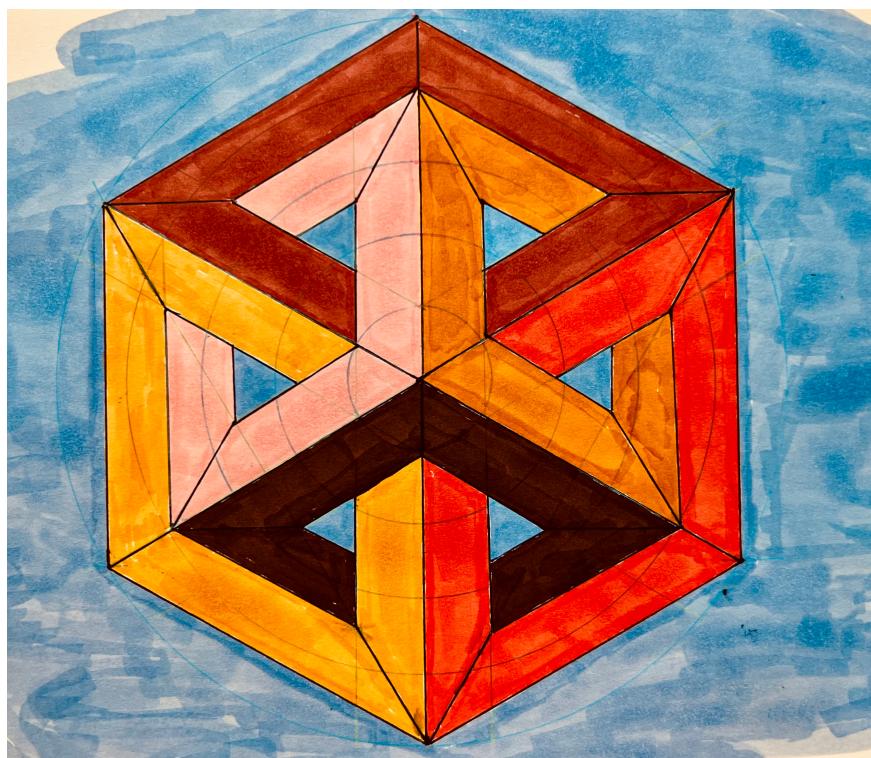


12 Offerings for First Fridays



by John Freal
2017-2023

If you write poetry, it's your own fault. – *Irish Blessing*

Dedication

To Mellie for her love, generosity, honesty, and hospitality for 680 months (and counting) with First Fridays

12 Offerings for First Fridays

Front cover – This is an isometric drawing. This type of drawing is characterized by central angles of 120 degrees representing the 3 dimensions – or in this case misrepresenting the 3 dimensions. The title is *Gaudi Cross Surrounded by Hexagon* which is also a misrepresentation since a Gaudi cross is 3-dimentional while a hexagon is 2-dimensional. Hope you enjoy this visual puzzle which owes much to M.C. Escher.

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In the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church one could get all her/his time in Purgatory reduced to nothing (a plenary indulgence) by receiving communion on 9 consecutive First Fridays. My mother said she took advantage of this when she was in high school. In 2005 after a visit to Ireland where we experienced hospitality daily, we decided to hold our own monthly open house for friends, neighbors, and anyone else they wanted to invite. We provided (mostly Mellie provided) 2 soups every month on First Fridays; others could bring what and who they wanted; and I offered a plenary indulgence and a bottle of Irish whisky to anyone who made the first 9 First Fridays. Three generations were always present at First Fridays too. I would offer a blessing (sometimes with a helping of nonsense) when it was time to eat. Glenn Tuski got the whisky and the indulgence, and this celebration continued monthly until 2020 when my bout with cancer and the COVID pandemic put a stop to it. Even though the pandemic is over and my cancer is in remission, we found that we reached an age and/or lacked the energy to restart what had been a wonderful experience. However, the gatherings and celebrations continue though now sponsored by others in our community. These poems/blessings are offered in the spirit of these very human gatherings and in the many more of those to come.

Christmas Presence – December

The prophets speak
and angels are coming
the beauty of the music
overwhelms me every Advent
In public school in 5th grade
I learned *Stille Nacht*
then *Adeste Fidelis* in 6th
In the cathedral one advent
Handel's Messiah started vibrations
that revisit me every year
along with *Cantique de Noel*
and in other musical stories
of peasants and wise men
father, mother and child
stories full of hope
God becomes human

We are human so we tell stories
sometimes the stories are a blessing
sometimes they're even true
even this story – human and divine
When I was about 6
and the night half spent
I woke up in the church manger
amid the statues
of humans and animals
The light was soft
my aunt and others
were singing in the loft
I sensed God was present
in these ordinary strangers
who came to be
with the God of mangers

That time and this
not just kronos
but kairos in its fullness
and also spiral time
or some new geometry of the cosmos
Incarnation is already redemption
so enjoy your days
since it's always Advent
every day can be Christmas too

The stone rejected
has become a cornerstone
a rock of purpose
a center for the soul
an open expanse and a new time
There was no room in the inn
no room in the world
as sometimes it seems
but Jesus comes anyway
bringing Christmas presence
to every human heart

Reflections and Connexions

Looking back on *Christmas Presence*
about a year since it was written I
realize how personal it is. I think that's
because it begins mostly with
memories of my own experiences.
Some of these memories still carry
with them a sense of the sacred and are
my first memories of any feeling. At a
young age I was not the possessor of
any special ideas about God, and I
certainly didn't know anything with
certainty. What made these memories

was a sense of awe. What I hope they bring into the future is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

Within Judaism and Orthodox Christianity there are still brief prayers, gestures, and small rituals that sanctify familiar actions of daily life and set those actions within deep time. Similar traditions were part of the Catholic Church as well in former times, but I think they have largely been lost (or corrupted and abandoned). But in most Christian Churches and possibly even the culture at large the rituals, prayers, gestures, music, drama, readings, and

cultural events that have the power to open us to sacred experiences all happen during Advent and the Christmas season. Not all these happenings will be special for us, but during the season God has a chance to work in a variety of ways to open in us the sense of sacred and the passage to deep time that God hopes for us.

Perhaps some of my Christmas memories can help you bring back memories of your own of a sacred time. I hope you will read *Christmas Presence* again and find your own sacred space.



All our children and grandchildren have played with this Nativity scene. A few years ago grandchildren thought it needed protection so a storm trooper and a few ninja warriors were brought in.

Leaving the Liminal – January

Although we learn to run
from brokenness, – our own and that
of others – we are made to notice it.

