

Cracks! That's how the light gets in

Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in *Leonard Cohen's Anthem*

Text: "From the beginning 'til now the whole creation...has been groaning in one great act of giving birth...creation still retains the hope of being freed...it was not for any fault of its own that it was made unable to fulfill its purpose, it was made so by God...we know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love Him...with God on our side who can ever be against us? Nothing can come between us and the love of God."

If you look hard at Romans chapter 8, you will see that St. Paul teaches us that we live in an imperfect world by God's design. It is made imperfect for a purpose. According to St. Paul one day all of creation will be liberated into a glorious freedom. We are to wait for that. But there is purpose to the imperfections of creation. It is deep and one that wraps up love and delivers it to all living things. There is a magnificent guarantee for the cosmos- that all things will work together for good for those who have the wisdom to love God.

Leonard Cohen one of Canadas greatest poets lost his father when he was only 9 years old.

I love that gravelly deep voice. It seems to speak directly to our problem of angst... Melancholy, strident, prophet-like Cohen seems to be able to connect directly to the pain in our souls.

Some of Cohen's reviewers say that Cohen's religious insights speak of a long and difficult spiritual odyssey, so difficult that it left Cohen literally wiped out.

Cohen himself said: "I had a lot of versions of myself that I used religion to support. If you deal with this material, you can't put God on. I thought I could spread light and I could enlighten my world and those around me and I thought I could, but I was unable to. This is a landscape in which [people] far stronger than you, far braver, nobler, kinder, more generous, people of extremely high achievements have burnt to a crisp on this road. Once you start to deal with sacred material you get creamed."

Cohen in my view has been too hard on himself. He has marvellous insights. I think his Anthem is in a league all of its own. In just a few words he sums up the Judeo-Christian heritage that still to some degree undergirds our society.

He begins with Creation: "The birds they sang at the break of day." He hears them say: "Start again; don't dwell on what has passed away, on what is yet to be."

Have you ever received a massive blow in your life- a marriage crash, an infidelity, a broken dream, the unexpected loss of someone you loved more than life? Has something sundered your world and you feel

broken? When you're weary

Feeling small

When tears are in your eyes

when times get rough

And friends just can't be found

When you're down and out

When you're on the street

When evening falls so hard

Oh, when darkness comes
And pain is all around...[

I remember being in England researching my Ph.D thesis. I was staying in a run down hotel. There was a heating element which I touched by mistake and I burned my hand badly. I was also suffering from food poisoning from a shrimp dish eaten the night before and now I was deathly ill. But early in the morning in this urban wasteland, suddenly I heard it, outside my window: the birds began to sing. Their song was full of irrepressible joy, full of the glory of creation..."blackbird had spoken like the first bird: The birds announced the new day. Of course they were saying: "Start again!"

At any time we hear bird song, we can hear the message: "Don't dwell on what has passed away, on what is yet to be." Start again...

In today's world with major wars going on in the Ukraine and Palestine and Israel and Africa, Jesus words in Matthew 24 sound a lot like Cohen and St. Paul confronting catastrophe. Jesus said: " You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed, for this is something that must happen, for nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, earthquakes here and there. All this is only the beginnings of the birth pains.

St. Paul says: "The entire creation groans in the one great act of giving birth."

Cohen says: "The wars they will be fought again, the holy dove be caught again, bought and sold and bought again."

Do you remember the story of Christ in the Jerusalem Temple? He overturned the tables of those who sold the holy doves for sacrifice.

Do you remember the Holy Spirit of God descending as a dove on Jesus at his baptism?

Jesus who was far stronger, far braver, far nobler, far kinder than we are, was burnt to a crisp on the sacred road... the Via de la Rosa- The dove is never free...

But then Comes Cohen's chorus: Ring the bells that still can ring!

Look around! Yes, there are bells that are lost and broken and will never ring again. But don't look to them. Don't look at what you have lost, look at what you have left!

The largest bell in the world is in Russia. It is heavily cracked...broken.

It will never ring again. But the second largest bell, though still able to ring, was silenced.

When Gorbachev's revolution took place, part of his reforms was the legalization of the use of church bells in Russia.

Suddenly, the great bells of St. Basils in Red square, were allowed to be rung in front of the Kremlin... Lenin had silenced them in 1919.

One morning an old Babushka was crossing Red Square when the magnificent bells from St. Basils belfry sounded, for the first time in over half a century. The old Babushka startled, stopped and then the tears began to fall as she recognized the sounds she had first heard as a little girl.

"Ring the bells that still can ring!... Start again!" Don't you give up. Look not at what you have lost, but at what you have left!

Cohen is aware that the problem we all wrestle with is the challenge of an imperfect world. We wish passionately that things were different.

But Cohen says: Don't go there! Forget your perfect offering! Drop your perfectionism.

St. Paul agrees: He says we need to drop our perfectionism and disappointment with the world because the universe was made this way by God.

WHY?

There's a crack in everything- that is how the light of God gets in to us. It is through our suffering, our pain our disappointments, that God is able to reach us and transform us, because these things show us our need of God...

If there is no crack, no light gets in. No development of the soul. No spiritual growth. No lasting happiness that is deep. No triumph over tragedy. No hope beginning on the other side of despair...

Cohen says that we won't find redemption in Government. The signs from God have been sent. Jesus was betrayed. In Cohen's poetry the government is in 'Widowhood'. There are killers in high places. They start wars. Some piously say their prayers. But Cohen says that their behaviour should summon up in us, a thundercloud response.

Cohen says that we are not going to figure the world out." You can add up the parts but you won't have the sum."

Coehn closes his verse with the same theme that drives Romans 8.

"Every heart to love will come, but like a refugee."

St. Paul "All things work together for good to those who love God"

Cohen spent hours and hours on his Anthem. It was not a quick write.

We need each of us in our daily lives when we are down and discouraged to hear his liberating words:

"Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in

Amen.