

RHYTHMS OF THE GOD-LIFE

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE THROUGH
PARAPHRASE, POETRY, AND PRAYER



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Rhythms of the God-Life

General Introduction

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

Proust

Encountering the Word

The little boy tugged on his father’s pant leg. The father bent down and his son whispered in his ear, “Daddy, why does Mrs. Smith carry such a big Bible everywhere?”

The father whispered back, “Why don’t you ask her.”

Summoning his courage, the boy asked Mrs. Smith about her Bible. With an immediate smile that the boy did not expect, Mrs. Smith replied, “Well I like to read it!”

“But why?” the boy blurted out, much to his father’s embarrassment.

“Because it’s the only book that reads me back,” was her reply.¹

Rhythms of the God-Life is an invitation to dig deeper into God’s Word. *Rhythms* is an “interpretive paraphrase” (about which I will say more below) that invites readers to read with both head and heart, to ponder the ways the Word connects to who you are and whose you are, and to respond to God’s call with actions in both the private and public sphere. Both your interior life of spirit and your public living of truth will be challenged in these pages, for you will encounter Jesus in them.

It is not enough to read Scripture without engaging and encountering the Word. As John Calvin once wrote, “Let not the Word of The Truth flit about in your mind alone but allow it to seep into the deep places, into the very marrow of your soul.” The aphorism that “the Bible is the only book that we read that reads us back” is as true for an interpretive paraphrase as for a traditional translation.

I am a pastor who believes Scripture when it says the Holy Spirit lives within each one of us who calls upon

the name of God and has been baptized according to the Triune name. As such, each of us has living within us a theological seminary of sorts: the Scripture text we are reading or know by heart, the experiences of fidelity and failure with which we have sought to live the Gospel, as well as the great communion of saints we have known and know, whose voices are our companions along the Way of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit is our Counselor who takes all this source material and shapes, forms and transforms us more fully into the image of Christ Jesus.

The above paragraph sounds grandiose. Let me rephrase it in terms of educational theory. I do not believe in the “Banking Model” of education, in which an instructor opens up the student’s brain and deposits facts and information first to be memorized, then to be regurgitated, with the assumption that such methods can be called learning. What we know about the human brain tells us learning is not linear. Instead of a one-way transmission of information, true learning happens as we engage one another in dialogue: back-and-forth, forth-and-back. True learning moves beyond the informational to the transformational.

Rhythms seeks transformation. It is comprised of three sections for each passage: an interpretive paraphrase, a poem that interprets and applies the text, and a prayer that applies the text to one’s daily life. Each of these sections intends to engage the reader with information that leads to dialogue. I do not ask you merely to receive my interpretation of the biblical text and its implications for our daily living and life together. I ask you to engage the material with mind and heart and spirit as an active learner.

¹ This story is of unknown origin. I first heard it told in the 1990’s at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in a continuing

education seminar taught by Tom Long, who at the time was a professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Interpretive Paraphrase

What will it look like to be an active learner with *Rhythms*? It starts with interpretive paraphrase, which balances scrupulosity to the Greek text and creativity to modern expressions. *Rhythms* remains rooted in the text and yet gives the text wings, to convey faithfully the Greek text of the New Testament yet do so in a way that invites the reader to see beyond the familiarity of beloved words of Scripture to experience the Word more deeply. This balancing act required choices about what words give precision and clarity for textual understanding, what words invite the reader's imagination to hear the music of Scripture, and when it is necessary to expand on the Greek text in order to convey culture and customs unseen by most modern readers. I will let you, Gentle Reader, be the judge as to whether I have made wise choices.

Early readers of the pages that follow often mistook them for Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, which I took as an extreme compliment. I have endeavored to apply the same scrupulosity to my paraphrase as Dr. Peterson famously applied to *The Message*. Where we differ is that I have taken the liberty to include contextual clues not found in the original, Greek manuscripts but which would have been obvious to the original, 1st century readers and hearers of the text. These contextual clues come from citing the Hebrew Scriptures, Roman laws, and both Roman and Jewish cultural practices. Sometimes the cultural clues are embedded in the paraphrase and other times they are in a footnote.

In Volume I of the *Rhythms* series I paraphrase the familiar passage, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the left also" (Matthew 5:39). I show how this passage assumes cultural practices between Roman soldiers and the oppressed, Jewish populace as follows:

If a Roman soldier backhands you, essentially treating you like a dog, turn your other cheek to him, inviting him to treat you as his equal.

In Volume II of the *Rhythms* series, I provide context in a footnote when Paul references being in prison:

Paul is in and out of prison frequently during his ministry. In the autocratic and oppressive rule of the Romans, Christian ethics were perceived as seditious. Roman culture was a caste system and like all dictatorships the Romans were suspicious

when people from different castes gathered together. The Romans' presumption was that rebellion was being planned. The Romans did not care about Paul's preaching for its religious content (because he was Jewish or participated in a Jewish sect) but because his message led people to challenge the social and legal structures upon which Roman culture was built. Further, the early Christian confession that Jesus is Lord was in direct violation of Roman law and a contradiction to the foundational, political statement of Roman authority that said Caesar is Lord.

The purpose of these interpretive insertions into the paraphrase is to illuminate the Word more fully; however, it is the responsibility of each reader, as one in whom the Holy Spirit lives, to engage my words as an active learner and dialogue partner: Why did I phrase this as I did? What did I see that you did not or missed that you see?

Poetry

To assist in the work of engaging and encountering the Word, each passage includes a poem and a prayer that reflects upon the passage. Emily Dickinson wrote that poetry helps us see something "slant"² and opens us to new perspectives. Dickinson invited her readers to look upon the familiar and see new creation, to move beyond our assumptions to encounter life's mysteries with wonder and awe. To tell something slant has become a metaphor that both connects with the concrete and then amplifies and moves beyond it. The poems in *Rhythms* seek to help readers see God's Word "slant" and use three poetic styles: Haiku, Cinquain, and free verse.

Haiku poems have three lines. The first line is five syllables. The second line is seven syllables. The third line is five syllables. Here is an example of a *Haiku* from Romans 8:1-4:

*Jesus on the Cross
Battle for eternity
His heart curved outward*

Cinquain poems have five lines. The first line is one word, the second line two words, then three words, four words, but then the fifth line is one word. Here is an example of a *Cinquain* from 1 Corinthians 2:3-16:

² c.f. Emily Dickinson, *Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant* (1886) and *There's a Certain Slant of Light* (1861).

Wisdom
spiritual mystery
wondering and wandering
learning The Truth-rhythms anew
wholeness

Free verse will be a more familiar form for most readers. I use free verse for the majority of passages and seek both to invite insights into the meaning of the text as well as provoke questions about the text. If the poems do not connect for you, I invite you to craft your own poetic response to the Word!

Prayer

Praying the Word is an ancient spiritual practice combining Scripture and prayer, often called *lectio divina*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “divine reading.” Benedictine *lectio divina* invites a reader to notice where the Spirit draws one’s attention and to remain in that place in meditation on the word, phrase, or verse. Ignatian *lectio divina*, which works well for story passages, invites a reader to imagine yourself present in the event being described. For example, imagine yourself as a disciple watching four men lower their paralyzed friend down through a roof (Mark 2:3-4). What do you see, hear, smell, and notice through your Spirit-guided sacred imagination?

In Volume I, for the Gospels of Matthew and John, I pray using the format of the Prayer of St. Francis. Here is an example from Matthew 5:3:

Lord, make me poor in spirit,
when too full, let me be poured out,
when too proud, let me choose humility,
when grasping for my own sake,
let me be spent in compassion.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek
to live for my own gain as to love with joyful generosity,
to trust in my strength as to accept my belovedness,
to think I know best as to trust you know better.

For the act of *kenosis*³ - of emptying -
is the model of Jesus,
the giving of self the Way of the Cross
that leads to eternal life.

In Mark, Luke, and Acts in Volume I, and continuing with Romans to Revelation in Volume II, the prayers begin, “God, it’s me....” Here is an example from Hebrews 8:1-13:

God, it’s me. I long for certainty: not the kind conveyed by power and privilege, nor that which comes from market success or insurance. No, I long for the certainty that my life is built on that which endures: character and hope and a love that will not let me go. I long for the certainty that my well-being depends not on human choices but upon Divine choosing: I belong to you—body and soul, in life and in death. I am humbled and grateful, that my longing is welcomed by Jesus.

In Matthew and John I chose to mirror the format of the “Prayer of St. Francis.”

Whether through direct address or formatted to mirror St. Francis (aka, my favorite saint), the prayers are written from my personal perspective, as if I am praying. If you do not connect with my personal experience, I invite you to craft your own prayer that speaks from your heart to God.

God-Language

Writing (and reading) a paraphrase is an opportunity to challenge one’s faith or, at least, explore the spiritual life slant. Though I am absolutely committed to inclusive language when referring to humanity, when speaking of the divine I prefer personal pronouns rather than the repetition of God, as in, “God said that God would bring God’s deliverance.” For me, personal pronouns better communicate that God is relational—the Holy Trinity, Three-in-One! I am personally comfortable speaking of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as saying something like, “God said that he would bring his deliverance.” That’s me: my comfort zone, my customary way of speaking the faith. And that’s okay.

However, as I have participated in small groups with female colleagues and listened to their experience of being excluded by the use of exclusively male expressions of God, I found myself wanting to experiment with the language I use. The Apostle Paul’s ethical guidance in Romans 14 is germane: “charity before freedom.” In *Rhythms* I chose to be cognizant that the way I speak of

himself nothing” (NIV) to describe Jesus’ emptying of his divine prerogatives to embrace the form of a servant.

³ *Kenosis* is a Greek word that means “emptying.” It is used most famously in the New Testament in Philippians 2:7 (c.f. “made

God may impact my beloved in Jesus in profound ways, for good or ill. Insisting on my personal comfort zone when others are negatively impacted is not okay.

I experimented with several ways to be inclusive with God-language (language about the divine) in early drafts. One experiment I found particularly meaningful personally was to speak of God as *Abba* and *Imma*, which are the Aramaic endearments for Daddy and Mommy. I wondered, as I wrote, how taking turns using *Abba* and *Imma* would affect my experience of the biblical text as Word of God. I wondered how my commitment to using personal pronouns while seeking to honor inclusive expressions of the One we worship as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier might affect me spiritually and ethically. What I discovered is a sense of community with female colleagues that felt sacred and unexpected (I am now chagrined to admit). I liked this fresh expression for speaking of God; therefore, you will find *Abba* and *Imma* but only used in one letter each.

Why only once?

In sharing *Rhythms* in written form and through teaching workshops, I discovered that some readers could not move past the prevalence of *Imma*. These readers, who were both male and female, appreciated my efforts to write a fresh expression of God's Word, but, for them, the use of *Imma* prevented them from embracing the interpretive paraphrase. Having already decided that "charity before freedom" is germane, I adapted my writing and tried another experiment in the following pages.

When using the divine name, I take the Hebrew Bible as inspiration, where God is called *El-Shaddai* (The Truth Almighty) and *El-Elyon* (Lord of Heaven and Earth). In the pages that follow, I call Yahweh by a unique characteristic connected to the theology and spirituality of the particular book or letter.

Book/Letter	Divine Name
Matthew	The Truth
Mark	The Action
Luke	The Compassion
John	The I WILL BE
Acts	The Sender
Romans	Abba
1 Corinthians	The Unity
2 Corinthians	The Reconciliation
Galatians	The Freedom
Ephesians	The Mystery
Philippians	The Joy

Book/Letter	Divine Name
Colossians	Imma
1, 2 Thessalonians	The Hope
1, 2 Timothy & Titus	The Root
Philemon	The Liberator
Hebrews	The Name
James	Sophia
1, 2, 3 Peter	The Sovereign
1, 2, 3 John	The Love
Jude	The Holy
Revelation	The Glory

I am not the first to call Yahweh by a unique characteristic by the way. In Genesis 31:42, God is called "The Fear of Isaac" (Genesis 31:42). If God can be called "The Fear," why not "The Joy" or "The Glory"? Further, I use "They," with a capital "T" as God's pronoun both to convey God's trinitarian nature and remain gender inclusive.

Religious Speech

Writing a paraphrase is an opportunity to explore fresh means of expressing faith and life. I use "God-rhythms" and "God-life" because I feel they convey a jazz-like sense of musical harmony appropriate to life with Jesus. I have made other linguistic changes in my attempt to create an environment in which readers might hear God's Word as a fresh expression and to receive it with insight, imagination, appreciation, and affirmation. For example, the word grace, a word that I dearly love, is paraphrased as "loving-kindness." Please be assured, O Gentle Reader, that I love the word grace. Not only is it integral to my story of giving my life to Jesus, but *Amazing Grace* is my absolute favorite hymn!

One difficulty of crafting an interpretive paraphrase is that the Bible is so well-known and loved that the temptation is to use well-known and beloved phrases. However, a paraphrase, by definition, seeks to open new pathways into understanding the text by deliberately *not* using well-worn phrases, and this practice may cause readers confusion! To minimize confusion, I want to give you a head start on some of the vocabulary I use, especially of familiar terms:

Traditional Term	Fresh Expression
Christ	the Anointed
church	gathering or the Body
demon	unholy spirit
disciple (individual)	disciplined follower, Devoted
faith	trust
grace	loving-kindness
healed	made whole
holy	set apart
kingdom of God	kin-dom, or rule of sovereign love
Lord	sovereign above Caesar, sovereign above the cosmos, or sovereign above the Body
prophets	truth-tellers
righteousness	right relationship(s)
salvation	becoming whole and complete, becoming our true self
Satan/Devil	Accuser
spirit vs. flesh	true self vs. false self

Readers will note the names of all 1st century Jewish groups have also been modified. My intent is to describe them according to how they function within 1st century Jewish culture yet point to the truth these same characters function within every 21st century Christian church.

Traditional Term	Fresh Expression
antichrists	the Opposers
apostles	sent ones
chief priests	the Rulers
deacons	the Caring
disciples (group)	the Disciplined followers
elders	the Old Ones
false teachers	the Speculators
Herodians	the Collaborators
Pharisees	the Intense
Sadducees	the Elite
Scribes	the Scrupulous

Some of my verbal experiments will work; others will not. Please don't judge the entire manuscript if one or more of these experiments fall flat for you! Instead, continue reading in search of nourishment for your heart, mind, and spirit. I hope you will take a "water off a duck's back" approach to experiments that fall flat. Many of the

footnotes compare my word choice to the choices made by English translations or suggest how the Greek text might allow for such an interpretation. (I highly recommend you read the footnotes, especially if you have a question about why I have phrased something in a particular way.)

Do you agree or disagree with the choices I have made? Why or why not? Let the dialogue begin.

Luke

I have a confession: I wrote the interpretive paraphrase of Luke 30 years ago, when I was a pastor in Brenham, Texas (home to Bluebell Ice Cream!). I wrote it as a devotional for my congregation and used it as a resource for our confirmands. I wanted every youth who went through that church to have read at least one Gospel cover to cover before launching into their young adult journey.

