

Earth Care and Spirituality

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Right in Front of Me

Dick Waddell

When I have sought a lesson from the world of seas and trees I have preferred the long view; looking out from Katahdin or to the west from Bald Mountain in Weld, or even lying on my back in the snow and looking beyond the tops of tall pines to the clear blue sky.

I have tended not to look in the front yard for much that would pass as inspirational, that would stimulate moments of deep reflection, perhaps even prayer.

Until now.

Sitting at the breakfast table, looking out through the kitchen window, I am greeted by one of two birch trees that shade the front yard in the summer, or cover it with twigs and branches after a heavy snowfall or strong wind in any season. Like its sister forty feet toward the corner, this birch has chosen a different life path from the other birches in the area.

Rather than putting its energy into growing to greater heights, it has chosen to reach out to its neighborhood. Branches radiate in all directions. Yes, three go straight up. But the rest take off north, east, south and west. Growing close to power, cable and telephone lines, their contorted shapes reveal a history of pruning by those who maintain the lines.

But the branches keep coming back; sprouting new shoots, a few of them getting to grow and to extend farther from the center.

The center. Ah, yes, the center!

Down the center of the trunk there is a split that starts in the root and extends upwards to the crotch, from which the three main branches climb to the sky. Every winter the split separates then closes up in the spring. It was a mystery to me why the tree had not fallen apart long before we came to the neighborhood. I don't remember when we discovered the tree had received some prosthetic assistance.

Twenty-five feet up, spanning the widest distance between two of the taller branches, a cable is bolted into each branch, relieving stress on the split in the trunk.

The cable has held the birch together for more than twenty years.

For all those years, chickadees and warblers, red-headed woodpeckers, cardinals, mockingbirds, juncos and assorted sparrows have found shelter and bugs, and, for the past several years, a resting place, after gorging at the feeder we stock throughout the year.

Because of the prosthetic the tree continues, shedding useless twigs, reaching out as well as up, feeding and sheltering birds looking for a moment's rest.

It is a living teacher for my life.

There is beauty in the long view. There is also value in paying attention to what is right in front of my face.

*Living Presence, open my eyes and heart
to receive what you have placed
close in front of me.*

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