Slowly we learn to open our hearts
in hospitality and our world to justice.
We can remain for a time on a threshold.
Help us see the shalom and the suffering,
the outcasts and the strangers,
and the revelations that they bring.

Help us see the blessings of the liminal
so we will find the courage to cross.

When we cross a border,
a road, a threshold, or a room,
what was outside come can alive
among us and within us.

Crossing spaces makes them different
and can turn borders to welcome mats.

Love not our own connects us,
opens us to the borders that we did not set,
the bridges we did not make, and the doors
we neither opened nor closed.

Love learns and grows, makes space and heals,
even breaks rules, opening our eyes and hearts.

Help us bring courage to times of transition.

The priest and the Levite did not cross.
Seeking God in the temple or on the mountain
seemed to make a difference to them.
Though in our own practiced deafness
we should not condemn them,
perhaps even extend our sympathies.
Crossing is not so much a virtue
as a calling we can hope to hear.

The oil and wine from the Samaritan
for the wounded traveler did not shatter further
and found the particular suffering
and knew the cost of hospitality.

That life, all life, is a gift given in love.

The journey is not only the one
going down from Jerusalem to Jericho
on our own business, but the orthogonal
one across the road where we make a space
to receive a gift and hear a calling.

Reflections and Connexions

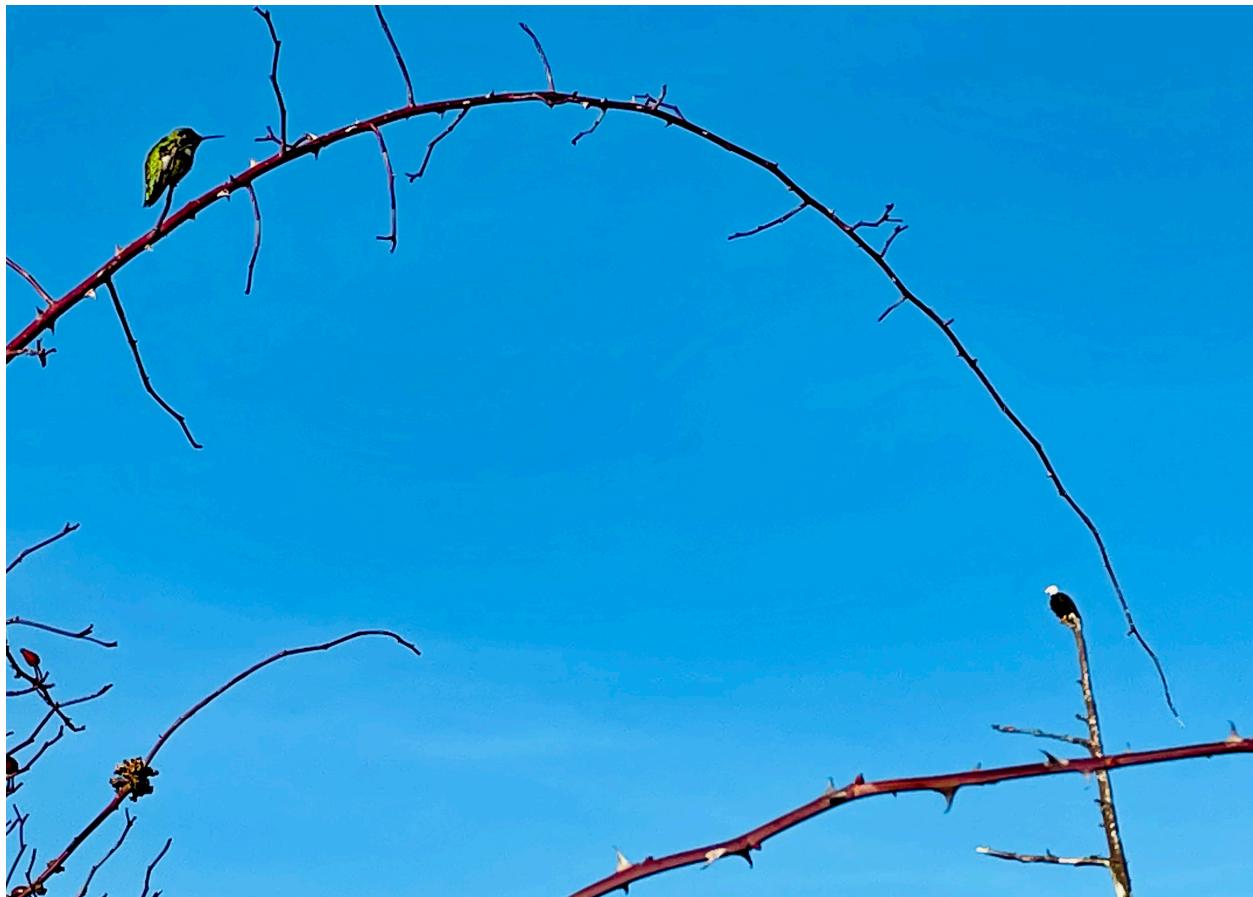
The artwork accompanying this poem was done by classmate, teammate, and childhood friend who lived across the field, abstract expressionist, Richard Nash. Its title is *Search*. This is not a word used in the poem though I think it can be a theme that runs throughout, as in the one who searches will find. It is not a narrow door but one with a golden path, inviting entry, crossing over after we search. I want to thank Richard for the use of his painting that fits the poem so well.

The poem is dedicated to the people of the First Presbyterian Church of Bellingham as they celebrate 140 years of following Jesus as a congregation. I also gave a copy of the poem to Israeli tour guide Uriel Fisch. He has said he will read it when his tours stop at the Museum of the Good Samaritan along the current road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If you are not familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan, you can find it in chapter 10 of Luke's gospel. It is told in response to a question about the great commandment. I hope you will consider your own journey and read *Leaving the Liminal* again.



Two Candles for Saint Brigid – February

I awaken again to the world,
if only for a time in this midwinter sunshine,
 to the new growth on cedars,
 to see young gulls splashing and diving
for the spawning smelt in the gravelly shallows.
In this time out of time cycles of renewal
 begin to bring dreams to life
The hummingbird and the eagle
 are happy for the sunshine
 and the fire in their bellies.
My prayer is, “Here I am.”



Candles make a prayer of fire and a fire of prayer.
One flame to burn what is no longer needed,
and the other to light our flowing forward.
Remember the burning bush and help small flames
bring new urgency into our love and life
and even the prayers of our unconscious.
Melt our fear, and let our anger burn for justice.
Bless the courage to grow
as we step into the river of grace.