For this edition of *Rhythms of the God-Life*, I updated the paraphrase and prayers to conform to the editorial standards I have adopted (e.g. “disciples” became “disciplined followers”) and wrote poems for each text, as the paraphrase 30 years ago used reflection questions rather than poetry to interpret the text. Yet much of the work bears the hallmarks of my spiritual and theological perspectives and my literary capabilities from my early 30’s.

What strikes me is both how the core of my spiritual and theological convictions have remained intact yet also how I have evolved as a theologian, biblical interpreter, and person of faith. I am more willing to present Jesus’ rough edges now than in my 30’s, more willing to allow Jesus’ “hard sayings” to remain troublesome, less willing to feel the need to defend Jesus from his detractors. As I only “updated” the paraphrase but did not undertake a complete re-write, the work below is a blend of my 30-something and 50-something self.⁴ Perhaps you, O Gentle Reader, will be able to discern my younger and older self in the pages below when compared to what I have written in *Rhythms* for Matthew, Mark, and John.

I mention this bit of autobiography to invite your reflection: How have your perspectives evolved? How are you the same person of good faith and character you were when compared to your younger self, yet perhaps with nuanced or even completely different opinions, views, and convictions? The journey with Jesus through life was never intended to be static but dynamic, relational, and (to use a very religious word) sanctifying,⁵ which means becoming your true self, the “you” God intends for you to be, with your inner character reflecting Jesus’ character to the world.

For the Gospel of Luke, the character to which we are called is compassion. Luke’s Gospel is the most socially egalitarian of the four Gospels in the way it elevates and honors women in ministry. Elizabeth and Mary are honored as truth-tellers (1:26-56), Anna is paired with Simeon as elder witnesses to the significance of the Christ Child (2:21-40), women are honored for their service (8:1-3, 10:38-42), and woman figure prominently in the parables (7:36-50, in which Jesus’ kindness toward a woman inspires his telling of the parable; 15:8-10; and 18:1-8).

In the parables, the theme of compassion toward the last, the least, and the lost takes center stage. In the parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37) the Great Banquet (14:12-24), the Lost Shepherd / Coin / Son (15:1-32), and the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31) we see a concern for the needs of the poor and a reversal of worldly order (i.e. “the last shall be first and the first shall be last”).

It is instructive that only Luke puts on Jesus’ lips his “programmatic speech”: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to preach good news to the poor” (4:18-19). And Luke contrasts Matthew’s version of the beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” with the more bluntly stated, “Blessed are you who are poor” (6:20). Again, only Luke recounts Jesus’ encounter with the tax-collector Zaccheus who proclaims, “...half of my goods I give to the poor...” (19:8). In Luke, widows’ concerns are honored twice as often as in the other three Gospels combined.

Given Luke’s focus as a storyteller, I have chosen in the pages that follow to call God “The Compassion.” I pray for all of us that our growing, evolving selves might continue our sanctifying journey as we encounter The Compassion in Luke.

⁴ As I write, I am 62. This paraphrase was completed while I was 59—technically still in my 50’s.

⁵ Sanctification is defined as growing in holiness.

Luke 1:1-4

The Story has been told many times in many ways: of divine love alive among us, walking beside us, living, breathing, being. This is the Story told by those who were there, of the things they saw with their eyes, things they heard, touched, felt, experienced. These trustworthy eyewitnesses are servants⁶ of the Word. This is the Story to which I have disciplined followers my life, O Friend of The Compassion. I share this Story with you so that you too may know it, so that you too may know Them: The Compassion who loved, the Man who lived, whose light shined upon us.

From chaos, order.

From darkness, dawn.

From silence, Word.

Spoken for our hearing.

Spoken for our receiving.

Spoken for our embracing.

God, it's me. You are the Eternal Word, the Word before history, the Word in history, the Word with us: Teach us how to see and to hear, to touch and to feel, to experience your Story. Told first by those who were there, then handed down by faithful generations, revealed to us now. Teach us what it means to be fellow eyewitnesses of your Word at work in our world, at work in our lives! Teach us what it means to become a living part of the Story, your Story, our Story together!

Luke 1:5-25

The Story I have to share is part of the much older Story of The Compassion's work in the world and is the transformational moment in history. It begins with Zechariah, who was a priest during the time Herod the Great was king of Judea. Zechariah's wife was named Elizabeth; she too was from a priestly family. Both were filled with integrity and goodness before The Compassion, yet their hearts felt sorrow and experienced anguish, for Elizabeth could not have children. They yearned for a child

but lacked any hope, for both were quite old, well past the age of childbearing.

One day when lots were cast to see who would serve in the Temple, Zechariah was chosen to be the one priest who would enter the Temple to burn incense, a symbol of the people's prayers. All the other priests and worshipers were outside praying when Zechariah entered the most sacred space within the Temple, the space that would bring Zechariah into The Compassion's presence. A celestial messenger appeared, just to the right of the place where Zechariah was to burn incense as a symbol of the people's prayers. Zechariah was terror-stricken when he saw the messenger. He had no idea what was happening to him. But the messenger said to him what is often said to us humans, "Be not afraid, Zechariah, be not afraid. Rejoice, Zechariah, rejoice, for The Compassion has heard your prayer. Elizabeth will give you a son, and you will name him John." Then the messenger began to sing a song of praise and thanksgiving to The Compassion:

John will be a great joy for you
and a great servant for The Compassion.

Many will rejoice at his birth;
rejoicing at the greatness of The Compassion!

John will be filled with the Divine Spirit,
even from birth, so no hard spirits for him.

Many will turn back to The Compassion;
many will have their hearts turned to Them!

John will come in wisdom and power and
in the spirit of Elijah.

Many will be made ready;
many will be prepared to serve The Compassion!

But Zechariah had a problem. He responded to the messenger's words with his head, not his heart, and he didn't understand all the details. So, he doubted what the messenger told him and asked, "How can this happen?"

him"). Further, the *huperetai* ensured the purity, protection, and sanctity of the literal Torah scrolls. In using *huperetai*, Luke is making a theological assertion about Jesus' original disciplined followers; namely, they conceived their work of cultivating and guarding the stories of Jesus' words and work as a sacred task to preserve the sanctity of the message about Jesus.

⁶ The Greek word is *huperetai*, which is a technical term. Ordinarily, a servant would be described using a cognate of the Greek word *diakonia* or *doule* from which we get the English words "deacon" and "slave." A *huperetai*, however, referred to a particular type of "servant," one who was entrusted with the Torah scrolls. The *huperetai* ensured the correct scrolls were handed to teachers (c.f. Luke 4:17—"and the scroll of the truth-teller Isaiah was handed to

Elizabeth and I are old, well past the age of childbearing. What you say doesn't make sense to me."

But it made sense to the celestial messenger, who answered clearly, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of The Compassion. I am Their messenger, sent to tell you your part in the Story. Now you will be silent until the day my words come true, for you have doubted Their Word."

Now, the people praying outside were beginning to wonder and to worry: What was taking Zechariah so long? When Zechariah did appear, they knew something had happened—an event! He could not speak, yet he had something to say, a Story to tell.

When his work in the Temple was complete, Zechariah returned home to be with Elizabeth. Elizabeth became pregnant. For five months she remained in solitude, praying and thanking The Compassion: "My Sovereign has done this for me; has gifted me with this blessing and taken away all my shame."

*What happens to one for whom
doing, doing, doing,
praying, praying, praying,
offering, offering, offering is
identity?*

*What happens when
doing becomes mindless activity,
praying becomes mere babble,
offering is not enough?*

*Imposed silence,
womb of transformation,
embracing stillness until revealed is
new identity.*

*Not through our doing, our praying, our offering,
but through what The Compassion has done,
the offering of Their Son, that gives
eternal identity.*

God, it's me. How often have I missed an opportunity to see your face? How often have I forgotten—Refused! Neglected!—to hear your messenger? How often have I, like Zechariah, chosen fear rather than faith, doubt rather than trust? O Compassion, please give me another chance! Send me a Gabriel. Or a John.

Or a friend or a pastor or even a stranger. Teach me, my Sovereign, how you are writing your Story in the world, in my life, even here, even now.

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the celestial messenger Gabriel visited the village of Nazareth in the province of Galilee in the northern part of Israel—a fertile territory of robust agriculture. Gabriel went to Mary, who was a virgin and was engaged to Joseph, who was a long-ago descendent of King David. Gabriel saw Mary and said, "Loving-kindness and *shalom*⁷ be yours, for The Compassion is with you!" Mary was shocked and shaken, for she did not understand the significance of the greeting or why such a messenger should be greeting her at all.

So, Gabriel said to her what is often said to us humans, "Be not afraid, Mary, be not afraid. I bring you Good News. The Compassion will gift you with a child, a son, and you will call him Jesus." Then Gabriel began to sing a song of praise and thanksgiving to God:

He will be called great,
a great gift to the people.

He will be called The Compassion's own Son,
a gift from Their own hand.

He will be called Sovereign,
one to rule on David's throne now and forever.

Mary inquired of Gabriel, "How is this going to happen since I have never slept with a man?"

Gabriel answered her, "The Divine Spirit will be with you, and the transforming power of The Compassion will overshadow you. Therefore, the child Jesus will be sacred, both of The Compassion and set apart to bring to fulfillment The Compassion's Story. And listen to this: Elizabeth also has conceived a son, even in her old age. She is six months into her pregnancy. You see, nothing is impossible for The Compassion; nothing is impossible with Them behind you and before you, beside you and within you."

Mary answered Gabriel, "I am The Compassion's servant. May what you say happen as you said it. I am willing." Then Gabriel left her.

of wholeness and wellness to all: economically, socially, physically, and spiritually.

⁷ The Greek word *shalom* is translated as "peace," and conveys not merely the absence of conflict but the positive, dynamic presence

*voice-less she enters the room:
voice-less before power, privilege, and patriarchy;
voice-less for she is but another's possession.*

*VOICE speaks new truth.
VOICE imbues new sense of self.
VOICE invites new vocation.*

*VOICE sings a new song!
VOICE embraces a new vocation!
VOICE says, "Yes!"*

"MAY IT BE TO ME AS YOU HAVE SAID!"

God, it's me. I am willing. I am willing! But I am also afraid. You alone know how often I am afraid, how often I hide my fear in bravado or busy-ness. You alone know how seldom I am willing to give myself to serve others if I am not the one in control. O Compassion, teach me how to let go and let you gift to me your loving-kindness and peace that I may be your servant—your willing servant. Teach my heart the eternal truths of this Scripture: nothing is impossible for you; nothing is impossible with you. Be not afraid, O my soul, be not afraid.

Luke 1:39-56

Mary went immediately to share in the good news of Elizabeth's joy, and to share her own! Elizabeth and Zechariah lived in the hill country of Judea. When Mary arrived and her greeting reached Elizabeth's ears, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy and Elizabeth laughed in praise to God:

Blessed are you among all women. Blessed is the child within you. Blessed am I that the mother of my Sovereign is here. Blessed is my baby who heard your voice and leapt for joy. Blessed are you for believing The Compassion's good news to you.

Mary also laughed in praise. She sang out a song of praise and thanksgiving:

My soul laughs in praise to The Compassion, and my spirit rejoices in Their Sovereign love. My soul laughs, for They have gifted me with incredible blessing, and all

generations will remember what The Compassion has done for me.

Holy is Their name for those who live in humility. Mercy is Their name for those who live in Their goodness. The Compassion shows Their strength with mighty deeds: scattering the proud and bringing down the powerful, lifting the humble and filling the hungry, sending the rich away empty of blessing. They shower mercy upon Israel, remembering the promise to Abraham, being true to Their Word forever.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then returned to her home.

*A young woman
stares into the dark liquid cupped in her hands,
noticing the steam rise and
drift away with her ruminations.
Warmth from the ceramic upon her palms invites calm.*

*Auntie sips her tea,
looking over the cup's brim at her niece,
imagining what her life could have been
under different circumstances.*

*Auntie hesitates, concerned to avoid
too quickly expressing her own joy
given the trepidation she imagines
unfolding within her niece.*

*Auntie knows people
exult of her blessedness:
no longer barren,
no longer bereft.*

*Auntie imagines what people
whisper about her niece:
ruined and ruinous,
"It's good she got out of town."*

*Auntie places her cup upon the table between them.
Taking her niece's hands,
she guides her to let go
of the Cup and place it upon the Table.*

*"It will be alright," Auntie says gently,
cradling her niece's hands.
"I know," replies the young woman.
"Still, it's a lot to take in."*

*“We are in this together,” assures Auntie.
“Our children are united forever,”
replies her niece quickly,
surprising Auntie with her strength.*

*Together, they sit back,
relaxed,
and each sip their tea.*

God, it's me. My soul laughs in praise, O Compassion, my soul laughs in praise. Not the laughter of a joke but the joy of a young child. Not the laughter of humor but the holy expression of joy that cannot be contained—Not what I create but what your Spirit gives. It is laughter born out of humility, borne upon my own poverty, giving birth to your riches. It is the laughter of praise to you, O Compassion, that you lift the humble and fill the hungry, that you remember your promise, that your word is true. My soul laughs in praise, O Compassion, my soul laughs in praise.

Luke 1:57-80

Elizabeth had her baby and all who knew her laughed with joy. “What a wonder,” they thought, “is The Compassion's mercy!” On the eighth day, in obedience to the Torah, the community gathered to name and circumcise the baby. Since Zechariah could not speak, the men debated among themselves, for it was considered a man's responsibility to name their children. “Let's name him Zechariah,” they concluded.

But Elizabeth stood firm, “No, he has already been named by The Compassion. He will be called John.”

“But none of your family is named John,” they objected. “It makes no sense.”

Then Zechariah asked for something to write on. “His name is John,” he wrote. Suddenly, his silence burst into praise.

Everyone was filled with the wonder of awe and a deep sense that the Divine Spirit was at work. The only thing that anyone could talk about in the whole area was this boy named by The Compassion, this John: “What special work will this child do for the realm of Sovereign love?”

Zechariah could hold in his joy no longer. He lifted his voice in song, praising The Compassion:

Praise The Compassion! Sing praises to the Holy One who redeems Their people, who brings wholeness, who is true to Their Word.

Praise The Compassion! Sing praises to Israel's Protector, who saves us from our enemies and those who hate us, who shows mercy to our people and remembers Their promise, who is true to Their Word.

Praise The Compassion! Sing praises to Israel's Sovereign, who rescues Their people, who invites us to serve, who makes integrity and goodness a living possibility.

And you, my child, will be a messenger for The Compassion—Sovereign over all the cosmos, to prepare the people, to prepare their hearts and heads and hands, to proclaim wholeness through the forgiveness of sins, to pronounce tender mercies that, in the hands of The Compassion, form us into our true selves. It is The Compassion who causes the sun to shine upon us, who causes light to shine in the darkness, who causes the shadow of death to become the light of life.

And John grew in spirit and strength, devoting himself to The Compassion.

