

It Feels Like Home

If I were a character in *Downton Abby* I would be Lady Mary Crawley. For those who aren't Downton Abby addicts, who practically live and die as the BBC kills off major characters or sends them packing, let me catch you up. Lady Mary is the spoiled oldest daughter, raised in an enormous house filled with servants and loaded with buckets of cash. Mary, by all rights, should inherit Downton Abby: the manor itself, its vast estates, the income from the vast estates, and probably all the tenants, staff and livestock, wild game, trees, water, and other natural resources. Lady Mary should be next in line to inherit everything, the whole shooting match, except for her one tiny, yet insurmountable, defect of being a woman – insurmountable at that time. Instead, wretched, distant cousin Matthew, a cousin who doesn't even have a title to his name, is due to inherit and there is nothing poor Mary can do but whine and throw temper tantrums until she realizes that distant cousin Matthew is actually quite dishy and if she weds him she can remain Lady Mary and inherit the Abby after all.

That's the soap opera backstory. The real point of Downton Abby, which is lost in most of modern day America, is that the whole ecosystem of Abby estates, staff, flora and fauna, the whole ecosystem of where we live and move and breathe needs to be cared for as if it is our home. All Mary wants is to care for her home, in gratitude for all it has given, and the promise of what it will give in days to come.

I identify with poor Mary in my own little way. Back in the 1950s, my grandfather bought several acres of land outside of Toronto. It is a small watershed of sorts

with some hills and a few little streams. My grandfather dammed up one of the streams and made a pond, he planted some trees, he built a couple of cabins for his kids and a retirement house for himself and his wife, and he let the rest of the land go wild.

Overtime, bits of the property were sold off here and there as the generations died and aged. My siblings and cousins are uninterested in the property, but I love that piece of land, the actual place, I love that little watershed so fiercely that I have fought to hold it in my life as hard if not harder than Lady Mary could ever imagine.

I see it as my responsibility, my family's responsibility, to keep my grandfather's dream alive, to keep the sprawling sub-developments out, to protect the watershed streams and the springs, the dark deep woods with their mushrooms and trilliums and the grasshoppers of the fields that have me falling down on my knees with an answer to the question of what I want to do with my one wild and precious life. This piece of the earth, that holds all the promise I need, has somehow, in a great miraculous accident of nature, fallen to me. It is my turn to care for it and it feels like home.

Well, that all sounds pretty dreamy, doesn't it? And it is, except the cabin is rotting into the ground, mice have taken up residence in the cutlery drawer, and all the clothes are musty from the damp. So, amongst other home maintenance chores, this summer I was high-grading the generations of t-shirts and this brings us to the

point in the service when I take off my clothes. Not all of them. You probably can't see this little number from where you are sitting so let me describe it to you.

As many of you know, when I was a teenager I was active in the Unitarian Universalist Youth movement in Canada. That's what the back home-silk-screened logo indicates. Nice bit of nostalgia, but no big surprise. But the front, once I shook it out and held it before me, once I took a good look at it, this t-shirt had me completely gob-smacked. It is a picture of a church celebrating its 150th anniversary, and not just any church. This church, apparently, after all of my adventures, in spite of my Canadian citizenship, regardless of a distracting first career in biology, notwithstanding 20 years of exile, beached like a whale by the cascading rivers and soaring mountains of the Pacific Northwest. After all the meanderings of my life's river I have been here before at some long-forgotten youth con. I have a t-shirt that tells me that I was here, right here, as my teenage soul was forming. This t-shirt has been waiting patiently for me in a moldy chest of drawers in a cabin in the woods, reminding me that I have always loved this faith so fiercely, for all that it has given in the past and all the promise it holds for generations yet to come. This raggedy old t-shirt tells me that this is where I belong. After a long journey, this church feels like home.

Welcome all, this is our annual Ingathering service. A Sunday dedicated to our beloved community and its mission of gathering together to inspire one another, and to be inspired, and thus be transformed so we may transform the world. We welcome each other, all the members and friends who have attended our church in the past, and we extend a special welcome to all those who have chosen to be with

us for the first time today We welcome our ancestors who built this faith over the centuries, and we welcome children of all ages, and the promise they hold for generations yet to come. Welcome each and all! May this congregation and its ministry hold promise for you and may it feel like a return home, a place that has always been yours and is always new. A place that can help you answer that question: What will you do with your one wild and precious life?