While the flames still dance,
can we begin our own,
moving in reciprocal patterns
and resting in the shadows of our others?
Will we notice beginnings and celebrate rhythms
as we find what is worth holding?
Can we see the wheel of fire
changing at each turn?
We will eat these fish or others
and drink, like the trees,
from the underground aquifer?
We will learn from these patterns of playing
wondering what directs our play?

Storms will come again; winds will grow
and put out our small flames.
Clouds quickly close over us.
Protect the others who walk or run this way.
Like the water that sustains life
and the wind making the trees strong,
can we welcome the rain and wind,
and even the ice?
There is spirit in the storm
helping us to ride out the world's hubris.
Roots and buds are stirring as are we.
Within and without make a space
for new beginnings, grace, and imagination.

May we be grateful for this awakening.
This thanksgiving can make us feel alive.
Thanks for the blessings of both dance and storm,
for the life of the sea and the flight of birds,
for walks in sunshine and the stream's flow.
May we know that the wheel of fire still turns.
Circle the holy well three times
since God our source is for us
and Christ incarnate is with us
and the Spirit flowing is within us.

Reflections and Connexions

On February 1, 2023, Saint Brigid's Day became a yearly public holiday in Ireland, the first Irish holiday named for a woman. It could also be the first holiday named for a Celtic goddess too, as some of the stories about and character traits of the goddess were transferred to the saint. Brigid of Kildare also has stories and legends of her own. She was born in 451 (A.D.) to a slave mother who was baptized by St. Patrick. Her father was a Celtic chieftain. Legend has it that she was raised by a druid. She died on February 1, 525. Her life dates form a temporal connexion between the time of Patrick and that of Columcille, the other two great saints of Ireland. February 1st is also the date of the pre-Christian Celtic festival of Imbolc, approximately half way between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. It was the Irish festival for what they believed was the beginning of spring. February 2nd is the Christian feast of Candlemas, named for the blessing of candles and celebrated as the time (40 days after Christmas) of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. (See Luke 2/22-40.)

That may already be more than you wanted to know, but since this poem is intended to be one of 12 poems in an annual liturgical cycle, there are more connexions to follow. "Midwinter spring is its own season," is a line from TS Eliot's *Little Gidding*, a poem that uses images of fire and the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit. Over the years I have remembered that line on many days in February when I have experienced unexpected sunshine and the beauty of the world, even knowing there will be cold rains to follow.

The last time I experienced the delight of a midwinter spring day was February 6th last year. As I got to the beach to witness gulls flapping and to smell the smelt spawning, and then see the hummingbird and the eagle, the music in my awareness was the opening movement of Beethoven's 6th Symphony in which he tries to capture the joy he felt arriving in the country. I decided soon after that I would use Beethoven's themes of the 6th Symphony if I were to write a poem about the experience. The themes of the movements are the exuberant arrival, meditation, community dance, the storm, and thanksgiving. These are the themes of the 5 stanzas of *Two Candles for Saint Brigid*.

I hope you don't concern yourself with why there are two candles or only two candles or what they might mean. They will mean what you want them to. Come back to *Two Candles for Saint Brigid* some other time and you may know. I also encourage reading *Little Gidding* and listening to Beethoven's 6th possibly even while you celebrate St. Brigid's Day.



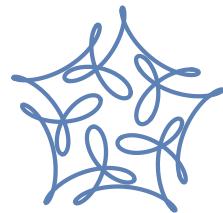
Oregon Coast by Nicki Lang

5 Roads to Walk – March

We Are What Is Left

Lions and tigers and bears, oh my
Language and logic and lies
Fictions seem to last longer than the
truth
which is always derivative in this
world
of either/or and the land of certainty,
built on shifting sand. It is the home of
egos
and some of survival's necessities.
Like a vision with blinders,
we just name things – this is...
You are...
They will...
Nouns name; that's all.

These little thoughts are in fast
company.
Easy are these directions without
depth.
Though many voices speak,
one voice says – this way –
mistaking representation for reality.
We might get comfortable living here
in this place where our home is not,
where all seems locally linear.
The time measured here eats his
children,
and this servant can control the master.
Love can sometimes find a space,
and perhaps fear always does.
We believe stardust can always start
over.



We Are What Is Right

Moving and fishing and flow, oh my
Integration is both more difficult for us
than deriving and is a softer presence
in this, our home of both/and.
It is at first liminal, then shared,
and then renewed, for a time whole and
healed.
Presence and the integral are related to
that
and that to the flow. Waiting at the
gates
of heaven, may we find dancing and
laughter and joy.

The beginning of wisdom is awe at
God's presence.
(or as it is written, the fear of the Lord)
We can take time and take our place
too
as well as taking only what we need
while queing up to be integrated.
Space is connected and will be made
whole.
May we find the fullness to grow
in word and grow in silence,
in the light and in the dark,
in the waves and rainbows and music.

Blues for All of Us

See the damage to earth
Storms are coming again
Even if we could hide – just abide
Heaven knows
we don't know where to begin

We have stolen the land
and have poisoned the wells
Our injustice will show
– then we'll know
when the priest rings the bells

Hear the emptiness call
the left side of your mind
When the suffering comes
– hear the drums
It won't leave you behind

When we live for ourselves
we get caught in a trap
Hear the rumble inside
– that's our pride
just like fools with a map

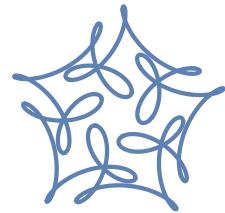
Will the humans be done
both the humble and proud
Can we see other roads
– lift other loads
Will we tell it out loud

Confession

Even the blues got lost
after finding an occasional melody,
building to cacophony
and the way of sorrow and the dark.
More than any revolution
we seem to want just
a resolution for this chaos,
while dressed up idolatry
and other small gods
replace what's left of integrity.
The prisons are full,
but count us also among the lawless.
The flood is still rising,
and the sun is setting.
Is the suffering and sorrow
of our time ending?
This hollowness betrays
no promise for us or for them –
at least for our small selves.
Is there anyone listening
to the cry of the Spirit within?
The price for any coherence
is 40 days in the desert
as well as a time for
our mutual forgiveness.

Waters of Life

Will a time of compassion begin?
Stand or sit or kneel and be forgiven.
My humanity is caught up in yours.
Let us find Shalom.



May you live in the grace,
whose path is looking informed by love.
though love is not a thing but a verb.
May you find your peace with uncertainty
and also with the feeling of fullness
that is prayer.