*Butcher, baker, candlestick maker;
Parents delight at the merest whiff of giftedness.
Athlete or mathlete, singer or song writer;
Oh, what shall this child be?*

*Delight turns into determination:
“Do your chores and brush your teeth!”
“Is your homework done?”
Oh, what shall this child be?*

*Rarely do parents hope for the troubler
who refuses to give up her seat on the bus and
will not remain silent in the face of oppression.
Oh, what shall this child be?*

*Parents hope for a doctor, lawyer, or engineer,
not a child committed to speaking truth to power
nor one with a penchant for starting “good trouble.”
Oh, what shall this child be?*

God, it's me. You alone are the One who redeems; you are the One who saves; you are the One who is true. And I am filled with the wonder of awe. May the work of John continue in my life: to prepare me to receive you, to make me ready to receive your mercy. May the work of John continue through my life: to remind others that

you rescue, to help us remember together that you remember your promises. O Compassion, I join my praise with the chorus of laughter, sung by your people in ages past, sung forever for years to come.

Luke 2:1-12

Around this time of sacred visitations, Caesar Augustus enacted a law that everyone in the Roman world should be counted. (This first census took place when Quirinius was Governor of Syria.) Everyone went to their family's ancestral hometown to be counted. Both Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, for they were both from the area and had relatives nearby.

Joseph and Mary, his fiancé who was pregnant, traveled south from where they lived in the small village of Nazareth, to Bethlehem, Joseph's family's hometown (Joseph was part of King David's family). They traveled well in advance of the birth of Mary's child, for it was hazardous to travel late in a woman's pregnancy. The couple stayed with Joseph's family in the region, for the culture of Israel was one of extreme hospitality and family would never turn away a couple in such circumstances.⁸

During Joseph and Mary's extended stay with family in Bethlehem, Mary had her baby, her first child, a son. She wrapped him up in warm cloths and put him down in the manger, where the animals were fed,⁹ because the guest room¹⁰ was full.

Out in the fields nearby, there were some shepherds watching over their flock of sheep that night. As they lounged around, half dozing, The Compassion's messenger appeared to them with radiance shining all around him. The shepherds were not only filled with a deep sense of awe; they were terrified! The celestial messenger said to the

shepherds, "Be not afraid, Shepherds, be not afraid. I come to tell you good news that will bring you great joy—and not only you, but all people will rejoice. Today, in Bethlehem, a Messiah has been born for you—even you who are considered the least and lowest in Israel."¹¹ This child is the Anointed One, and he is Sovereign above heaven and earth. This will show my words are true: You will find a baby wrapped up warm in cloth, not in the guest room, but in a family's manger."

Hospitality
a prerequisite,
the Child welcomed,
not entering by force.

To those whose hearts
are empty,
are bereft,
are humble,

to those whose minds
are curious,
are open,
who wonder,

the Child arrives,
awaiting welcome:
needing to be embraced,
swaddled in the arms of love.

God, it's me. Your love envelops us all with life and light; may it shine into our lives. Instill in us a sacred wonder: that you, the Creator of all, come in weakness, in humility, needing the care of Mary and Joseph.

⁸ The previous two sentences are not in the Greek text but added as interpretive context. They are the likely scenarios given well-established cultural practices, as described by New Testament scholar Ken Bailey, who also notes that the first depiction in Christian literature of a "midnight arrival" was in a late 2nd century novella.

⁹ Per Bailey's research, ancient Israelite families brought in their livestock during the night to protect against theft. The livestock would sleep on the ground while the family slept on an elevated floor several feet upon the ground. We impose our cultural expectations when we see poverty level, Israelite families as each having a barn.

¹⁰ Again per Bailey's research, the Greek word used is *kataluma*, which means "guest room." Ancient Israelites homes were designed as single room dwellings that could add a *kataluma* for family. Bailey suggests that given the fact of the census, Joseph's

family would have had multiple guests. Joseph and Mary, as young adults, would have been consigned to sleep amidst the warmth of the livestock, with elder family members given the honor of the *kataluma*. Bailey also notes that the Greek word for "inn" or "hotel" is *pandocheion*, which Luke uses in the parable of the Good Samaritan (c.f. 10:34).

¹¹ The conventional teaching of the day was that shepherds were ranked #1 on the list of most unclean professions! The accusation laid against them was (a) they worked on the Sabbath, (b) frequently were unable to tend to their religious duties, and (c) would often traverse Gentile lands (unknowingly) as they followed their sheep yet would not wipe the dust from these lands from their feet upon returning to Israel, as was proscribed by 1st century custom. That the message of the Anointed One's birth came first to shepherds is an example of Luke's "upside-down" or "social reversal" theology and sociology in the Gospel.

Overwhelm us with sacred awe that evokes our awareness that your love comes to us as a gift we did not earn yet is given freely, lavishly, and intimately. Carve out space in our hearts and minds, in our busy schedules and anxious spirits. May we make room for you—and not just in a guest room, but every room in the home we call our true self.

Luke 2:13-20

Without warning, the night sky was filled with light and a squadron of celestial messengers were singing praise and thanksgiving to The Compassion:

Glory to The Compassion in highest heaven,
and on earth peace to all humankind,
on whom Their generous love rests.

The shepherds talked things over after the messengers returned to heaven. There wasn't much debate about what to do: "Let's go see with our own eyes this event. Let's see this gift from The Compassion's hand we have been told about." So, the shepherds ran quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby just as the celestial messengers said they would, wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger.

When they left the house, the shepherds could not keep quiet; they told everybody everything about this Child. And the people who heard the shepherds were amazed by what they heard.

But Mary kept everything to herself. She reflected upon the shepherds' words in the deep places of her heart and encountered¹² with hope and foreboding the possibilities these words promised. The shepherds returned to the fields, laughing in praise to The Compassion for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

*Meister Eckhart—
mystic, theologian, prophet—
understood God must be allowed
to be birthed in one's life.*

*"Ground of Self" Eckhart called this birthing,
process of emergence,
becoming our true self,
living into an awareness of the God-life.*

*This is the journey Mary began,
as she reflected in the deep places.
Mary's true self emerging beside the Cradle,
beginning its journey to the Cross.*

*While shepherds laugh in praise,
a mother pondered, pondered, pondered.
While the bells ring and carol we sing,
we ponder, too.*

God, it's me. Glory to you, O Compassion, glory in the highest! Glory to you who brings your peace into the world. I thank you for the gift of the Child, Jesus, who challenges every notion of human power and prestige. For the Child came not in the power of might but in the power of love, his prestige found not in a desire for greatness but in a willingness to be humble. O Compassion, help me to hear this familiar story with my heart open to hear it in fresh and faithful. Help me to hear it as the shepherds heard it: a joyous wonder for all.

Luke 2:21-40

When the Child was eight days old, Mary and Joseph, in obedience to Torah, took him to the Temple to be named and circumcised.¹³ They called him Jesus, the name given by the celestial messenger even before he was conceived. After the forty-day period of purification required by Torah was complete,¹⁴ Mary and Joseph again lived in obedience to The Compassion and took Jesus to Jerusalem to be dedicated in the Temple, where they were to offer the customary sacrifice of "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."¹⁵

Living in Jerusalem at that time was a man named Simeon, who was full of integrity and goodness before The Compassion. Simeon was a prayerful man, waiting for The Compassion to encourage Israel. The Divine Spirit

¹² The Greek word used is *symballo*, which is usually translated as "ponder" but can mean "encounter with or without hostile intentions." The image of Mary in this verse is more than merely sitting on her front porch in a rocking chair but of active, dynamic contemplation.

¹³ c.f. Genesis 17:12.

¹⁴ c.f. Leviticus 12:1-6.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

was his constant companion, and the Spirit had encouraged Simeon with the promise that he would not die until he had seen with his own eyes The Compassion's gift to Israel, the Anointed One. When Mary and Joseph, in obedience to Torah, brought Jesus into the Temple, the Spirit again encouraged Simeon, who took Jesus into his arms and wept with thanksgiving:

O Compassion, you have fulfilled your promise, and now I may pass in peace. For I have seen your saving work with my own eyes. I have seen what all people shall see: A light to reveal your lovingkindness and *shalom* to all people, a light that will bring honor to your people Israel.

Mary and Joseph were delighted by these words, but their hearts paused when Simeon turned to them with this warning: “Your child's purpose on this earth cannot be denied: He will challenge all hearts to decide. Many will fall from The Compassion, and many will be raised up because of how they respond to him. All hearts will be read like an open book. Even your hearts will be pierced with the sword of conviction that calls for a decision.”

There was a woman named Anna present also, a daughter of Phanuel of the family of Asher. Anna was old, having lived to 84 as a widow after only seven years of marriage. Anna spent day and night in the Temple as a person of prayer, in deep thanksgiving and discernment, seeking The Compassion's face.¹⁶ She approached Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, and she too wept in praise and gave thanks. She told all around her to give thanks, “For this child is the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Mary and Joseph were obedient in everything Torah required. Then they returned home to Nazareth in the province of Galilee. And the Child grew and became full in strength and wisdom, for The Compassion's lovingkindness was upon him.

*Waiting through long decades.
Eavesdropping upon one's own soul,
listening for whispers that are not spoken.*

*Patient enduring
shapes, forms and transforms,
that which is into what will become.*

*Until,
unveiled in a single and singular moment:
truth permeates all yesterdays and
guides all tomorrows.*

God, it's me. Laughter and weeping merge into one joy before you, O Compassion. We have waited so long to know your wholeness and our true selves. We have seen glimpses, seen through the glass dimly. But now, in the Child, we see the fullness of your loving-kindness that has dwelled with us before the beginning of time. We see the divine love to which we were blind. We see the dynamic activity, the creativity, the passion that has been working all along, if only we'd had eyes to see. And now we see it all: We see Jesus. And our laughter and weeping merge into one joy.

Luke 2:45-52

Now the Feast of Passover, also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was one of the primary celebrations of the people. Passover celebrated The Compassion's liberating the people from slavery in Egypt.¹⁷ Joseph and Mary took their family on their annual trip to celebrate the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem. They did this when Jesus was twelve, the age in which a child began to be more responsible to Torah, in preparation for becoming a Child of the Covenant at age thirteen.¹⁸ Once the Passover had been celebrated, the family traveled home, but Jesus' journey kept him in Jerusalem. Believing Jesus was with relatives, which was customary in that day as families traveled together as a group, Joseph and Mary continued on their way. After a while they began to worry. When they could not find Jesus among the relatives, Mary and Joseph searched for Jesus in Jerusalem—and they found him in the Temple, engaging the teachers with questions. All who heard Jesus were amazed at the depth and texture of his insight. When Mary found Jesus, she spoke as angry and worried mothers speak: “Young man, didn't you ever stop

¹⁶ Her name, Phanuel, means “face of God” and her father, whose name is *Asher*, is one who sought The Compassion (2 Chronicles 30:11). For those familiar with monastic lifestyles, Anna is similar to the anchorite monastics in the Middle Ages who attached themselves to a single room or small suite within a monastery.

¹⁷ The explanation of Passover is not in the Greek text but added to give context for modern readers.

¹⁸ This sentence is not in the Greek text but added to provide interpretive context to the passage.

to think how this would affect us? Your father and I have been worried sick looking for you.”

Jesus replied, “Why did you search elsewhere? Didn't you know I must fulfill my purpose? I was compelled to be in my Abba's house.” Mary and Joseph did not understand what Jesus was talking about, so they took him and returned to Nazareth. Jesus was obedient to his parents, while Mary reflected upon his words with wonder and curiosity in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and strength, respected by The Compassion and by all.

*Iron sharpens iron—
insight the fruit of engagement.*

*Obedience, the long walk of trusting,
deepening the well even as it expands the horizon.*

*Growing into purpose, call, vocation—
reflection and action in intimate embrace.*

*Coming home to my true self—
The Compassion's heart expressing itself through me.*

God, it's me. You invite me in, lay out the welcome mat, and offer me some good ol' fashioned, down-home, country hospitality. Yet too often I am too busy to appreciate the offer or accept the invitation. But not this day. In this moment, I turn my heart away from the silly and shallow noises of life. In this moment, I tune my heart to the deep rhythms of your Spirit. This day I ask that you teach me what it means to engage your word with questions and be about the business of your house—your house! In all moments, I seek to dance the God-rhythms of your purpose and passion, revealed in your Son, empowered by your Spirit.

Luke 3:1-20

In the fifteenth year of Caesar Tiberius' rule - when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor over Judea; Herod (Herod the Great's son), the Jewish ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip, ruler over Iturea and Traconitis in the far northeast of Israel; Lysanias, ruler over Abilene in the southern portion of Syria, and when Annas and Caiaphas were high priests over Israel.

The Compassion's Word was spoken to John while he was in the desert. John went everywhere in the desert region east of the Jordan river telling others the Story of what The Compassion was doing. He told the people the good news of a baptism that could turn their lives around—that would inspire them to dance the God-rhythms and restore them to the God-life. The Compassion's loving-kindness and *shalom* would descend upon them and divine mercy would be like a close friend. John's ministry is what Isaiah was talking about:

A Voice in the desert!
A Voice calls!

Prepare for The Compassion!
Prepare to dance the God-rhythms!

The Compassion is turning the world
upside-down and inside-out!

Treacherous mountain paths
will become a stroll in the park!

Look! See! Perceive!
Lovingkindness is coming!

John lashed out at the crowds coming out to hear him, as if he were some kind of carnival act: “Snakes!” he called them. “Do you think hearing me can keep your scaly hides from judgment? It's not what you hear or where you're from or what family you were born into that matters to The Compassion. What matters is what you do with your lives. Let me set the record straight: The Compassion can take these rocks and create children of Abraham, so consider yourselves warned. Metal upon wood, The Compassion's ax is ready to cut down forests of wickedness in order to plant one good tree. Believe me when I say purging fire¹⁹ will utterly consume the wicked wood.”

The crowd was stunned into reflection: “What shall we do?” they asked.

John gave examples to everyone ways they could make justice a part of their daily living. To ordinary folk he said, “If you have more than you need, say, two warm coats, then share one of them with someone who needs one. Or if you have more food than you need, share that also.” To the tax collectors, who were notorious for their corruption and greed, he said, “Be fair. Don't collect any

¹⁹ c.f. Malachi 3:2-3, the Refiner's fire takes away common metals and only leaves the precious. This is not an allusion to “hell.”

more than you need.” To some Roman soldiers, he said, “Don't bully, threaten and manipulate people. And be satisfied with what you have.”

Everyone in the crowds wondered eagerly, the question was reaching a fevered pitch: “Could John be the Anointed One, the Messiah?”

John put an end to such speculation and rumor. He told everybody, “I baptize you with water, a symbol The Compassion forgives you. But the key person in this whole Story is about to show up, and he will do much more than I could ever dream. I am unworthy even to be compared to him. He will baptize you into the God-life, into the awareness that the Divine Spirit can live in your soul. He will toss on the bonfire all that needs to be consumed. Only what is true will endure. Everything else will be burned like yesterday's garbage. This is Good News for it means that what remains will be your true self, whole and complete as The Compassion intends.”

John told the Story to the people in so many ways, every way he could imagine to share the good news of what The Compassion was doing. But when John took aim at Herod, who had married his brother's wife, Herod came after John. John denounced Herod's illicit marriage, and Herod added this sin to the many he had already committed: He put John in jail.

I confess:

I do not trust zealots.

Their intensity repels

like spiritual body odor.

Truth be told:

Neither religious nor political “true believers”

inspire assurance in me.

What do they see and perceive to which I am blind?

Then comes John.

“Doberman”²⁰ of the Gospel—

growling a warning to turn away and turn toward,

barking commands to live the Way.

