



Reflections by the Lake Devotions for an Unordinary Time

June 11, 2020

In Christ There is No East or West
Nancy Ellis

On January 1, 1988, the Rocky Mount Gryphon band, under the direction of Mr. J.C. Sykes, marched in the Lord Mayor's parade in London, England. My family was fortunate to be afforded the opportunity to travel with these young people and their adult chaperones. Our daughter, Lisa, who was a fourth grader, was studying about the prime meridian located in Greenwich, England. When we received our itinerary, my teacher heart swelled with excitement to learn that we were scheduled to go on a cruise down the Thames River and stop in Greenwich for a short visit! On December 30, we set out down the Thames at 8:45 AM, passing under the London Bridge and on toward Greenwich. As we disembarked, the majority of the young people headed to the local McDonald's while the Ellis family sought out the location of the Royal Observatory. After discovering that the observatory was situated on the top of a very steep incline, Amy and Bobby decided to sit it out. I grabbed Lisa by the arm and ran up that hill with little concern that her feet hardly touched the ground during the entire ascent! When we arrived at 0 degrees longitude where east meets west, we were delighted to see the Shepherd Gate Clock, which displayed the official Greenwich Mean Time. I took Lisa's picture with one foot on each side of a brass strip, which represented the arbitrary location of the prime meridian, explaining to her that she was standing in two different days at once. What a firsthand learning experience!

During these past few weeks, as we have experienced turbulent times both in our city and country, I have thought of that place where east meets west. In 1889, Rudyard Kipling published his poem, "The Ballad of East and West." The lines, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," sound as if Kipling is saying that there is no hope that people from East and West can ever come together, but the opposite is true. The poem tells of Kamal, a man of India who steals an English Colonel's horse. The Colonel's son rides off in pursuit. The two men end up in a place where Kamal has a soldier behind every rock, but he respects the young Englishman's courage and spares his life. The young Englishman, in turn, passes up a chance to use a hidden pistol with which he could have killed Kamal. The poem ends at it began with these lines:

Oh, East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently
At God's great Judgment Seat;

But there is neither East nor West,
Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
Though they come from the ends of the Earth!

Kipling's poem celebrates the possibility of mutual respect between people who are very different from each other. Nine years after Kipling's poem was published, William Arthur Dunkerly (using the pen name John Oxenham) wrote the hymn, "In Christ There is No East or West." The hymn, which gets its inspiration from Kipling's poem, takes Kipling's idea a step further. It reminds us that Christ brings all sorts of people together "in one great fellowship of love." (Copyright 2007, Richard Niell Donovan)

In Christ There is No East or West

In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
Close binding all humankind.

Join hands, then, members of the faith,
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as His child
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,
In Him meet South and North;
All Christly souls are one in Him,
Throughout the whole wide earth.

"And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 8:11

A PRAYER FOR UNITY: Lord, we ask for your help to set aside our differences and look to the greater cause, the cause of Christ. Give us the courage to make a difference by speaking out in order to right a wrong. Help us to stand strong together and live out our days with love, compassion, and grace. Amen.