Be free to stumble and rise again.
Find yourself at home.
Let all judgments take into account
the many others in these experiments
with seeing and thought,
with language and intuition and imagination.
Our long journeys toward wholeness are similar
May they be safe places
for souls to show up.

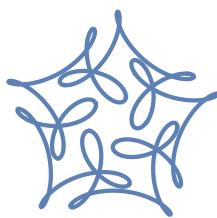
Reflections and Connexions

The third line of the final meditation, “My humanity is caught up in yours,” is Desmond Tutu’s translation of the Zulu word *Ubuntu*. Another explanation that may be necessary is the simile “like fools with a map.” The point here is that the fools have the map but miss the experience and reality that the map, whether graphics, words, ideas, just represents. My aim in making these meditations is to make them about us, about our common humanity. We can be manipulative and attentive, selfish and generous, fearful and courageous, callous and compassionate. We more easily see these things in others. My hope is that these meditations will perhaps provide an opportunity to see them in ourselves as well as to see them in the whole human enterprise.

The first two meditations have their themes from Iain McGilchrist's *The Matter with Things*. The Left and Right in their titles refer both to our asymmetric brain hemispheres and to what's left to us plus what we get right. McGilchrist's book on neuroscience, truth, beauty, goodness, physics, metaphysics, evolution, consciousness, intuition, imagination, reason, science, philosophy and the sacred is wonderful and wise but also long and complex. I will say no more here about his ideas except to direct you to his website.

The last three meditations are from Part 2b of Keith Jarrett's Koln Concert. He tends not to put words on his jazz piano music. The titles of his albums are just the Paris Concert or the Tokyo Concert, titles like that and the tracks are just 1, 2a, 2b and so forth. But I was so drawn to the different yet flowing musical flavors of track 2b of the Koln Concert that I needed to write down words. What you have in these 3 meditations are the fifth or so iterations of journal writing in the presence of his music. I have not captured what he expressed most elegantly in music though I do hope that his inspiration to me has become something worthy of poetry. John O'Donohue has said that music is what language would like to become if it only could. Perhaps poetry gets it part way there.

The fourth inspiration with these poem is Nicki Lang's painting of the Oregon Coast and in its reproduced form is actually here. It is a particular place where Nicki especially feels God's presence and the fullness that presence brings. I have thought that the two large rocks could represent our divided selves receiving God's healing presence, but perhaps this language in a poor substitute for the art in itself. I am grateful for Bishop Tutu, Iain, Keith, John, and Nicki and their generosity to the world.



Uprising – April

Descending the ridge, looking not far
but close, I saw one standing at the road's edge,
her feet were in snow, her hands folded in prayer,
and her face turned to a bare gray snag.
This watcher, this Mary of Magdala
with gray hair and a gray robe tells me
to remember the dying tree of Golgotha.
I join my prayer with hers;
we have similar questions.

He suffers with us, reveals our lot
as his own life within darkness.

The one suffering must be
at the heart of God's darkness.
It's a long way now from that first
uprising in the garden of morning.

We are witnesses to very many shattered lives.
We must walk past genocides and misery on the Trail of Tears.

We recall enslavement, Irish famines, lynchings,
horrors of the Holocaust, and bullets and bombs falling
first on Guernica and then on Hiroshima.

Today they explode at random, mostly on the poor.

We pray for all these victims and wonder
about how the offenders lived with themselves or with anyone.

Does his sacrifice bear all this
for all of **us** and for **all** of us,
from his great heart to ours?
We humbly pray for justice and mercy.

O Mary, we are not the same,
but part of you lives in me
and my Christ in you.

May I journey with you now
to see what you have seen
for your sake and for my own
to be the witness you have been?

You saw the darkness in that time at the dying tree
and the light of that uprising that sets the broken free.

The uprising takes the hand of each of us,
and we fall up into the depths of time,
fall into the flow of the river of life.

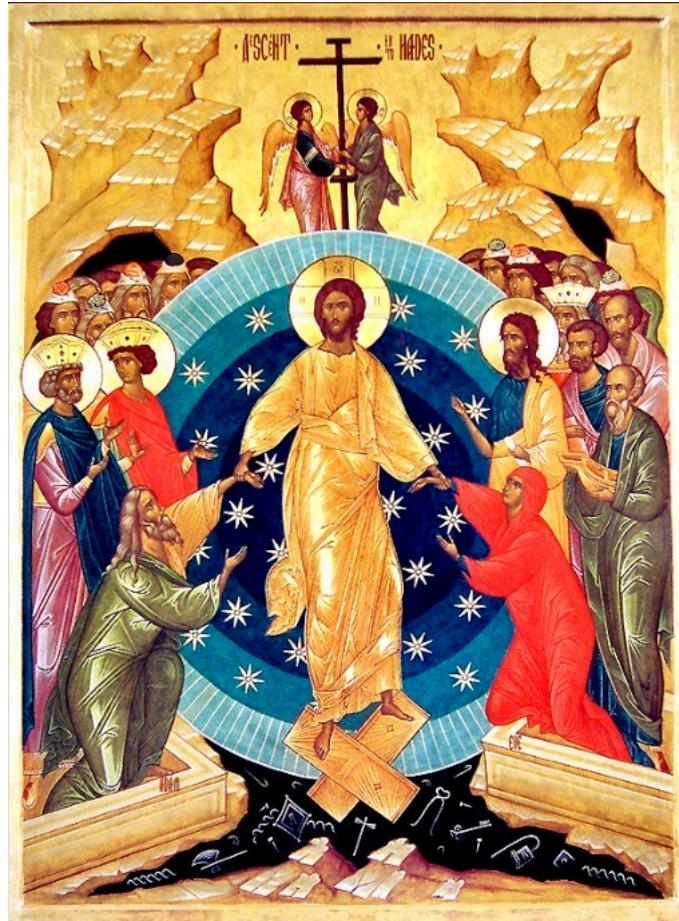
May we stand in the light of dawn
from that first uprising.

May we stand in the light of Christ,
the light of the world, the light
that shall be for all people,
the light that shines in the darkness,
the light that gives life,
the Spirit that gives life,
the light that turns to love,
the love that overcomes
suffering and death,
and is in all things.