I am wary,

even as I sense my spirit being nudged

to dare dream of the new creation I could become

beyond my natural inclination to remain shielded.

God, it's me. What shall I do, O Compassion? What return can I make for all the goodness you have given me? The catalog of your gifts is thick with pages. Yet, too often, my thanksgiving is but a pamphlet and my own generosity but a single page. Forgive me! Turn me away from the idol of abundance; turn me toward trusting in your provision. Help me to accept that I have all I need and then some. Help me to let go of my abundance of possessions that I may grab hold of your abundance of peace.

Luke 3:21-38

After many had been baptized, Jesus also was baptized. As Jesus was praying, heaven itself seemed to open, and from that place came the Divine Spirit, looking like a dove descending upon Jesus. The Compassion's voice was heard: “You are my Son, my joy, the light of my love.”

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his sacred journey of ministry. Jesus traced the line of his family back through Joseph, (whose biological son many presumed he was but whom became Jesus' father by adoption), and through Joseph back 77 generations of both saints and sinners, including David the king; Jesse who was David's father; Obed who was David's grandfather and whose mother was Naomi the foreigner; Boaz who married Naomi; Perez whose mother was Tamar the daughter-in-law to Judah who prostituted herself to Judah in order to force him to fulfill his obligation to her; Judah who sought to rob Tamar of her rights; Jacob who was the deceiver; Isaac who was offered in sacrifice but saved by the celestial messenger; Abraham to whom The Compassion's promise was first given; Noah the builder of the ark; Adam the beginning of human creation; and, ultimately, to The Compassion.

Not many can say they were baptized in a jacuzzi.²¹

Many can claim to be The Compassion's beloved.

Scholars argue over where Jesus was baptized, and

miss the point that he is The Compassion's beloved.

Sure, let's fight about “sprinkling vs. immersion” and

the age when one receives the sign of the covenant, so

we can miss the mark and miss the point, as well—

We are The Compassion's beloved.

²⁰ The Rev. Dr. Barbara Brown Taylor famously preached a sermon in which she called John the Doberman Pinscher of the Gospels for the way he acts like a guard dog to protect the sacred approach to Jesus' cradle.

²¹ The youth event was intended for Doheny State Beach in Dana Point, California, but the ocean became too cold, so the event was moved to a church member's home.

God, it's me. How I long to hear your words to me: "You are my child, my joy, the light of my love." At times my heart doubts this joyful word, yet I claim the promise of Christian faith: through Jesus Christ I am forgiven! I have become your child, precious and beloved by you. Thank you, O Compassion, for the gift of your love conveyed through your Spirit. Teach my heart, O Divine One, to dwell in your love.

Luke 4:1-13

Now Jesus, with his companion the Divine Spirit fully beside him, journeyed from baptism to temptation, from the Jordan River to the desert wilderness. There in the wilderness Jesus was confronted by the Accuser for forty days. Jesus ate nothing during his desert days, so he was hungry when the Accuser approached him with this test: "Look at these stones all around you—round and brown, they look like fresh baked bread, do they not?"²² As The Compassion's Son, you can command these stones to become bread. Imagine the aroma, their warmth in your hand and upon your tongue. Feed yourself and be filled."

Jesus answered, "The Word says, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Again, the Accuser tested Jesus. He took him up to a high place and showed him the lure of the world—splendor and luxury. The Accuser said, "I will give you all the power and authority you can desire, for it has been given to me and I can give it to you. Oh, yes, I will gladly give it to you, but first you must worship me."

Jesus answered, "The Word says, 'Worship only The Compassion and serve only Them.'"

A third time the Accuser tested Jesus. He took Jesus to the highest point of the Jerusalem Temple, a giddy height, and said, "Prove you are who you say, The Compassion's beloved! Throw yourself down from this height, for the Word says, 'They will order celestial messengers to guard your life; messengers who will carry you in their arms and protect you from even stubbing your toe!'"

Jesus refused to take the bait dangled before him. He said, "The Word also says, 'Do not seek foolish things from The Compassion.'"

When the Accuser had finished these three rounds of testing, he left, but not for good. Instead, he waited to return for a moment when he thought Jesus would be weak.

The human body can endure sixteen consecutive hours of watching football with sufficient amounts of beer and chips.

And I wonder why I don't feel more energetic.

Driving the boulevard at midnight, mischief riding shotgun, deceit in the backseat. What could go wrong?'

And I wonder why my heart feels empty.

*If I can just seal this deal, I'll be a BFD and my a **hole of a boss will learn who really has the power in this office.*

And I wonder why I'm unhappy.

God, it's me. Teach me how to overcome the Accuser's temptations. Teach me how to swim away from the world's lures rather than take the bait—not to bite, to avoid being tempted, to reeled in, caught. O Compassion, I need your help for these temptations are great: the pleasures of the body, the allure of power, the need for security. I even create long and logical arguments for my personal accommodation. "These things aren't so bad," I tell myself. "I haven't gone too far," I self-deceive. "I'm ok." I lie. Forgive me and correct me. Teach me to seek only the best, to seek only your will for my life, to seek only you.

Luke 4:14-30

Jesus' journey took him from baptism to temptation to ministry, and so he returned to Galilee to begin it. He returned with the Divine Spirit bursting through him as he taught, and everywhere he went people were talking about him, praising his *dunamis*²³, spreading the news.

On the Sabbath Jesus went to his home synagogue in Nazareth, as he did every Sabbath day. He asked to read the Word, and the servant of the Word, the *huperetai*, handed

²² This sentence is not in the Greek text but added as interpretive context, especially as rocks in the desert often resemble bread.

²³ *Dunamis* is the Greek word for "power" from which we get the English words "dynamic" and "dynamite."

him the scroll for the truth-teller Isaiah.²⁴ Jesus found the verse he was looking for and read:

The Spirit is on me, filling me with power and purpose.
The Compassion has sent me,
to tell the Story to the poor,
to declare to the prisoners, "Freedom!"
to announce to the blind, "Sight!"
to proclaim to the persecuted, "Release!"
to trumpet long and loud: "Jubilee!"²⁵

Then Jesus closed Isaiah, handed it back and sat down. All eyes were on him. All ears were open. He spoke: "Today the Word has become an event; the Word has become incarnate in your midst."

Everyone was pleased and amazed at the wonder of his words, proud to know him. "Isn't this Joseph's son," they asked, "the boy we know?"

But Jesus, ever cautious of back-slappers, said to them, "You say that now, but one day you will quote me the proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself!' One day my words will not be enough, and you will call for me to perform tricks for your amusement, to do here what you heard I did in Capernaum."

Jesus continued, "Don't be fooled! I'm not. Truth-tellers are not honored if they're the hometown kid. Believe me, a truth-teller's best work is among outsiders. There were plenty of hungry widows during Elijah's time when there was severe famine because no rain fell for three and a half years. But what did Elijah do? Did he go to an Israelite? No, he went to a Gentile, a widow from Zarephath in Sidon. Likewise, there were many lepers in Israel, but Elisha didn't touch any of them. No, he cleansed Naaman the Syrian."

Jesus' praise for their enemies, people from among the Nations, and his hard tone toward his own people, the Israelites, ignited the people's anger. The crowd stormed out, driving Jesus to the edge of the cliffs outside of town. But instead of throwing him down from the height, Jesus walked right through the crowd to continue his journey.

*Refusing to forget the victims of human traffickers
the prophet breaks her silence:*

*"Jubilee!" she whispers, to
the remembered,
even as the wind disappears her voice
and conveys only the smell of smoked meat.*

*Drooling gawkers stroll by,
the inattentive,
unwilling to look away from the cathedral, to see
the putrid underbelly of Super Bowl Week.*

*Inside the glass and metal cathedral,
the so-called "warrior" does battle,
basking in the crowd's adulation,
the passionate
for whom distraction is a gift to remove from sight*

*children with vacant stares,
children with red marks on the inside of their arms,
children crying, crying, crying,
the forgotten,
for whom justice remains untended amidst their tears.*

*The prophet stands outside the cathedral,
a single, lit candle in her hand,
a silent vigil for those a culture seeks to ignore,
the anonymous,
whose names are inscribed on the Divine heart.*

*"Jubilee!" she whispers again, and again, and again,
as the Wind carries her voice.*

God, it's me. I hunger for your Jubilee: to know your freedom, to receive your sight, to discover your release. But dare I desire for others what I crave for myself? Not often enough. Not nearly enough. O Compassion, forgive my self-focus. Breathe into me your Spirit of power and purpose that has launched movements throughout history. Teach me anew that your good news is not only for me but for all, not only for here

²⁴ In the quotation that follows, Jesus recites Isaiah 61:1-2a. It is significant that Jesus stops the quote before reading that he is sent to "bring the vengeance of our God." Jesus practices rabbinic *midrash* in this passage to proclaim a vision that is somewhat different from what Isaiah suggests.

²⁵ While Isaiah proclaimed "Jubilee," the reference begins in Leviticus 25:8-55, where the Israelites are instructed to release all indebtedness every 50th year as a symbol of their own release from bondage under Pharaoh. The call to proclaim "jubilee" does not mean "Let's party!" as some infer but has a radical economic impact akin to the reparations movement.

but for everywhere. May I serve you today by inviting others to join together in Jubilee!

Luke 4:31-44

Jesus went to Capernaum, a village in Galilee, to teach on the Sabbath day. Everyone who heard him was filled with wonder as they listened because Jesus taught with power and purpose; understanding as the Story's author rather than a mere interpreter. In the meeting place that day was a man in whom lived an unholy spirit. Upon hearing Jesus, he pointed and screamed, "YOU! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are and what you will do! You are The Compassion's Anointed One who has come to destroy us!"

Jesus looked at the unholy spirit within the man and spoke to it, "Be silent! Come out of that man." The unholy spirit obeyed Jesus. He threw the man to the floor and came out of him. The people were filled with wonder when they saw what Jesus did. "What kind of teacher is this who has power over unholy spirits? For what purpose has Jesus come if he commands unholy spirits, and they must obey him?" The Story about Jesus spread like wildfire throughout the area.

Jesus left the meeting place and went to the house of Simon, who later would be called Peter. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with fever, so the family asked Jesus to help her. Jesus went to her and prayed, speaking to the fever within her, "Come out of this woman." The fever obeyed Jesus. Simon's mother-in-law returned to wholeness and began to serve Jesus and those with him.

As the sun was setting people from all over brought family and friends who were sick to Jesus. It did not matter the illness, Jesus touched them physically with his hands and spiritually through his prayers, and the illness obeyed Jesus. The sick returned to wholeness. What is more, unholy spirits were thrown out of people and as they left the unholy spirits would shout, "Son of God! Son of God!" But Jesus ordered them to be silent because they knew his identity, that he was The Compassion's Anointed One.

And when it was day, Jesus left that area to be alone, to seek communion with The Compassion. But the people would not allow him solitude; they sought Jesus out and continued to plead for him only to stay among them, to stay with them only. But Jesus told them clearly, "No, that is not possible, for I must tell others the Story of what The Compassion is doing in the world. My purpose is to tell

others the Story of Sovereign love." And so that is what Jesus did. He told the Story throughout the area of Galilee.

*Morning solitude,
basking in precious, restorative tranquility,
then I hear the pitter-patter of little feet,
"Ta-Da!" my son announces himself.*

*"Daddy, get up. The sun is out."
The hand on my shoulder shakes me awake.
My brain, sluggish, recoils,
but my arms lift my son into the bed*

*and place him between my wife and me.
He begins to shake her, too.
I quickly lift him back to my side of the bed,
for his own good.*

*His small hands placed on either side of my face,
my son squeezes my cheeks between his palms.
"You look funny."
I surrender to his touch.*

*Whooshing him into the air
in one motion, I rise from the bed,
the Tickle Monster unleashed—
giggling together into the new day.*

Jesus, Son of God, Son of God! You hold heaven in your voice. You speak and creative power bursts into the world. Sicknesses of spirit and body obey your Word. You hold heaven in your touch. You reach out your hand and saving energy surges from you. Miracles happen within and without. Jesus, fill me with wonder at what I hear and at what I see; fill me with trust that I may accept you as the Anointed One. O Compassion, you are sovereign in love, come to confront all who are fallen, come to restore all creation to wholeness. May I tell your Story and be unafraid.

Luke 5:1-11

One day Jesus was telling the Story to a crowd while he stood beside the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The people kept coming closer to Jesus, eager to hear his every word. Jesus saw two boats at the edge of the lake belonging to fishermen who were cleaning their nets after a long night of fishing. Jesus walked over to the boat belonging to Simon,

climbed in and asked Simon to anchor just offshore. From there Jesus taught people the Word.

When Jesus finished teaching the crowd with words, he began to teach Simon and his friends with actions. He turned to Simon and said, “Anchor us out in the deep water and throw out your nets for some fish.”

Simon answered, “With all due respect, we're professionals and have been breaking our backs all night with nothing to show for it. But if you say so, we'll give it another try.” Simon threw the nets into the water, and the flood of fish overwhelmed them as the nets began to break. Simon and Andrew motioned frantically to their partners on shore to come help. The boats were overflowing with fish and began to sink under the huge haul.

When Simon witnessed this, he dropped to his knees, heart overflowing with awe: “Sovereign,” he confessed, “Leave my presence for I cannot live in yours as I am one who is broken.” James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Simon's coworkers, also saw what Jesus did.

Then Jesus turned to them all and said, “Be not afraid; beginning now you will fish for the hearts and minds of human lives. Calling people to justice and joy shall be your new life's work.”²⁶ Simon and the Zebedee brothers trusted his word; they pulled their boats to shore and left their families behind to follow Jesus, never looking back.

*Leaping into a boat,
sailing into the sunset—
romantic stuff—
the building blocks of legend!*

*Fishing for justice,
casting nets,
calloused hands cracking, bleeding—
a gritty reality that shapes character.*

*Reeling in the hearts and minds of those for whom
The Compassion desires shalom
is a narrative still emerging—still calling,
the next chapter even now being written.*

Jesus, is there anything I do better without you? Even in my job, skilled professional and technician that I am, your guiding hand strengthens. Jesus, how much more can I be with you in my life? My job, my friendships, my

home life, everything fills to overflowing when your presence graces my life. Jesus, fill my life to overflowing that, blessed, I may be a blessing to all whom I encounter.

Luke 5:12-26

One day Jesus was visiting a village when a man with leprosy approached him. So desperate was the leper that he transgressed Torah—broke the explicit command by approaching Jesus rather than keeping his distance.²⁷ The leper dropped right down before Jesus' feet, begging, “If you desire, you can make my skin clean.”

In reply, Jesus touched the man's skin, “I desire; be whole.” Immediately the man's skin was restored to wholeness. Jesus told the man, “Say nothing about this. Only return to The Compassion the thanksgiving gift Moses commanded of those made whole. Let your life and obedience tell the Story of what The Compassion has done for you.” Of course, the Story got out and Jesus became even more famous. Everyone wanted something from Jesus—to hear him, feel him, be touched by him. It often required much from Jesus. And when it did, Jesus sought out solitude to renew his strength through prayer.

