

Testimony of silence

Rosanna Eller McFadden

I imagine my words as beautiful birds
which come from my heart
and ascend to heaven in a flurry of soft wings.

But in reality
I am more often clever than kind.
Words fly out beetle-bright,
sting the unwary, then fall to the floor and shatter.
With the rueful acuity of hindsight
I stoop to sweep up the shards.

“Words are so powerful they should only be used
to heal, to bless, to prosper.”

This quotation, given to me by a friend,
hangs in my studio, bearing mute witness
as I scold my children,
complain to my husband,
and cut telemarketers off midsentence.

Words are stacked on my shelves,
hanging on my walls,
running through my head,
pouring from my fingertips,
stuck in my throat,
on the tip of my tongue—
Greek words, Hebrew words, biblical texts, text messages.

I need a testimony of silence:
to savor the doxology of quiet mindfulness,
to practice the benediction of attentive listening,
to learn that the more I know of God
the more I am dumb.

And sometimes if I wait—
wordless,
open,
still—
a feather floats into my upturned palm.

About the author

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