Reflections and Connexions

Uprising is a literal translation of the Greek word for resurrection. The following painting was a fairly common icon in the early centuries of the church, and these icons are still commissioned and revered in Orthodox Christianity. Jesus **at the moment of rising** has the wrists of Adam and Eve. Just like Adam and Eve chose death for all humanity, Jesus chooses resurrection life for all of us. All of humanity in this particular icon is streaming out of Hades. The belief behind this is that Jesus has and will bring back all of humanity from the realms of the dead. Below his feet are the broken gates of those kingdoms. The creeds of the church echo some of this belief when they mention Jesus “descending into hell.” I’m not sure who the other two are in the painting. My best guess is that they are Saints Peter and John who

tried to find Jesus the morning of his rising, but it was Jesus who found them somewhat later. There is a certain timeless quality in the beliefs behind this icon. The Uprising (Resurrection) happens both then and now.



Mary Magdalene was the first living witness of the Uprising. She was also present at the crucifixion. Two weeks after Easter a few years ago I was coming down the road from Hurricane Ridge. I saw an older woman praying by the side of the road. Perhaps since she was facing a “dying tree,” I thought of the cross and remembered Mary Magdalene. I wondered how she would pray now, especially in response to the events mentioned in the third stanza. The poem is my response to the wondering, not so much an answer as a continuing question.

Turning – May

I want to feel the warming of the heart
that comes with spring,
the calm of the sea in the morning,
the flow of a stream,
and the integrity of even a small forest.
Yet the buds and blossoms are hesitant
in this cold of April.
We long for the beauty we do not see
and a hope we do not feel.

Finding our idols and vision
and selves have grown too small,
can the embers of ancestral fires,
burning wood or wax, ignite anew
hearts, minds, and spirits?
Can the music about to swell,
the child who looks at my face,
the forested ridge in the distance
return us to the peace of Presence?

Take a drink;
breathe the air;
play on the Earth;
dance between the flames.
Feel the flow of friends
and elements; bow to the flame feeding
on earth and air, or to the slow, rhythmic,
metabolic burning of life
within and around us.
As we take ourselves lightly,
let us fly to taste and see.
If you've found but a little joy,
add it to our jubilation.
Bring your friends to meet ours,
and if you are weeping,
bring us your tears.
Let all creatures drink
from this fountain of fullness.

Though wishes can sometimes aspire
to prayer, we will not wish for things.
Jesus found beauty and goodness
on the path God gave him to walk
and then took on evil and death.
At first light Mary found flowers
in that garden of morning
and, even in great sorrow,
stood with angels, seeing in a new way.
Was it always planned this way
that we could have this sense of joy,
that we could run the race together
for the joy of running?
Let all humans receive
this kiss for the whole world,
this vision of hope.
Dance in a cosmos
where the living God dwells,
both beyond the stars' canopy
and within all hearts.
Open, while you may,
to this love that flows.



Wave by Matsumi Kanemitsu from a copy given to Virginia Freal

For Trinity Sunday – June



The open rose fades,
and time's spiral turns
Nothing stands alone or still.

Creation evolved us,
who discovered rhythms,
describing creation.

The first realm is creation itself
from quarks to earth to cosmos.
Why is there space?
we ask the cosmos.
Why should there be time?

The second world evolved in time.
Our awareness has
no stars, quarks, or quanta.
Could we be the stuff
the cosmos expected?
Why am I conscious?
Whose presence is this?

A third world maps the first
The mathematical forms
that describe creation
are created within our consciousness
and are symmetries of beauty
and rhythms of grace.
The circle is complete;
this trinity flows.

Are there other trinities
calling to us
from the depth
of trust and presence?

We remember that
the rose fades;
time's spiral turns;
and nothing stands
alone or still.
Since the beginning
God opens, there is light;
and the Spirit flows.

Now – is at peace.
Here – is the place where love flows.
This – is Your Presence.

Reflections and Connexions

While “open rose” is its own metaphor, it’s also an acknowledgement to Roger Penrose, the originator of what he called the 3 worlds metaphor. In years since 2017 when I first wrote a draft of this poem, I have revised it several times. I found that the Cappadocian Fathers of the 4th Century developed a similar theology of Trinity involving the concept of kenosis, self-emptying. In their theology the love of the Father is emptied into Christ, Christ’s love is emptied into the Spirit, and the Spirit empties her love into the Father. However, we don’t really fathom the Trinity, but only approach it through metaphor. These metaphors are offered to help us remain humble in the presence of an unfathomable God.

In more recent times, Christian theologians have recognized trinitarian concepts in other religions. The Trinity can be seen in the first three verses of Genesis as summarized in this haiku – In the beginning God created, the Spirit hovered, there was light. Consider also that Christian theologian Raimon Panikkar offers a triadic structure of Reality combining divine, human, and cosmic elements. He points out that none of these “parts” exist separately but only in their interdependence. This is similar to the internal structure of every proton and neutron in the nucleus of every atom, being composed of three interdependent quarks. There are trinities everywhere. In the last lines of the poem are the three words Thomas Merton used in his brief spiritual instruction to the novices in the Abbey of Gethsemani – Now / Here / This.

One of my new contributions to this edition of the *Trinity Sunday* poem is the trefoil knot in its geometric construction with the Mathematica program. It is the mathematically simplest knot, other than the circle. Such knots were even used in Celtic art in pre-Christian times. Even now there are holy wells all over Ireland. I offer this trefoil design as a three-fold path around an Irish well. I wanted to include, but cannot, a beginning page of John’s Gospel from the Book of Kells, as part of this poem, with its many 3-fold designs, its portrait of John the Evangelist, and the words “In the beginning.” Instead I have the photograph of the rose that was taken by my mother. As TS Eliot has written, “In my end is my beginning.”

Like Love, God is a verb.

So ... Who Do You Trust? – July

Did you get a good price for your soul,
the power you thought you bought?
Whether you belong to Jesus
or the Tempter or some local god,
you never had much control or freedom.
Now you don't have any.
Someone or something else is in control.
Clean up; grow up; wake up; show up.
The Sign of the Cross
will begin to lift you up.

Wash your face.
It will feel good.
You don't have to be a butt.
Prepare to separate
from control and certainty,
from the tattered flag of mere patriotism,
from hurt feelings,
from the sale of your soul.

Make ready for God's freedom.
You may have found some good,
but your growing is not there.
Escape the compulsions
of egocentric existence,
leading only to the fruits of selfishness –
to sloppy thinking and fearfulness,
to joyless grabs for happiness,
to blaming others instead of loving them,
to false gods and magic-show religion,
to loneliness and competition,
to consumerism and anger
to trivial pursuits, addictions, parodies of harmony,
and the vicious habit of depersonalizing
others into enemies.

I won't go on.
You have nothing to lose
but your delusions.