One day Jesus was teaching to a full crowd of religious professionals, including the Intense and the Scrupulous from surrounding villages and even as far away as Jerusalem. The Compassion's healing *dumamis* was alive in Jesus and active through him. Four friends came to bring their paralyzed friend before Jesus, but the room was too crowded. There was no way for these strong, urgent friends to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus through the front door. So, they searched for a way to be in Jesus' presence. The friends finally climbed to the roof and tore straw from it in order to make a hole large enough to lower their friend down to Jesus. When Jesus saw their great trust, he said to the paralyzed man, “Friend, I forgive you.”

Immediately the Intense and Scrupulous began whispering among themselves: “Blasphemy! He slaps The Compassion in the face! Only The Compassion has the authority to forgive!”

Jesus understood how anxious they were, so he asked them, “Why are your hearts filled with fear? Which is easier to say, ‘I forgive you,’ or, ‘Get up and walk,’? But I want you to know the Son of Humanity has the authority of heaven itself.” Then Jesus faced the paralyzed man and said, “Get up and walk.”

²⁶ c.f. Amos 4:2 where the reference to fishhooks “catching” people links to Amos' prophetic word against Israel.

²⁷ c.f. Leviticus 13:45-46.

Immediately the man bounced to his feet, grabbed his mattress and began dancing in praise. Seeing this, the people were filled with awe and wonder and began to give The Compassion glory! “Amazing,” they said. “Utterly amazing!”

*It is blessed to have friends who
force you to go somewhere uncomfortable,
to look up at standing crowds,
to ascend stairs without a railing strapped to a board, to see
those friends trash someone’s roof—
all for you.*

*It is good to have friends
fight for you even if it borrows good trouble,
willing to destroy in order to save you,
able to improvise for the sake of healing,
unwilling to forsake you,
unable to look the other way.*

*I wonder about the friends.
Did they ever waver?
Were they scandalized by Jesus’ easy mercy?
Offended by his divine prerogative?
Surprised by those who privileged
policy and protocol over a person?*

Thank you, O Compassion, for friends who dare.

Jesus, friend and Sovereign, I believe you have the authority of heaven itself. I trust that you can forgive. I trust that you can heal. I trust that you can make me whole. Believing as I do, help me to live this day trusting that your grace makes me good, your power makes me pure, and your love makes me whole. Jesus, teach me to dance the God-rhythms with awe and wonder.

Luke 5:27-39

After this Jesus went out and saw Levi, a tax collector, at work. (Tax collectors were hated by most Israelites because they were considered Roman collaborators who helped oppress the people.) “Follow me,” Jesus said to Levi and Levi left everything to follow Jesus.

In his joy, Levi threw a great party for Jesus. He invited many of his tax collector friends to join in the feast. But the Intense and Scrupulous approached Jesus’ followers; they murmured and grumbled²⁸ about the company Jesus was keeping, “Why does he party with tax collectors and others who are so obviously sinners?”

Jesus answered them, “It is not the whole who need a doctor but the broken. My purpose here is not to remind good folks about The Compassion but to call sinners to become saints by turning away from brokenness to the wholeness found in the God-life.”

But the Intense and Scrupulous could not stop their grumbling and murmuring, so they accused Jesus of promoting joy. “John’s followers often fast and pray, and so do our followers, but yours are renown for their exuberance with food and wine.”

Jesus answered them, “A wedding reception is no time to skimp and save but to feast to the full. When the bride and groom are at the party, there is always joy. But a time soon will come when the groom leaves, that is the time for the holy habit of fasting.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “No one rips their new suit to patch their faded jeans. If one does this, both the suit will be ruined and the jeans will look strange. And no one wants a vintage wine to be poured into a dirty bag found on the side of the road. If one does this, the vintage wine will outshine the bag and still be ruined. Instead, vintage wine belongs in crystal. And no one after savoring the vintage wine desires a cheap imitation, for it is said, ‘Only the vintage will do.’”

*We both leaned into the hug.
It had been thirty years and only yesterday.
Chest to chest, arms patting my back, he whispered,
“How are you, brother?”*

*More hugs, greetings, chatter growing ever louder.
Smiles and laughter, an open bar.
The circle grew wider.
Eventually, we were called to attention.*

*“Thanks for coming out to celebrate Tripp.”
Our hearts embraced a collective gratitude
as we remembered a lost friend.
Mirth and tears ensued.*

For a moment, all was right with the world.²⁹

²⁸ c.f. Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3 among many.

²⁹ This poem is dedicated to the memory of Tripp Montgomery, to whom the Claremont-Mudd Stags’ water polo alumni dedicated a

God, it's me. Why is it that so many religious folks lack zest for living? Why is it the people given the most grace often grumble the most gripes? Am I like that? O Compassion, teach me the gift of joyful exuberance that comes from living into the God-life you are giving to me and to all. Teach me the gift of faithful fullness that comes from drinking deeply from the wine of your love. Teach me your great desire to transform sinners into saints through the gift of a love that calls and compels us to turn toward your embrace.

Luke 6:1-11

One Sabbath day Jesus and his followers were walking through a grain field, picking grain and rubbing the grain in their hands to remove the hulls and make it good to eat. Some of the Intense confronted Jesus, "Why are you breaking our Sabbath rules?"

Jesus answered them, "Haven't you read what David and his friends did when they were hungry? David took the sacred bread off the altar, the bread intended for the priests, and shared it among his friends."³⁰ Then Jesus revealed to them this truth: "The Son of Humanity is Sovereign over the Sabbath."

On a different Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. There was a man whose hand was deformed. The Intense and Scrupulous searched for ways to cause Jesus trouble and watched him closely to see if he would break one of their Sabbath rules by healing this man. But their deformed motives were obvious to Jesus, and as he was not afraid of them but indeed wanted to confirm for them the rhythms of the God-life, Jesus said to the man, "Stand here so everyone can see you." The man stood. Then Jesus turned to the Intense and Scrupulous, "What is the heart of the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to bring wholeness or tolerate brokenness?" The Intense and Scrupulous did not answer, so Jesus looked around at the crowd of people but said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." The man stretched out his hand; it was whole, restored by Jesus. The Intense and Scrupulous were enraged; they schemed ways to destroy Jesus.

*The quail come to my fountain every evening,
taking turns refreshing themselves,
first one parent and then the other
(for quail mate for life).*

*I enjoy their visits as I sit on my patio,
trying to keep track of how many little ones
scurry from beneath nearby shrubbery
and then return to their leafy shelter.*

*The quail and I have a ritual, you see,
an agreement to spend evenings together,
the rhythm of their visits bringing joy,
as I write and sip and ponder creation.*

*What is this?!
The quail are in the backyard at midday!
They are visiting the fountain without me!
How dare they?!*

Jesus, you are Sovereign over the Sabbath, Sovereign over heaven and earth, the Sovereign over my life. Jesus, grant unto me rest that renews, work that brings wholeness, and the wisdom that knows the difference between these things. Grant me serenity, courage, and wisdom to embrace all things according to your *kairos*³¹—to know when it is time to work and when it is time to worship, when it is time to praise and pray and when it is time to be your vessel of new creation.

Luke 6:12-26

A couple of nights later Jesus felt a need for communion with The Compassion, so he went into the mountains to spend the night in prayerful presence before Them. The next morning, Jesus called for his followers to join him. He chose twelve to be sent ones:³² Simon (later called Peter), Andrew his brother, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (the son of Alphaeus), Simon (the one called "the Zealot"), Judas (the son of James), and Judas Iscariot who later betrayed Jesus.

Jesus went down the mountain with his sent ones to a plain; many followers and many other interested listeners

new scoreboard at the aquatics center on October 14, 2023. See you someday soon, brother.

³⁰ c.f. 1 Samuel 21:1-6.

³¹ There are two words for time in Greek: *chronos*, which refers to chronological or linear time, and *kairos*, which refers to the key moment in an event or the moment of transformation.

³² The Greek word used is *apostoleos*, meaning "one who is sent," and from which we derive the English word "sent ones."

from all over Judea, Jerusalem and the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon were there. The gathered throng hoped to hear Jesus teach and be made well. Those with unclean spirits were made whole, and the people surged around Jesus seeking to touch him for The Compassion's *dunamis* was flowing from him, bringing wholeness to all. Then Jesus turned to his followers and taught them these truths:

“Deep joy is open to you when you have little, for then you will rest in The Compassion’s Sovereign love.

“Deep joy is open to you when you are empty of food, for you will be filled with The Compassion.

“Deep joy is open to you when sorrows fill your heart, for The Compassion will lead you to joy.

“Deep joy is open to you when people pester, punish or even persecute you because of me! Rejoice when this happens! Leap for joy, for it means you are squarely in The Compassion’s service, speaking kindness, living with integrity, and showing in your person the realm of Sovereign love. Heaven is happy with you, even if others seek your harm. This happens to those who dance the rhythms of the God-life.

“Great sorrow to those who have everything they need; such is all you'll ever get.

“Great sorrow to those who are fully satisfied in themselves; they will not be sated you forever.

“Great sorrow to those who know only the laughter of luxury, such laughter will one day choke itself in sadness.

“Great sorrow to those whose gift is to flatter and indulge, such flattery will win them praise but never bring them to the truth.”

*Sorrow and joy embrace,
chattering at a cocktail party
like colleagues who don't like each other
yet work side by side
on projects that pay little and mean less.*

*Sorrow and joy blur boundaries
in my own heart,
believing the Madmen,
in their skinny ties and three Martini lunches,
who tell me I can have it all.*

*Joy and sorrow must learn:
“Good fences make good neighbors,”³³
and the same heart must choose when
“a path diverged in the woods”³⁴ and
the narrow way leads to life.³⁵*

God, it's me. How often do I refuse your presence and peace? Why is it that I choose fullness and luxury and think these things alone will satisfy? Why is it that I seek flattery and indulgence and trust these things will bring me true affirmation? How foolish! These are the paths to great sorrow. O Compassion, I desire deep joy, so nurture me that I might rest in you. Guide me into the deep joy found when your love surrounds me, the deep joy that leads me to the laughter of praise.

Luke 6:27-36

Jesus continued, “If you have ears, hear and listen: Shower your enemies with *agape*³⁶ by doing good to those who hate you. Be a blessing to those who are like a cancer in your spirit; prayerful toward those who hurl abuse your way. If someone slaps you, don't react and don't fight back. If someone steals your shirt, make a gift of your whole suit. Be gracious with people and generous with possessions. And if someone treats you unfairly in any way, practice perseverance and cultivate the habit of humility. Here is a simple truth: be first to be the best by treating others the way you like to be treated.

“If you *agape* only the lovable, so what? Does that make you a saint? Sinners do that every day! If you do good only to those who you know will return your kindness, so what? Does that make you a saint? Sinners do that every day! If you give only to those who will give back, so what? Does that make you a saint? Sinners do that every day! But act with *agape* toward your enemies, be gracious to them, be generous to them, for no other reason than that it is a

³³ Robert Frost, “Mending Wall,” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44266/mending-wall>, accessed May 15, 2024.

³⁴ Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/search?query=A+path+diverged+in+the+woods>, accessed May 15, 2024.

³⁵ c.f. Matthew 7:14.

³⁶ Greek has seven different words for “love” and uses four of them. *Agape* means “unconditional love, offered without reference to merit but as a choice of the one who loves.”

reflection of who you are, then you will be a child of The Compassion who is generous to the cheapskate and gracious to the vile. The Compassion is Mercy, so be merciful.”

*Saint and sinner dancing salsa—
not in the heat of the night, but in
the struggle of my heart longing to
get ahead but trusting I must
get out of the way to
get into the Way.*

*Saint and sinner grappling—
Gordian knot impervious to being unwound,
their wrestling produces sweat and stink.
Is there no horizon to which I may journey,
where my eyes are not clouded with sweat? No
way where I might avoid stink? Where can I find the
Way to journey toward the horizon of light?*

*Saint and sinner recognized
as my own heart and mind and spirit,
only ending their eternal battle
as the saint in me lays down all weapons
to open my arms,
vulnerable to attack,
trusting victory only comes to the vanquished.*

God, it's me. Yeah, right! Do you really expect me to buy into this stuff? I am mainstream, not counter cultural. I am a product of American culture: Go first, get ahead, don't look back and woe to the one who gets in my way! And yet there is something strangely compelling about Jesus' words: they invite, evoke, lure me to walk a different path, to live a different way. So, teach me, O Compassion, to be merciful as you are merciful. Teach me to be generous to the cheapskate, gracious to the vile, even loving my enemies with an agape love—your love for me and for all.

Luke 6:37-42

Jesus continued his teaching. “Do not criticize or condemn others, for when you do you look into a mirror and what you say returns in full. Instead, forgive and forget; give with grace and generosity. Let your giving overflow from a full and faithful spirit that never wastes an opportunity to bless another. When you do this, blessing will return to you in equal measure.”

“Can a blind man guide a blind man? No! They will both end up falling. Does the student teach the teacher? No! So be careful what you learn from those seeking to teach you.

“Why do you obsess over a simple mistake another makes but cannot see your own fatal flaw? How can you say to another, 'Oh, look, you have a pimple,' when you don't acknowledge your own, gaping head wound? It's nonsense to worry about another's misplaced comma yet ignore that your own essay is littered with outright lies. Don't worry about another's error until you correct your own negligence. Don't try to make others see their faults until you accept responsibility for your own actions and attitudes. It's like saying to another, 'Your tie is crooked,' when you are wearing filthy rags.”

*“I don't like it when...”
are the five most dreaded words
a spouse can hear.*

*“No, it wasn't like that.”
Five words my heart suspects are a lie.
I respond, instinctually, reactively, defensively.*

*Blessed am I when
I am unafraid of the mirror—
the look within an opportunity for transformation.*

*Blessed am I when
I look into the mirror rather than out the window—
when have I ever grown by judging another?*

*Blessed are we whenever
our first instinct is to wonder rather than react, and
our second is to forgive rather than fight.*

God, it's me. You know how often I have been there, done that. You know how often harsh words or cutting remarks have wounded those I hate (and those I love). I desire to be understood—teach me to understand. I desire to be loved—teach me to love. I desire to be an instrument of your peace—teach me that it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we find pardon, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Luke 6:43-49

Jesus continued his teaching. “A good tree produces delicious, juicy fruit, nothing rotten. A bad tree produces

rotten, putrid pulp, nothing delicious. Each tree is known by the quality of fruit it bears. People do not pick peaches from weeds in a field nor lush grapes from a barren desert. No, the delicious fruit a good person harvests in their life is grown in the good soil of loving-kindness. And the rotten fruit a bad person harvests is grown among the sterile soil of a God-empty heart; even the words they speak taste sour.

“Why do you speak my name, 'Sovereign, Sovereign,' but don't apply my teachings to your life? Let me tell you what this is like. It's like the difference between building a home that will last versus raising a shack. To build a home requires a solid foundation, footings dug deep, then the house can be built to last. But if all you do is nail a couple of two by fours together with some panel board, the shack won't last the winter. If you hear, listen, apply and then practice my words; you are building a secure dwelling, a homestead for the God-life. But if all you do is hear my words so you can think of yourself as ‘Christian,’³⁷ then one good storm will destroy the hutch you call a house.”

