was packing up to leave, she asked him to play a bit of her favorite, Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto in D major*. I was completely embarrassed and then amazed as he smiled a little smile, tucked his instrument under his chin and brought us both to tears with his playing. Later that I discovered that Mr. Laurini had conducted *The Sound of Music* and *Oklahoma* on Broadway, and had been chosen by the State department to lead American orchestras abroad in Berlin, Naples, Milan and Venice, among his many other accomplishments. The students whose lives he touched were so fortunate that he decided to take on a new adventure in teaching at a time when many would have simply retired. He brought his life experience to share with us but always in an unassuming way.

I remember Mr. Laurini when I look around and see people spending so much time taking selfies and chronicling their lives on social media, and saying in effect, "Look at me!" Maybe we should turn off the phones and computers and do something worth a picture, worth remembering. Listen. You might hear a bird sing, or a call for help, or even the sound of a far-off cello.

Prayer

God, who loves the world so much, we come to meet you here,
knowing not only that we are loved by you
but also that we have much love to give away.

Help us to decide what to do with this precious gift.
We can hold it tightly instead of loving other people.
We can clutch your steadfast love to ourselves,
or we can open our hands to see where your love will take us.

That's risky, God. It may take us places we do not want to go;
it may call for confidence and strength we do not think we have.

O God, sometimes it hurts to care,
to extend ourselves, to let other lives matter.
But God, when we really care, we can do nothing less
than listen with the ears of our hearts,

sit by a stranger who becomes a friend,
spend hours by a hospital bed.
When we do, we discover parts of ourselves
we left in the attic for years,
and we are pursued by the love of Jesus Christ who
came into the world and hurt with us,
cried over Jerusalem,
wept for Lazarus,
feels each pain,
suffers with
and loves every soul as if it were his only child.

O God, we have much to repent
about the times we have not loved
and so much love to give away
because you have lavished love upon us.

--Sharlande Sledge

From *Prayers and Litanies for the Christian Seasons*

Psalm 85:8-13

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."