You are called by the flow of the Spirit.

Already you are in this flow,
and it is in you.

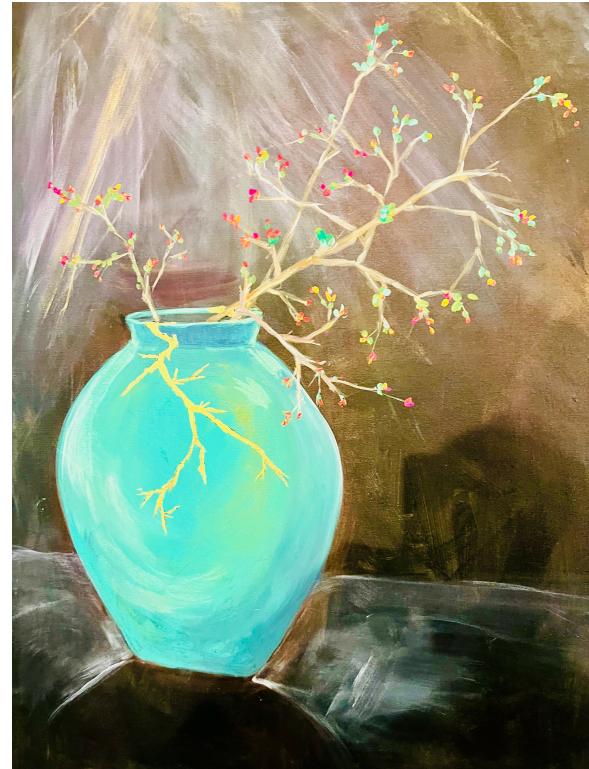
Our work is to be open to all
the fullness poured into our hearts.

Serve in love and in
the ambiguity of living.

Seek justice (not retribution),
love mercy, and walk humbly.

The gifts of the spirit,
like fruit appearing in an orchard,
are affection for others,
exuberance about life,
serenity and the willingness to persevere,
compassion in the heart,
a conviction that holiness
permeates all things and people
leading to loyal commitments.
So direct your energies wisely
without the need to force things.
In this freedom we find
a beautiful way to live.

May you be happy.
May you be blessed.
May you be free and peaceful.
May you be ever loved.
May you be always loving.



Art Work by Kathy Harvey

Reflections and Connexions

In poems I have used the word “you” before. Mostly this has been to address God in an intimate way. However, in this poem there 30 actual and implied “yous” addressing the reader, sometimes accusingly and sometimes suggestively. These come from two multifaceted sources, one ancient and one modern. The ancient source is from scripture, in this case – the letter of Paul to the Galatians (the works

of the flesh and the gifts of the spirit) and the book of the prophet Micah (“Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.) The modern one is from the writings of scientists, psychologists, philosophers, poets, and spiritual teachers*. Habitual ways of thinking, addiction, pathological attachments are modern names for what scripture usually calls sin. While there may be some subtle differences in precise definitions, it seems some parts of scripture, religious traditions, philosophy, poetry, and science are talking about the same parts of our humanity.

Many modern Christians, like the ancient Pharisees, seem to have become famous for enumerating other peoples sins though they have not the only group trying to do this. The out-of-control impulse to control is visible virtually everywhere in modern society from today’s expulsion of Baptist congregations for having female pastors to killing people worshipping in synagogues, from don’t-say-gay laws to denial transgendered existence, from mistreatment of refugees and migrants to the violence causing them to flee, from Christian nationalism and faux patriotism to white supremacy and the conspiracy theory of the month. Our sins are mostly social and often involve trying to both deny the humanity and seek control some part of our social world. Our addictions are not just alcohol and drugs but ideologies of contempt, exclusion, hatred, and hubris. These addictions can keep us from even knowing what we don’t know. So be brave, and have the courage to expose the work of your own shadow, what Jesus called actor or hypocrit.

So...who do you trust? The hope of the poem is that it will be the mercy of God and the flow of the Spirit. I hope you will read *So...Who Do You Trust?* again and pray the prayer that is the last verse for 3 other people and for yourself.

* Viktor Frankl, Bill Wilson, Ken Wilber, Iain McGilchrist, Richard Rohr, Eugene Peterson (in this piece for his take on Galatians 5 and 6), David Bentley Hart, John O’Donohue, David Whyte, Isabel Wilkerson, Martin Buber, Robert Alter, Abraham Heschel, Padraig O’Tuama, Mary Oliver, Krista Tippett, TS Eliot, Charles Taylor, Hannah Arendt, Bob Dylan, Norman Fischer, Augustin Fuente, David Bohm, Robert Bellah, Thomas Merton – The work of these people has helped and blessed me, though at this point in my life it has become impossible to disentangle and express all the ways. You might say I trust them.

On the Road to Donegal – August

We are whole
in our birth
 in our gatherings
Two or more are together
 more than their sum
leading to creations and discoveries
 following a way
 being lost
then found and home
 washed in generations
 found in time
homes of our ancestors
 we might find in Donegal
Prepare to use this now
 this presence
 this road
Prepare our hearts to celebrate
 this vision of faith
that is still respectful and inclusive
 despite persecution
 famine and abuse

Can we all walk together
 and find a feast along the way
On the way to the particular
 to find the hill to crown the king
 in the echoes of our tribe
we found all of us
 on the road to Donegal
In the high hills at Carrowkeel
 on midsummer's eve
we found soft carpets of grass leading
 to ancient cairns and fields ringed
 with stone circles

Time turned the other way
 as we entered
the chamber of the cairn
 to stand and lie down
 in the places of the honored
Have we stood
 can we
 stand in the gap
for all of us
 in an underground
 we will all share

On such a summer's eve
 all those people gathered here
to celebrate ancestors and new life
 and being alive together
Though we can fall short
 we also fall together
 amid the bright faces
 of our humanity

Back on the road to Donegal
 we have broken loose
We will find other hills to climb
 berries to pick
 churches to visit
work to do and oceans to contemplate
 races to run and ale to drink
 and even time to crown the king

In the name of the Father
 and the Son
 and the Holy Spirit – Amen



Mellie among burial cairns at Carrowkeel

Reflections and Connexions

In 2005, after visiting Doolin, the Cliffs of Mohr, Aran Island, and Galway we were on our way to County Donegal in the Northwest of Ireland. I didn't know much about the place except that my great grandfather, Patrick Joseph Friel, emigrated from there sometime in the mid-19th century along with his wife and parents. They moved to Allegeny County in western Maryland to mine coal and raise 7 children. Until I made that trip, none of their descendants had ever returned there. When we got to Donegal, we found no trace of them but found a family legend many centuries older. And on the way to Donegal we found the artifacts of people even millennia older than that. On the hills of Carrowkeel among the burial

cairns on the eve of the Celtic festival of Lughnasa both Mellie and I felt the presence of the ancient humans with whom we had much in common. Such ancient sites may have had something to do with ancient astronomy and religion, but I think their primary purpose was to gather people from all over for a party. On our way to find who had been invited to our particular party we found that many more had been invited. We belonged to all of that.