*“Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit,”
so said Aristotle and our water polo team's t-shirts.
I have thought about those shirts through the years—
brash, young athletes we were (some said “cocky”).*

*Coach started every year reminding us of the
difference between “capital T” and “small t” team:
between saying we were teammates and
supporting, encouraging, and challenging each other.*

*Coach reminded us of the Wizard of Westwood,³⁸
whose Bruins won ten championships:
who started each season with a lesson on
how to tie one's shoes!*

*The foundation for goodness is built upon
little things, like loving the a * *hole, and
seemingly small things, like matching walk with talk,
allowing excellence (and love) to become a habit.*

*Reputation is what others think of you.
Character is who you are when no one is looking.³⁹
Shaping the soul the work of a lifetime.
Building a spiritual home the work of eternity.*

God, it's me. Grow within me the seeds of your loving-kindness. In my head, plant your word. In my heart, water your Spirit. In my hands, weed evil desires. In my life, harvest good fruit. May I build my life on the foundation of your justice and joy. May all that I do turn brokenness into shalom. Where there is poverty, may I bring equity; where there is hunger, fullness; where there is hatred, love; where there is curse, blessing; where there is vengeance, mercy; where there is condemnation, affirmation. O Compassion, grow within me the seeds of your loving-kindness.

Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus finished teaching the people, he went to Capernaum. A Roman soldier, a captain, had a servant who was sick and about to die. The captain prized the servant, so when he heard Jesus was in town, he asked some of the older Jewish men to ask Jesus to come make his servant whole. When the older men came to Jesus, they begged him, “This man is worthy because he helps our people and even built us a place of worship.” Jesus said he would go to the Roman captain.

When Jesus was almost at the house, the captain's friends came to Jesus on the captain's behalf, saying, “Sir, come no closer for I am not worthy to have you in my home, or even be in your presence! But speak the word and I know it will bring life. For I too respect and have authority. I know the experience of speaking events into being by saying, ‘Go,’ or, ‘Come, or, ‘Do this, and it is done. Jesus was amazed when he heard this. He turned to the crowd following him and said, “In truth, I know of no one who trusts The Compassion this way, not even in Israel among The Compassion's chosen people who have been trained in the ways of trust and obedience.”

When the captain's friends returned to the house, the servant was whole.

*Would the Roman captain have
requested help from a woman?
Treated her with such respect?
Expected great things?*

*Do I honor the female boss or
mansplain, interrupt, and clone her ideas?*

³⁷ This is an anachronism, as the followers of Jesus were not called “Christians” until immigrating to Syrian Antioch (c.f. Acts 11:26).

³⁸ Aka, John Wooden, whose UCLA Bruin basketball dynasty won ten NCAA titles in 12 years.

³⁹ The first two lines of this stanza are quotes from Coach Wooden.

*A friend wondered why I liked the Barbie movie,
"Isn't it anti-male?"*

*I replied, "It's not against having a d***
but against being a d***."*

*As one to whom authority has been given,
do I give to others what I ask from them?*

God, it's me. Teach me, O Compassion, about authority. Help me to understand that authority is not necessarily a "hard" word. Show me the gift of living under your authority. Teach me, O Compassion, about trust. Help me to understand that trust begins when I accept your authority. Show me the gift of living according to my trust. Teach me, O Compassion, about Jesus. Help me to understand Jesus. Show me Jesus.

Luke 7:11-17

A little later, Jesus went to Nain, about eight miles from Nazareth, and performed a miracle that reminded people of the prophet Elijah. Approaching the town gate with his disciplined followers and a large crowd, Jesus encountered a funeral procession for a widow's only son. When Jesus saw this woman, his compassion swelled and spilled out of him. "Don't cry," he said to the mother. Then Jesus went and rested his hand on the open coffin. The coffin bearers stood silent as they heard Jesus say to the dead young man, "Young man, I say to you: Arise!"⁴⁰

Immediately the young man was alive; he sat up and spoke even as Jesus gifted him back to his mother. Mystery penetrated their hearts as they sought to comprehend what they had witnessed. They laughed and wept and sang songs of praise! "The Compassion is here! The Compassion is among us and has come to help Their people." And the Story of what Jesus did spread throughout the land; it could not be held back.

*Laughter and silence make strange bedfellows,
dancing and stillness the original odd couple.*

*My heart sings while my lips are paralyzed—
An aria only You hear.*

*Such is the paradox of a soul
penetrated by awe.*

God, it's me. You are here, O Compassion, you are here. I could hardly believe it, but then you came to me, and I could not deny it: you are here. I shut out all other sounds to allow silence to penetrate my heart and mind, my spirit and soul. I shut down the desire for constant explanations to allow mystery to fulfill its sacred work within me. Now I open my mouth to sing a song of praise, for your compassion overwhelms, and I can hold back no longer: "The Compassion is here. The Compassion is among us and has come to help and to heal and to make whole. In Jesus the Anointed, The Compassion comes to all."

Luke 7:18-35

John's followers reported back all the things they had seen and heard from Jesus. Calling two of his followers, John sent them to ask Jesus, "Are you the Anointed, or must we wait for another?" After the two men asked him this question, Jesus first answered with actions: he made the sick well, the broken whole and the unholy spirits were sent packing. Even the blind were made to see. Jesus then answered with words from the truth-teller Isaiah, "You have watched, now go bear witness; tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead live, lepers are cleansed, and good news is shared with the poor. Deep joy is open to the one who does not stumble because of me."

John's followers left and Jesus turned back to the crowd to explain about John: "What were you hoping to see when you went into the desert to see John? A wimp? A weasel? Or someone who would tell you the truth? Yes, indeed, you went because you knew John was neither wimp nor weasel but a truth-teller, but you hardly know the half of it. John was even more! He was the one to whom Malachi referred:

I will send my herald ahead of you,
a truth-teller to till the soil of my justice,
to prepare your Way.

⁴⁰ The Greek word used is a variant of *egeiro*, which can mean "to wake up" or "arise." *Egeiro* is used in many passages to refer to

Jesus' resurrection (c.f. 1 Corinthians 15:4, 13) and suggests this is a foreshadowing event.

⁴¹ c.f. Isaiah 29:17-19 and 35:5-7.

“Yet as great as John is in the history of all humankind, he cannot hold a candle to even the least individual in the realm of Sovereign love.” Everyone, even the so-called “scumbag, tax-collectors” knew Jesus spoke the truth about John and about The Compassion’s longing for justice. But the Intense and Scrupulous rejected The Compassion’s purpose because they had refused to release their hold on power. They declined the invitation to submit to John’s baptism.

Jesus continued speaking to the crowd, “To what can I compare the people of today? They are like children fighting in a playground, ‘Did not!’ ‘Did to!’ ‘It’s your fault!’ ‘No, it’s your fault!’ Can anything make them happy? John came fasting and you call him ‘holier-than-thou.’ The Son of Man came feasting and you call him not holy enough. A parent’s wisdom is revealed in her child’s character.”

“Come From Away” is a musical about the folk of Gander, Newfoundland, Canada and the days after September 11, 2001.

*In a town of 10,000, the stranded passengers arrived:
7,000 mouths to feed, 7,000 beds to find,
7,000 hearts to hold, 7,000 to welcome home.*

*Between “there and nowhere”
7,000 found that “here”
is where The Compassion’s love resides.*

*Love in action broke down walls of hostility.
Love in action healed ancient hurts.
Love in action forged forever friends.*

What do you have to say about that?

God, it’s me. The blind see; help me to see those who are hurting. The lame walk; help me to hold those who are falling. The deaf hear; help me to listen to those who are silenced. The dead live; help me to nurture new life wherever I see it. The lepers are cleansed; help me

to touch those who appear “untouchable.” The good news is shared with the poor; help me to tell others of your wondrous love. May deep joy be mine as I live in Jesus.

Luke 7:36-50

One of the Intense, named Simon, invited Jesus over to his house for dinner. As the guests lounged on carpets around the table,⁴² a woman who had lived life as a loose and easy score for the men of that town⁴³ heard where Jesus was and came to the house⁴⁴ with a bottle of very expensive perfume.

The custom of the day was for a host to ensure that his guests’ feet were washed with the dust and mud from the roads taken away. The woman, noticing that Jesus’ feet had not been washed,⁴⁵ stood behind Jesus raining tears upon his feet. She let down her long hair in view of the men, which was considered illicit at that time, and she used her hair to wipe Jesus’ feet dry. Then she wet his feet with her kisses and sealed her kiss by pouring perfume over his feet.

The leader who had invited Jesus into his home as a guest, looked at Jesus with scorn, “This man is no truth-teller,” he thought, “or he would know the loose morals of this woman he is allowing to touch him; he would know she is broken and being with her is a path to brokenness!”

Jesus looked Simon in the eye and said, “Simon, I have a story to tell you.”

“Oh,” replied Simon, “I love a good story.”

Jesus continued, “Two men were in debt. One owed a year’s worth of salary. The other owed a month’s worth of salary. Both were poor, unemployed and had no way to repay the debt, so the bank forgave both loans. Now tell me: who was more thankful?”

He replied, “the one who owed more money.”

Jesus said, “You are correct.”

Then Jesus turned to the woman but said to Simon, “Do you see this woman that you think is immoral? I was your guest, yet you provided no water for my feet; she wet them with her tears. I was your guest, yet you provided me

⁴² Tables in ancient Israel were low to the ground. Rather than sit at chairs as is our custom (or as depicted in DaVinci’s *The Last Supper*), people lounged on their side.

⁴³ The Greek text only notes that she is “a sinner,” not what the sin is. Could she have been a thief, embezzler, or brigand? Possibly, yes. However, commentators notice the presence of perfume (used to mask smell) and her willingness to let down her hair (strictly forbidden in ancient Israel) as clues that should might have been a prostitute.

⁴⁴ Ancient “dinner parties” were public events. Only the host and guests would be seated and served, but others from the community were allowed to observe from around the walls or through the windows. Thus, the woman was not an invited guest but neither was she a party crasher.

⁴⁵ The first sentence in the paragraph and the first phrase of the second sentence are not in the Greek text but provided as interpretative context for (a) the woman’s actions, and (b) Jesus’ parable that follows.

no kiss of greeting; she sealed her tears with a kiss. I was your guest, yet you provided me no place even to wash up; she washed me herself with perfume and love. She has loved much, so I tell you her many sins are forgiven. Beware the one who is forgiven only small nuisances, for their love is equally small and often a nuisance. Then Jesus lifted the woman's eyes to his own and said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

This created a ruckus among the other guests: "He can't do that! Who does he think he is?" Jesus ignored them and said to the woman, "Your trust makes you whole; go in The Compassion's *shalom*."

*The young girl sneaks behind the table,
while the pastor shakes hands with parishioners,
the service having just ended.
The girl snatches the leftover communion bread.*

*Scurrying into an empty Sunday School room,
the girl meets up with her four friends.
They squeal while feasting,
passing the loaf around, pretending to be the pastor.*

*The scowl on the elder's face said everything—
the tone of his voice invited shame.
Marching the children into the fellowship hall,
the girl's mom looks at her daughter.*

*Seeing the twinkle still in her daughter's eyes,
the mom's heart relaxes just a bit.
"What have you and your friends got up to?"
"We just wanted more of Jesus, Mama."*

Jesus, forgive me the rudeness of inviting you into my life only to ignore you; forgive me the arrogance of thinking I can judge others better than you; forgive me the smallness of wanting so little of the mercy you give. Jesus, fill me with courage to risk others' scorn in order to stand before you; fill me with love to offer all of myself to kneel before you; fill me with joy to know so much of the mercy you give. Jesus, with your mercy in my heart and upon my lips, I go in The Compassion's *shalom* today.

Luke 8:1-15

After forgiving the woman her sins, Jesus went from village to village telling about the realm of Sovereign love.

His twelve sent ones were with him along with his women followers: Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus tossed out seven spirits; Joanna, who was married to King Herod's business manager; Susanna and many others who used their own means to provide for all.

As a large crowd was gathering from all over, Jesus told this parable: "A farmer went out to plant seed. He tossed the seed wildly. Some seed fell on hard ground; it was stepped on and the birds ate it up. Some seed fell between rocks; it grew for a while but then died out when its roots didn't take. Some seed fell in with the weeds; it too grew for a while but then the weeds choked it out. Other seed fell among rich, dark soil; it spread like wildflowers everywhere. Those who have ears to hear: Listen!"

Jesus' followers asked Jesus what this parable meant. He said, "You understand the mystery of The Compassion's Sovereign love, but to others I speak in parables so that 'seeing they may not perceive; hearing they may not fathom the mystery.' This is what the parable means: The seed is the Word of God, the Story. The seed on the hard ground are those who hear the Story, but it does not penetrate their hearts, and the Accuser steals it away so they cannot find life. The seed in the rocks are those who love to hear the Story, but they only hear, never more; they have no roots to keep them strong when tough times come. The seed in the weeds are those who say they want to grow deep roots in mercy, kindness, and *shalom* but always find an excuse to seek after something else; they suffer from chronic immaturity of the spirit. But the seed planted in the rich, dark soil are those who devote their effort and energy to faithful obedience; they seize the Word, and the Word seizes them. Their lives express The Compassion's justice and joy.

*I only see when I look—
perception the fruit of a
Spirit borne noticing.*

*I only hear when I listen—
opening a path to
intuition and understanding.*

*When I encounter the Word,
I discover that
I have always been embraced.*

Carpe recordatio.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ A Latin phrase meaning "Seize mindfulness."

God, it's me. The mystery of your Sovereign love is close at hand yet it often seems beyond sight, beyond sound. Teach me to perceive beyond sight and to listen beyond sound. Open me to the gift of sight that perceives things as they truly ARE: not just height and weight, not just color and texture, but meaning and purpose, quality and character. Open me to the gift of listening that fathoms the mystery of things as you have made them: whole and wholly loved and holy. Open me to the gift of being seized by the One who alone can fill the God-shaped whole in my heart. Seize me with the gift of your Word planted deep within the rich, dark soil of my soul. O Compassion, help me to see perceive sight and to listen beyond sound.

Luke 8:16-21

Jesus continued his teaching, “No one lights a lamp and then covers it up or hides it under the bed. Rather a lamp is lit to shine light into the darkness so that all may see. No darkness is so dense that The Compassion’s light fails to pierce it. All things will be revealed: every thought, every feeling, every action. So choose wisely and well how you listen to the light of the Word. Accept its light and more will shine upon you; reject its light and your darkness will grow ever deeper.”

Jesus' mother and brothers arrived just then, but they could not get through the crowd. Someone told Jesus, “Your mom and your brothers are here to see you!”

Jesus replied, “My family consists of anyone who loves the Word enough to obey it. Love triumphs over lineage.”

*Light grows scarce as winter solstice approaches,
darkness encroaching upon day,
lengthening shadows,
warmth becoming more precious.*

*The midday light of late autumn sprinkles
pixie dust upon the Mexican Bird of Paradise,
planted beneath my kitchen window,
whose flowers attract a butterfly.*

*Light, both revealing and revelation,⁴⁷
opens my heart and
gives it speech,
illuminating my love, becoming its muse.*

God, it's me. The light of your love shines in the darkness—ever loving, ever brightening; darkness defeating, death defying. In my life your light shines—may my love shine brightly; darkness receding, death transcending. Shine on me. Shine through me. Shine, Jesus, shine.

