

I have been blessed in my life to stumble into the path of many wise people. I've been equally blessed that some stopped to spend time with me. In 1984 and into the Spring of 1985, I was blessed to sit at the feet, figuratively and literally, of Dr. Maya Angelou.

Dr. Angelou was a newly appointed Reynold's professor at Wake Forest University. She taught one class back then, picking 12 or 15 students by a process that only she knew. I don't know why she picked me, maybe she had seen me in one of the university theatre productions, maybe she liked to hear me sing, or maybe she just thought I needed some remedial life lessons. I only know that she did choose me and for that, I give thanks.

At that time, Dr. Angelou was developing three themes that she continued to expand upon for the rest of her life. She would say to us "'Homo Sum' Mr. Pringle," or "'Homo Sum' Ms. Hayes," (she prefixed us all with Mr. or Ms. and addressed us by our last names). "Homo Sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto." Words spoken by a roman slave named Terence in 54BC. "I am a human being, nothing human is alien to me." "Mr. Pringle...you have it within you to be a Gandhi or a Hitler, do not say 'I could never do this' or 'I could never do that'...Homo Sum...they did what they did and you are capable of doing the same. Nothing that another human being has thought or felt can be alien to you. Victim, oppressor, hero or tyrant - they are all within us."

Later, she began to tell us "We are more alike, than we are unlike." I think now, that for her, this was the distillation of the Terence Homo Sum quotation. That was who she was, she would take an erudite Latin quotation and condense it so that everyone could understand and appreciate it. She was the people's poet.

Finally, one day we were rehearsing a poetry concert that she had compiled and was directing. She looked at me and said, "Mr. Pringle, at this point I want you to sing,

When it looked like the sun wasn't gonna shine anymore,
God put a rainbow in the clouds."

Those themes...Homo sum, I am a human being...we are more alike than we are unlike...be a rainbow in someone's life...continued to be her rallying cries for the rest of her life.

I'm going to read "An Amazing Peace" now. It was written by My teacher-friend, Dr Maya Angelou, for the lighting of the national Christmas Tree at the White House, December 1st, 2005.

Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem
By Dr. Maya Angelou

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.
Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas
enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the
corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children

It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.

Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.
Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.
It is what we have hungered for.
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say
come.
Peace.
Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.
We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the
Confucian,
Implore you, to stay a while with us.
So we may learn by your shimmering light
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.

We jubilate the precious advent of trust.

We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves

And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.”