Our solidarity with those ancient humans, these present ones, and those to come is not just an option but a reality as well as a biological and anthropological necessity. We are also chemically bound to the earth and atomically bound to the whole cosmos. It may be difficult for some people to accept this. In our age most people have had a preference for our tribe, our social set, our church, our religion, our country, and/or our point of view. So to conclude these reflections I offer this untitled poem in the form of Japanese renga. I did not so much write it as find it.

Releasing control
security and esteem is
the way of the cross

Not many of us follow
this way – We wander elsewhere

Be vulnerable
The cross redefines success
Our woundedness wins

In life share the fate of God
and love that way God loves

Jesus taught the way
to our redemption was to
accept paradox

Cross purposes reconcile
To be lost is to be found

Quantum Levity – September

Dreams can come like this -
My bunker of certainty
collapsed around me.

In the rubble God's laughter
became beauty and presence.

On a river bank
I stood as idea boats passed,
dismissing each one.

I wait for deeper seeing
and take delight in what's there.

The relationship
I call prayer happens as I
watch the river flow.

You speak to me from silence.
Teach me to come here always.

Deep called unto deep.
I was going from Aix to Bea
when Bea called to me.

“We are much more than just things,
and we are forever new.

“We tell space to curve,
and space tells us how to move
in time with the light.

“We are all quantum fields,
singing independently.

“Dancing together,
we have our being and so
live and move in time.

“Events create their own time
though time is our forgetting.

“Time is the entropy
we do not know, and order
that escapes our grasp.”

Bea came close and asked to bring
the center even closer.

“Reality is
deep so we will always be
exploring,” she said.

“Do not be afraid to lose
the control you thought you had.

“You will learn to live
and move and find your bearings.
Locate by your love.

“The fullness that you sense is
because you reflect your God.

“We are waves upon
waves, open to space and time.
We are connexions.

“We’re infinities of grace.
Each one a crossing of waves.

“The experience
you are having this moment
is the one you need.

“Excuse my staring,” she said,
“I saw Jesus standing there.”

A new light arranged
its spectrum of colors in
hidden symmetries.

Bea said, “Go where the journey
becomes your destination.”

The dark had structure,
and the lightness had beauty.
New spaces appeared.

These apeirohedral worlds
were both divided and one.

Then I found myself
at the gates of paradox,
Happy to be there.

Where this was I did not know,
but I knew that I heard You.

As spaces came forth
in connexions with deep time,
the vision left me.

Law, chance, and necessity
began to assert themselves.

My ride on a beam
of light began to slow down.
The river came back.

Though I still felt a fullness,
Bea and the vision had gone.



Reflections and Connexions

Quantum Levity is a poem about space and time or perhaps spaces and time. In the 4th century BC when he wrote about physics, Aristotle called *levity* the tendency for light things to rise and *gravity* the tendency of heavy things to fall. Aristotle had a lot of important things to say, and he was correct about many of them. However, because he didn't do experiments, his physics was mostly wrong though we still use gravity to refer things that are serious and levity refer to those that are light and frivolous.

Gravity is still an important concept in physics and one of the 4 fundamental forces of the universe. Quantum gravity is a current theory in physics that has significant support among physicists, but one for which there is but a little evidence. Einstein's General Relativity would be replaced or severely modified if quantum gravity turns out to be true. A conceptual statement of General Relativity is given in verse 5 of the poem. Perhaps in the future, General Relativity will be known as quantum levity. Also a thought experiment of Einstein shows up in the poem's last verse.

When I wrote a draft of this poem about 5 years ago, I wanted it to be not only about space and time but also about light – light in all its aspects, from light and almost frivolous to the waves that will travel through the cosmos forever. Also when I thought about light, I remembered Dante's Comedia, published in 1221. In the *Paradiso*, there seemed to be light everywhere. I also stole Dante's guide Beatrice. She becomes just plain Bea in *Quantum Levity*.

The form of the poem is Japanese renga. Each verse has 5 lines and is composed of 2 versets. The first verset has 3 lines of 5 syllables, then 7, and then 5. (This is the same form as haiku.) The second has 2 lines which both have 7 syllables. Poems written this way can have any number of verses. The form developed in medieval Japan among poets and was collaborative. Consecutive versets were always written by different poets and each new verset attempted to stay within the theme of the previous one and to break new ground. Japanese renga had from one to thousands of verses, and two to over 100 poets collaborated in the poetry gatherings that were part of their making. Of course, I am only one poet and not Buddhist or Japanese, but I have tried both to stay within the themes and to break new ground, by channeling Aristotle, Dante, Einstein, and others.

I hope you will read the poem again. Feel free to make comments, or respond to any part of the poem by writing some of your own versets.

The Physics of Forgiveness – October

No thing is perfect.
Of perfection we have no knowledge.
Beauty is broken.
Symmetry is evidence.
Forgiveness removes the weight.
The gate of heaven
is narrow but beauty
keeps it open for us.
I would feel strange getting
there with weight still around me.

The field that is forgiveness
has darkness at one pole
and love at the other.
The shape of the field is such
that I see neither pole completely.
The darkness would be too dark,
and the love would blind me.
I look the other way.
Only God is good.

Pray then for the grace
to forgive so I am not
swimming against the current
or misaligned like a stick
that can't get through a grate.
Against the current
the weight is more,
yet I grow smaller.
Time heals unless I try
to keep the hurt alive.
Memory can be an obstacle,
and forgetfulness a friend.
Tears will be the joyful fruit
of suffering and love.

I will be aiming toward
forgiveness of everything.
Not much else makes sense,
though sense-making makes no sense here.
Forgiveness is the opposite of gravity
though not quite levity.
It's orthogonal to entropy since
this field opens the flow of time.
There is no room in the inn
of human retribution
and no buying or selling of grace.
Our forgiveness frees the future.

In time all will be forgiven,
but why wait to acknowledge your goodness
and let go your trespasses?
Let us live while we can in the river
of grace and the flow of the holy.
Help us find the integral awareness
beyond the entrapment of our judgments.
Let human language and the rhythms
of our being build learnings in our world.