Luke 8:22-25

One day Jesus said to his followers, “Let's cross the lake to the other side, where many of the Gentiles live.” They all got into a boat and set sail. Jesus slept in the back of the boat, in the place where the boat was steered. Suddenly a fierce storm rocked the boat—a winds whipping, waves crashing squall. The boat was about to sink.

Jesus' followers were scared trustless: “Master, Master,” they shrieked, “we're sinking!”

Jesus woke up and rebuked the storm, and the storm obeyed his word. Then Jesus turned to his followers and asked them, “Where is your trust?”

All of his followers were once again filled with the wonder of awe: “Who is this man, Jesus, that he commands the winds and orders the waves, and they obey him?”

*In the dim light of an ICU the nurse asked me,
“Are you ready to have that breathing tube removed?”
I nodded assent.
Removing the tube, the nurse left for the night.*

*My companion for twelve days,
that tube had served as a faithful friend,
it's removal welcome and evoking trepidation—
I could not breathe on my own!*

*Gasping, I learned that most
King Jamesian of words: Beseech.
I beseeched the Lord.
“God, help me! Help me!”*

⁴⁷ “Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.” Nicole Schaub, quoting contemporary American artist James Turrell, *How Caravaggio, Turrell, and 3*

Other Artists Revolutionized the Use of Light in Art, (artsy.net/institution/article, September 4, 2015, 1:44 p.m.). Accessed November 28, 2023.

*“Breathe,” I “heard” whispered in my mind.
Calming myself, I slowly drew a breath.
“Now what?” I cried out.
“Breathe again,” spoke the whisper.*

*Sleep came and, with it, light at dawn, as well as
the dawning of peace that
no storm can steal away
from he who is Sovereign over it.*

Lord Jesus, you are Sovereign over the Storm. You are my strength in the winds. You are my salvation in the waves, and I confess there are times when winds and waves overwhelm me. I confess there are times when winds and waves scare me trustless. Yet, I trust that you can silence the winds. I trust that you can still the waves. For, O Jesus, you are Sovereign over the Storm.

Luke 8:26-39

Jesus and his followers continued their journey to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, about five miles away to the Gerasenes where many Gentiles lived. As he stepped onto Gentile land, Jesus was confronted by a crazed man who wore no clothes and lived in the caves that served as tombs outside the city. The man was a victim of unholy spirits. When the crazed man saw Jesus, he went into a fit, collapsing before Jesus' feet, and the unholy spirit within him called out loudly, “Why do you torment me, Jesus, Son of The Compassion, Sovereign of Heaven? I beg you not to torture me!” (The unholy spirit said this because Jesus had begun to order it to leave the man. Often, the unholy spirit had itself tortured the man with fits of craze and rage such that, even bound in chains, the man had broken out of his physical captivity.)

Jesus looked at the unholy spirit and demanded to know its name. “Brigade,” it admitted, for it was made up of thousands. The entire brigade begged Jesus not to order them into the deep pit of sorrow that was their natural home.

So, Jesus ordered them into a herd of pigs that was nearby. But the pigs could stand the unholy spirits less than the man, and they threw themselves off a cliff to their death.

When the pigs' keepers witnessed this scene, they raced to the city to tell others what had happened. When the local folks came out, they saw Jesus and the man. Wonder and awe swept through the crowd as they recognized the man sitting at Jesus' feet. It was him! Only

he was sane and sound, clothed and no longer crazed. Fear danced around the edge of their hearts. Finally, they decided it was all too much to accept. They asked Jesus to leave; fear had flooded their hearts. Jesus accepted their decision and left.

The crazed man, now clear and calm, begged to go with Jesus, but Jesus told him no: “Go home, tell the story of all that The Compassion has done for you.” And indeed, the calm man went away and told all that Jesus had done for him.

*Call it by name.
No euphemisms.
No wink, wink.
No, “Bro-sky! Bro-meister!”*

*Called by its name
misogyny is less appealing,
racism more appalling,
the call to do justice apparent. And*

*when abuse is cast out,
when betrayal fed to the swine,
when corruption forced out of hiding,
we shall all call it by name: shalom.*

What is your name?

Dear Jesus,

How sad were you when you felt the people's fear? Did sorrow flood your heart when fear flooded their hearts? It all seems so senseless, so meaningless! All they had to do is accept your healing power: why didn't they welcome you, Jesus?

And yet, am I that much different? Do I like to see you act in ways I know will change the very fabric of our culture? I often welcome your intervention in others' lives if you agree to leave my life alone? If I am honest, I must admit that fear dances around the edge of my heart, and sometimes floods it.

Jesus, is there any way you can help someone like me, too? I mean "help" in a non-threatening sort of way, of course. You see, I want your help—really, I do!—I just don't want you to change me. Am I asking too little?

Your friend,
Me

Luke 8:40-56

When Jesus returned from the Gerasene region on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, a crowd was waiting to welcome him. From the crowd emerged Jairus, the local synagogue leader, who fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his home, for his only daughter, a girl of only twelve, was dying.

As Jesus journeyed through to Jairus' house amidst the dense crowd, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years and who could find no help from others, came to Jesus and touched the tip of his robe, making Jesus religiously unclean according to the Law. At that instant her bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When no one would admit to touching Jesus, Peter pointed out that, as they were in the midst of a crowd, many folks had touched him. "No," Jesus said, "this was different. *Dunamis* flowed forth from me." The woman felt afraid because touching even his hem had made Jesus unclean according to the Torah. Yet she also felt caught, her brazen act exposed. The woman fell at Jesus' feet and confessed to him that she had touched his robe. She told Jesus that her bleeding had stopped the instant she touched him.

Jesus looked tenderly upon the woman, "My Daughter, your trust in me brought you to wholeness; live in *shalom*."

While Jesus was still speaking with the woman, a friend of Jairus came and told him the sad news: "Your daughter is dead. There's no need to bother the rabbi anymore."

But Jesus said, "Be not afraid, Jairus, be not afraid. Only trust and wholeness will cover your entire house as well." When Jesus came to Jairus' home, he allowed only Peter, James, John and the girl's parents into her room. The house was full of crying folk, paid mourners to wail and play flute according to the custom of the day. Jesus hushed them, "Do not cry for the girl; she is not dead but asleep."

Those who heard Jesus scoffed; they knew he was wrong. They knew the girl was dead. But upon entering her room, Jesus took the girl's hand and said, "My Child, sit up." At that instant, her spirit returned and new life was breathed into her by the Divine Spirit. Jesus told her parents to give her something to eat but not to speak a word of what had just happened.

Privileged and poor.

Ruler and relegated to society's trash heap.

Suffering the same: hurt in need of healing, yet the absence of support deepens the woman's suffering.

*Suffering anonymously and alone
deepening her desperation.*

*Jesus cares and cares for both (and for all):
different paths, one destination.*

God, it's me. How can I do what you ask, O Jesus?! "Do not speak a word..." I could more easily stop the beating of my own heart than I could withhold your praise. I could more easily forfeit my own soul than I could refuse to tell of your love. Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus, Thanks be that your command to Jairus is not spoken to me. Thanks be that what needed to be kept secret for a moment is now public for all time. Thanks be that I can sing your praise and speak of your love, a love for powerful and poor, a love for bold and brazen, a love for leaders and lonely, a love for the Jairus' of the world and for anonymous women everywhere.

Luke 9:1-9

Jesus called his twelve sent ones together and entrusted them with *dunamis*, the authority to command unholy spirits and the ability to make the sick whole. Jesus sent them out to speak of the realm of Sovereign love and to restore people's wholeness. But he coached them: "Keep It Simple Saints. Don't load yourself up with equipment; you are the equipment. Load yourself up with integrity and character, with the truth and love The Compassion has put within you. And wherever you go, be sure to honor those who show you hospitality. Don't try to climb the social ladder and jump from house to house. But if a town will not even open a door to you, take no offense but rather shake the dust from your shoes and move on without fuss. Spend time with those who want to hear rather than wasting your breath on those whose ears are dead." Then the sent ones spread throughout the villages telling the Story and spreading The Compassion's wholeness.

Now Herod, Caesar's puppet and Israel's king, heard about what was going on and was both curious and confused. The rumor mill was in high gear. Some said John had come back to life, others said that Elijah the prophet had returned from heaven, still others said that one of the long dead truth-tellers had risen. Herod knew these rumors were wild speculation but didn't know what was

really going on, so he said, “John I killed, took his head right off, so who is this man I am hearing about?” Herod wanted to inspect Jesus up close.

*Like the buyer of a car who wants to kick the tires,
like TSA at the airport or ICE at the border,
like the USDA in the meat plant, so
Herod wanted to inspect Jesus.*

*Inspection is an act of presumption, and can be an
act of hubris—arrogance inflicting itself
on all within its sight.
Who is Herod to inspect Jesus?*

*Herod did not understand his role,
like meat judging the USDA.
Jesus is the inspector,
Herod the inspected.*

*He who wanted to inspect,
when inspected,
was found wanting.
Be careful what you wish for.*

Jesus, I must confess that it is easy to lose focus; easy to be high tech rather than high touch, to rely on charisma rather than character, to worry about others' opinions rather than your will. Jesus, you have entrusted me with a Story that is eternal, a Story in which truth stands without need of embellishment, integrity is its own reward, love is its ultimate fulfillment. Jesus, may I learn to trust the authority of the Story and so to stand for justice, walk with courage, and live in you now and forever.

Luke 9:10-17

Jesus' twelve sent ones returned to share their personal stories of The Compassion's love in action. Jesus gathered the whole group and took them on a retreat to a village called Bethsaida, but crowds of people learned about the retreat and flocked to Jesus. He welcomed them with gracious hospitality, told them still more about the realm of Sovereign love, and restored wholeness to all in need of healing.

As evening approached, the twelve sent ones came to Jesus to advise him about what to do: “Send the people away so they can go find food and lodging; goodness knows they can't all sleep here!” The twelve thought they were

being compassionate toward the people, but actually they had forgotten The Compassion's *dunamis*.

Jesus told them: “You feed them.”

“That's absurd,” responded the twelve, “we have no more than five loaves of bread and two fish between us! Do you mean to say that you want us to go into town to buy food for the whole crowd?” There were too many men and who knows how many women and children present, so the twelve, thinking quite literally and pragmatically, could not begin to comprehend what Jesus wanted them to do. So, Jesus showed them.

Jesus told his followers, “Have people sit together in groups of fifty.” Once everyone was seated, Jesus took the bread and fish, looked up to heaven, gave thanks for this bounty and broke the food into pieces for his followers to give to the people. All ate. All were filled. And a full twelve baskets were left over.

*Looking at what I lack
blinds me to your provision.*

*Noticing my weakness
diverts me from your strength.*

*So, I get quite pragmatic
(as a good Presbyterian is taught to do).*

*Focused on my pragmatism
I lose sight of the charism you have entrusted to me.*

*Can I try again, from the top?
“And a one and a two....”*

God, it's me. You are the All-Powerful, the Almighty, yet how easy it seems to be to forget who you are. I must confess, I sometimes laugh at the disciplined followers when I read that they are so blind they cannot even begin to comprehend what you want them to do with so hungry a flock. How dense! Why, just a few verses ago they themselves were instruments through whom your *dunamis* was flowing. Then they forgot all about it! Honestly, how can they forget that your *dunamis* for one situation can apply to all situations? Actually, it seems pretty easy to forget such a truth. I do it all the time. But you are actively engaged in nudging me to broaden my trust, to open my mind to divine possibilities, to look not at my feet but at your horizon! Yes, I am truly your follower, aren't I!

Just like them. O Compassion. Use me to show your love in action.

Luke 9:18-27

Once when Jesus was praying alone, with his followers nearby, he got up and came over to ask them, “What are the people saying about me, about who I am?”

His followers told him the word on the street: “John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the long dead truth-tellers come back to life.”

“What about you,” Jesus asked, “What are you saying about me? Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are The Compassion’s Anointed!”

Jesus warned his followers that they were to keep this truth to themselves and tell no one for a while, at least not until they understood the full meaning of what they were saying. Jesus then continued his warning in order to teach them what it means to say he is The Compassion’s Anointed: “The Son of Humanity must suffer, suffer long and suffer hard. He must be rejected by the Intense and Scrupulous. And, yes, he must be killed, but on the third day be raised to life.”

He continued his warning further by saying, “If anyone wants to follow me, they must let the God-life flow through them. What’s more, to follow me one must let my suffering—even my death—flow through them by carrying your cross as I carry mine. There is no other way to be my follower. If you try to keep your life always safe and secure, you will never risk grabbing hold of the God-life I give you. But if you are willing to follow me into suffering and death, then you will be ready and able, even eager, to receive the God-life I give. This is a challenging word, difficult to embrace and demanding to live out. But what good is it to get everything you want but nothing you need, to grab every outward pleasure yet lose your most important inward treasure: your soul? Don’t be afraid to risk it all for me! Don’t worry how foolish all this sounds to others! If you are ashamed by me and my words of warning, know that the Son of Humanity will be embarrassed when he drapes the radiance of The Compassion’s Sovereign love down upon this world like a heavy blanket!⁴⁸ When the full light of The Compassion and Their celestial messengers shines, will it shine upon you? Rest assured, even here, even now, some

of you will glimpse the glory of which I speak even before you taste the dryness of death.”

*Rory, all of 14-years-old, laments,
“This is too close! My friends will see you.”
Mom sighs.*

*These laments as the school comes into sight
have become a daily ritual,
like prayer or breakfast cereal.*

*Mom longs for the days when
Rory clutched her thigh as
strangers or a big dog approached.*

*“Someday,” she reminds herself,
“Rory will become a man capable of
telling his mother, “I love you.”*

Someday.

God, it’s me. Jesus’ words are true, I know, but they scare me still. Jesus’ words are hopeful, I accept, but they scare me still. Jesus’ words promise a life beyond what I can imagine, but they scare me still. O Compassion, I can only accept Jesus’ cross if you grant me your courage. I can only accept Jesus’ cross if you grant me your strength. I can only carry my own cross, if you shape and form my will. Not my will but your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Luke 9:28-36

Eight days later Jesus took Peter, John and James up to the mountain to pray. As Jesus was praying, his face glowed with God-life and his clothes started to blaze like lightning. Suddenly there were Moses and Elijah standing next to Jesus discussing the fulfillment of Jesus’ journey which would happen soon in Jerusalem. Peter, John and James were asleep while this was happening, but they awoke to see this whole scene, this vision. Peter exclaimed, “Sovereign, my Sovereign! This is tremendous! Let us build three monuments: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (Peter had no clue how absurd the idea sounded to build stone replicas of living Realities.)

⁴⁸ The Greek word *doxa* is used, which translates as “glory” with the connotation of “weightiness,” “radiance,” and “reflect.” I capture two of these connotations in the paraphrase.

As Peter was babbling on, a cloud covered them like a blanket; an awe-tinged fear covered them as well. A voice erupted from the cloud: "This is my Son, my Chosen! Listen to him." When the weight of the voice lifted, Jesus was alone, and his followers speechless. They did not speak coming down the mountain. They did not speak in the valley. For a time, they were silent about all they had seen and heard. For a time.