Photo by Brian Lotze

Reflections and Connexions

One way or another the majority of what Jesus has to say in the gospels is about forgiveness. I first became aware of this in my early 30s when reading *The Human Condition* (1958) by Hannah Arendt. “The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.” Since this caught me completely off guard, I knew it must be true. I was at the time trying to reconcile my spiritual heart with my scientific world view (perhaps I still am), and here was a secular philosopher using Jesus to make a point about why forgiveness, as Jesus spoke of it, was an essential ingredient in the world of human affairs. I then turned to the gospels myself to confirm what she was saying. Without the possibility of forgiveness human action in the world is not possible. We could undertake our activities of daily living, but we could not speak or act in a political and social sense without forgiveness. Or as Richard Rohr has expressed it more recently, “Without radical and rule-breaking forgiveness – received and given – there will be no reconstruction of anything... without forgiveness there will be no future.”

All of the several churches I’ve attended have in the weekly service a time of confession or prayer of forgiveness, and this is both necessary and good. But it is not the forgiveness in its completeness that Arendt or Rohr or Jesus spoke about. In churches it seems that we receive the idea that forgiveness is something we get, leaving out the necessity that forgiveness is also something we do. Of course, a more complete idea of forgiveness is in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us as we forgive.” As we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we can center ourselves in forgiveness. We are able to forgive because we can recognize our shared humanity and also our humility before God.

In *The Physics of Forgiveness* the concept of a field from physics is introduced because it might represent the integral awareness that is necessary for forgiveness and love. This integral awareness is also called non-dual consciousness and is related to the human ability to put things together with the brain’s right hemisphere. In this putting together things almost cease to be things and instead become connexions and relationships. Our own well-being is tied to being able to do this.

At different times we have all been selfish and generous, thoughtless and thoughtful, cruel and kind. Since neither extreme defines us, we all need to give and receive forgiveness from each other. God blesses this activity. I hope you will read *The Physics of Forgiveness* again.

The Callings of Ruby St. Jo – November

Each day Ruby St. Jo opens the Book
and spends some time with Jesus.
This routine gave her freedom.
Caring for children had been her career
even into her social work life.
So when her own children moved on
a second marriage happened, bringing
new life, good times for Ruby and Ned
years for work and play and love.
They found joy in the lives that they led.
So at a loss was Ruby St. Jo as she walked
from the grave of this love of her life,
it was late; what next in this time of suffering?
What more in a darkening November
but the Feast of Christ the King?

Her grandsons and a new life called.
Calvin and Timothy needed her now.
Their father addicted and in jail.
Their mother unable to cope.
Ruby would be both parents now
sharing heart and home with the boys.
They needed her calm; she liked their noise.
But home life was not easy at first
as adoption papers were approved.
What came next was not easy either.
In the big city hospital Tim needed care
so Cal would be home with her friend.
She would find space in the city
to stay with Tim till the end.
Their world was dark for many months.
It took time for Tim's miracle healing
in an unexpected change.
In November with her boys back home,
although now it seemed like spring,
in a time of thanksgiving walked Ruby St. Jo
toward the Feast of Christ the King.

Ruby St. Jo in her working time
had helped some kids who were rough.
Those living in poverty,
in the presence of illness or addiction
in the absence of fathers, sometimes without homes,
some teens often out on their own.
Grandson Cal knew some rough ones too
though he gave them a wide berth.
One day got a text about Jimmy
who he knew at their old school.
Jimmy'd been killed on a bike ride
by a rope stretched across the paved path
His friends were angry, hurt,
and vulnerable;
no one seemed to know of their needs.
The man who strung rope was not charged;
no grave they could visit or funeral would be held.
The rough crowd of young teens decided
to hold their own wake for Jimmy.
When they found no adult that
they knew was going to do a thing,
they'd start a procession of All Saints
to the Feast of Christ the King.

The wake idea got the blessing
of Jimmy's big sister. They'd skip school
and go to their secret beach.
Ruby St. Jo knew that beach too
and knew that she must go.
She asked her pastor and an elder
from her church to come,
but like the priest and Levite of old
they walked by on the other side,
and urged her not to go.
Ruby waited on the secret beach
while some of the teens got stoned.
It was almost an hour
before Jimmy's sister showed
to quiet the crowd and introduce Ruby St. Jo

She called to the wondering crowd,
“You lost a friend to an untimely death,
but do not blame God or harden your hearts.
Just know you are loved
by Jesus the Christ
who understands grief and pain,
and all that you have been through.
He’s holding Jimmy now
and may you realize that he’s also holding you.
May you learn to see yourself
with the same love, delight, and expectation
with which God sees you in this moment.
You are a chosen generation, created for these times.
You can bring light not darkness
into this challenging world.
As you seek to hear your calling,
you will carry it wherever you roam.
Like we stand on the shore of this ocean
God’s mercy will lead us all home.”

Her presence was just as much as her words
the tough kids might remember,
the ones crying when she was done,
the ones who had Jesus on a cross round their necks
found a place in their time of loss.
She gave them time to grieve,
to pray, and just to breathe
as she let the Spirit bring
the gifts from that violent November
for the Feast of Christ the King.

Some small part of church that day
went beyond its own interest in being,
as souls were blessed and invited,
as eyes of the heart began seeing,
souls redeemed and reconciled.
So pray as you can with Ruby St. Jo
and spend some time with Jesus
Pray for Cal and Tim, and for all rough kids
on the shore of the ocean of mercy,
and listen for your own callings.
You will pray for us all when you sing
and will bless this journey of all saints
that ends with Christ the King.

Reflections and Connexions

This poem is biographical in content and tells a true story. (Of course the names have been changed.) We have a friend whose life is centered in calling all to a life with Jesus.

Long ago John Duns Scotus pointed out that God loves things in themselves and as themselves. He called this the scandal of particularity. Yes, there can be universal meanings, but we come to them through what is concrete, specific, and ordinary. Christian Wiman has written, “If God is love, Christ is love for this one person, this one place, this one time-bound, time-ravaged self.” This is a wonderful gift both to give and to receive.

Some of you who are not familiar with liturgical Christian churches might be helped by knowing that the Feast of All Saints is always November 1st. The Feast of Christ the King is the last Sunday of the liturgical year and often occurs near American Thanksgiving. I hope you will be able to revisit *The Callings of Ruby St. Jo*, to imagine yourself in the story, and to listen for particular callings in your own life.



In the Garden of 'Ruby St. Jo'