*Minding my own business, you descend.
Not paying attention, you reveal yourself.
Eternity found in the now.*

*Life can overwhelm and unprepared am I to
recognize the glimpse you give but a
glimpse is all I need.*

*Glimpsing you face-to-face,
hearing your Spirit nudge,
propels me toward Golgotha.*

God, it's me. I go about my sleepy way, not searching, not expecting, traveling through this life appreciative of a nap. But simple pleasures, beautiful though they are, cannot compare to a glimpse of your glory. You opened the curtain once, for your disciplined followers long ago, before you journeyed to the cross. Open now for me today a vision of eternity, give me the gift of seeing beyond the veil, even if only for a moment, that I may go about my faithful way, searching, expecting, traveling through this life prepared for a cross.

Luke 9:37-50

The next day, down in the valley, Jesus was met by a huge crowd. A man stepped forward shouting, "Rabbi, please, please help my son, my only son. An unholy spirit abuses him. It tosses him around, screams at him until he cries, and beats him senseless. I begged your followers to free him from this bondage, but they were too weak."

Jesus responded, "Oh, you fickle folk unable to dance the God-rhythms. Your hearts are turned away from The Compassion, so you have no understanding of spiritual encounter and spiritual battle! How long do I have to put up with this? Bring the boy here." As the boy approached, the unholy spirit twisted the boy up and propelled him to the ground. Jesus fired words at the vile thing and restored the boy; he gave the father back the life of his son, his only son. All who witnessed this event were

filled with the wonder of awe, overwhelmed by The Compassion's splendor and magnificence.

At that very moment, while they remained in a state of awe, Jesus turned to his followers, teaching, "Let this truth sink into the depths of your spirit; let this truth dwell deep within the marrow of your soul: The Son of Humanity must be betrayed by human hearts and human hands." His followers could not comprehend how this could happen given what they had just witnessed but were afraid to ask Jesus what he meant.

Instead, they started to argue about who among Jesus' followers was most magnificent. Their hearts were transparent to Jesus. He put his arm around a child and said to them, "Whoever accepts this child in my name, honors me. Whoever accepts me, honors my *Abba* who sent me. It is not the proud and powerful who are magnificent, but the one humble enough not to care who receives honor and who is considered great. Your spirit, not your size, shines the light of The Compassion's splendor for others to see."

John said, "Sovereign, we saw a man bringing your wholeness to others, even commanding unholy spirits in your name, ordering them to release those the unholy spirits had held captive. We stopped this man, of course, because he wasn't a part of our clique."

Jesus responded, "Do not stop such folk. Celebrate the realm of Sovereign love wherever it is discovered. The one who is not your enemy is your friend."

*Might makes right
until all are blind
and only the broken
see The Compassion's splendor.*

*Hating for Jesus
may be all the rage
but what commerce
have rage and righteousness?*

*Dying I live.
Losing I win.
Surrendering I advance.
Letting go I am held.*

God, it's me. I'm surprised by opposition to your gospel, to Jesus. What's not to like? You love us, you forgive us, you nurture and support us. Why are there people who would stand against what you stand for? And yet, I see in Jesus' life the ferocity of the battle.

I see the "powers and principalities" that will have nothing to do with your love. I see my own helpless response in the face of the events and horrors of these days that are too much for my mind to comprehend; they overwhelm. I see my own hapless knowledge of what it means to face the powers with your love, to stand against the principalities armed with my humility alone. O Compassion, teach me the nature of the opposition to Jesus; grow within me the character that captures hearts and minds through love.

Luke 9:51-62

When it came time for Jesus to return to The Compassion, Jesus turned toward Jerusalem with steely eyes and a square jaw. He sent word out ahead of him about where he was going. His journey took him through Samaria, into a Samaritan village, but the Samaritan people opposed Jesus because he was focused on Jerusalem. When the Samaritans refused hospitality to Jesus, James and John were incensed! "Sovereign," they asked, "do you want us to ask The Compassion to blast them with bolts of lightning?" Jesus scolded James and John for their foolishness, nicknamed them "The Sons of Thunder," and merely went on to another village.

Along the journey, a man approached Jesus and said, "I want to go with you wherever you go."

Jesus warned the man, "Foxes have holes to keep them safe and warm, birds have nests for the same purpose, but the Son of Humanity has nothing of the sort. Are you sure you are ready to pay the price with me?" To another Jesus said, "Follow me."

The man said, "Sure, but first I have to wait until my father dies, so I can take care of his business."

Jesus scolded him "Let the dead take care of their own business. Your business is to tell about the realm of Sovereign love."

Another said, "I'd love to follow you, but first I need to return home and say good-bye to my family."

Jesus' reply was strict, "No waiting! The realm of Sovereign love is already here, and it is moving forward even as we speak. Follow or fall behind!"

If I don't think about it (whatever "it" is), does it matter?

Did it happen?

Can I be held accountable?

Denial, deflection, and disregard, are each an opportunity to "sit this one out" rather than dance the God-rhythms.

To refuse love, to refuse to love, to love to refuse, is no way to live the God-life.

God, it's me. My excuses are old and stale. Echoing many before me, my excuses lack even the good humor of originality. You have heard them all before: I am too busy, I am too tired, I am not good enough. "Hogwash!" you say. "Follow me!" you command. And I reply...?

Luke 10:1-16

Jesus chose seventy of his followers and sent them out in twos to every town and place to which he himself was about to journey. Jesus said to them, "The Harvest is full to overflowing, but there are not enough workers to do the harvest work. Pray to The Compassion, Sovereign of the Harvest, to send you help for the work at hand. Go! I am sending you into difficult situations, even dangerous territory. You will be like lambs living with wolves. Show your trust yet be ready. Pack light. Don't load yourself down with comfort and security. And don't dawdle along the way, stopping to chit-chat with everyone you meet.

"When you enter a house, the first thing you are to say is, 'Shalom! Peace be to this home.' If people of peace dwell there, your *shalom* will cover them like a shawl; if not, your peace will be free to return to you. Accept whatever hospitality you are offered, for it is their gift to you and to The Compassion. Do not insult the gift by seeking better hospitality elsewhere. When you enter a town, if you are greeted with hospitality, accept it with thanksgiving. Bring my peace to the people through work and word; share with them the good news Story, saying, 'The realm of Sovereign love is near to you.' But if you are not greeted with hospitality, go to the edge of town and brush the dust from your feet, saying, 'Even the dust from your town I wipe from my feet! Don't you realize the realm of Sovereign love is near?' I promise, it will be better for Sodom on the Day than for those towns."

Jesus continued, "Doom Korazin! Disaster Bethsaida! If the majesty of the Maker had been told in Tyre, if the might of the Almighty had been shown to Sidon, the people of those cities would have returned to

right relationship in droves; they would have been on their knees seeking mercy. It will be better for them than for you on the Day. And what about you, Capernaum? Don't think your town motto, 'Raised to Heaven,' will help you out. No, you will be dashed down to the depths." Turning to the seventy, Jesus concluded his instruction: "Whoever hears and accepts your message, accepts me. But whoever ignores what you have to say, rejects me. And not only me, for whoever rejects me turns away from The Compassion!"

*The sun beat down upon his head,
sweat dripping into his eyes,
shadow from the brim of his hat
obscuring his face.*

*The worker stood upright,
or at least tried to stand
with as straight a back as
his arthritic spine allowed.*

*The worker looked across the path at his beloved,
her curved fingers
nimble picking strawberries
whose sweetness would adorn other tongues.*

*The worker took off his hat and
wiped his brow with the scarf that
protected the back of his neck.*

*I startled as I saw his face for the first time.
"What is Jesus doing in this field?" I wondered.
And then the stoplight turned green.*

Praise to you, O Sovereign of the Harvest, you plant the seeds of your salvation through the word you send. You cause growth to occur through the Spirit's stirring. You invite me to harvest the fruit you produce. O Sovereign of the Harvest, give me the confidence to speak of your love in the midst of difficulty and danger. Give me the conviction to stand for your justice even in the wolf's den. Give me the courage to accept the invitation to harvest the fruit you provide. By word and work, may I honor you by participating in the harvest work.

Luke 10:17-24

The seventy returned triumphant, their joy bubbling over, "Sovereign, even unholy spirits bow to the authority of your name."

Jesus replied, "Yes, I know. I saw Satan crash to the earth like an angry storm. I have given you a great gift, the authority of my name. And with this gift you may go out with confidence knowing you can walk all over snakes and scorpions, trampling the Accuser. Even still, don't rejoice in your victory over evil but in your companionship with good. Joy is found not in the defeat of the Accuser but in the love The Compassion has for you. Their love is the source of joy." Then Jesus, himself full of joy, full of the Divine Spirit, prayed out, "I praise you, O Compassion, Sovereign of heaven and earth, because you hide your truth from know-it-alls but reveal your truth to trusting children. Yes, I praise you, for it filled you with joy to reveal your truth to these children."

Jesus continued, "The Compassion has entrusted the entire creation to me. No one knows the Son except The Compassion. And no one knows The Compassion except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Them." Looking his disciplined followers directly in the eye, Jesus said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, that see The Compassion revealed. I tell you the truth, prophets and priests and princes all have long desired to see what has been unveiled for you to behold, but they did not get even a glance. The Elite throughout every human age presumed they would be told what has been spoken to you, but they heard nary a whisper."

*Embraced:
heart to
living Source,
joy discovered amidst embers
never extinguished,
always burning
with love that propels God-life,
reaching out
with encircling arms
forever held.*

Jesus, it's me. I did not know and could not know The Compassion unless you revealed Them to me. I have not chosen and cannot choose The Compassion until you first chose me. I am grateful, for my eyes see and my ears hear what angels have always known. I am grateful

for the mystery of the universe,⁴⁹ its purpose, has been revealed to me. Praise to you, O Jesus! Your mercy is from everlasting to everlasting! Praise to you, O Compassion! Your wisdom is beyond the depths of searching! Praise to you, Divine Spirit! For you draw me toward mercy and lead me into joy.

Luke 10:25-37

Just then, a Scholar stood up to test Jesus: "Teacher, what must I do to grasp and claw my way to eternal life?"

Jesus answered, "What does Torah say? How do you interpret it?"

The Scholar answered back, "Love The Compassion with all you are: head and heart, strength and spirit. And love your neighbor as much as you love yourself."

"Good," Jesus replied, "these things are the God-rhythms. Dance the God-rhythms to live."

But the Scholar wanted to show-off, so he pursued the question further, "But can you be more specific; can you define 'neighbor'?"

In response, Jesus told this parable: "A man was going down the twisty, turning trail that leads from Jerusalem to Jericho when rogues jumped him. These rogues stripped off his clothes, beat him, robbed him and left him for dead. From a distance, he looked dead because he was unconscious. From a distance, one could not tell where he was from for without clothes one could not guess his home.⁵⁰ A pastor came along on foot, saw the man and just kept walking, for to come within six feet of a corpse would have made him unclean and been quite inconvenient. The pastor, who had just served in the Temple for two weeks, would have had to return to Jerusalem rather than continue home. Next an elder came along. He also saw the man and just kept walking, for though he knew Torah said he must come to the aid of a fellow Israelite, the elder did not know where the man was from because no clothes were found that distinguished the man as an Israelite. But then an agnostic came along. The agnostic saw what the others saw and then saw more. He didn't keep walking. Instead, the agnostic was filled with compassion, went to the beaten man, provided

the best first aid he could, then set the man on his donkey and took him to the nearest hotel. He pulled out enough money to care for the man and told the hotel manager to do whatever needed to be done, saying, "When I return, I'll pay you for whatever money you have to spend on his care." Then Jesus looked at the Scholar and said, "What do you say? Which of the three who saw the man in trouble was his neighbor?"

The Scholar replied, "The one who showed mercy."
Jesus said, "Go and live the same way."

*A boy leaned against the burned-out car,
scorch marks on the hood,
its frame raised on to blocks to remove the wheels.*

*Behind the car was a dilapidated building,
windows broken and brick wall adorned with the
poetry of gang graffiti.*

*We drove slowly past as I gave a tour,
my father horrified that
I had chosen to spend a summer here.*

*I tried to explain why I was there, to no avail.
My father saw the car and the building
but not the boy.*

God, it's me. I know when people talk about the "Christian walk" or "walking the walk" they don't mean to keep walking by those in need of human compassion. Yet, sometimes, that's exactly what I do. Because I am busy, in a hurry, my plate is full, burdened with responsibilities. Because I believe that helping encourages dependency, at least that's my convenient excuse. O Compassion, you call me to see more, to see deeper by looking at others with the same compassion with which you look at me. You call me to look with compassion—at a sinner but see a saint, at my bravado but see my brokenness, at the arrogant but see instead a child of God. Today, grant me the patience to

⁴⁹ c.f. Ephesians 1:8-10.

⁵⁰ These two sentences are not in the Greek text but added to provide context. The key points of Jesus' parable revolve around the fact that the Law declared that coming within six feet of a corpse made one unclean. The "pastor," who in the Greek text is called a priest, would have had to return to Jerusalem rather than continue home in order to submit to the cleansing rituals (c.f.

Numbers 19:13). The Law also required a good Israelite to care for another Israelite but not for a foreigner (c.f. Deuteronomy 22:4, Isaiah 58:7). Because clothing styles were unique to each region, one could know where another is from by the clothes they wear (e.g. American tourists in Europe) but such knowledge would be unavailable if the man was naked. The subtleties of this story are remarkable.

be less busy, the honesty to stop making excuses, and the compassion to show your mercy to others today.

Luke 10:38-42

As Jesus and his disciplined followers continued their journey along the Way, they entered a village. A woman named Martha welcomed them into her home with hospitality. Martha's sister, Mary, sat at Jesus' feet listening to him speak about the realm of Sovereign love. Mary hung on Jesus' every word. But Martha was busy, distracted busy, cranky busy, with her work in the kitchen. Martha grew frustrated enough even to snap at Jesus, "Sovereign, don't you care that my sister is a lazy, do-nothing! Women in our culture are supposed to serve the men, not dote on their every word."⁵¹ Why don't you tell her to help me?"

Jesus was gentle with his response, "Martha, Martha, the smell of your cooking is surely a delight to the senses, but my presence is a delight to the whole self. Mary has chosen wisely; her choice will be honored."

*The golden leaves upon my pomegranate tree
whisper that winter's three weeks
will soon come to the desert.
Christmas nears, and I sense a chill in the air,
though the morning sun feels warm upon my legs.*

*There is a stillness in my garden,
even as a hummingbird flits
from a Palo Verde to our feeder and back.
There is but a hint of sound
from our chimes on this day, as wind rests.*

*A pause has come amidst my hectic schedule,
and I am liberated
to wonder and to ponder,
to appreciate and to imagine,
to do nothing and so all that is required of me.*

Jesus, Eternal Word: I praise you. Jesus, the Morning Star: I love you. Jesus, Alpha and Omega: I thank you. May I pause each day to remember, appreciate, and give thanks that I live in your presence. As I revel, enjoy, and delight in this truth, your presence energizes

my whole self. Help me to live today that your presence would shine through me to all whom I meet.

Luke 11:1-13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When Jesus finished praying, one of his disciplined followers said to him; "Sovereign, teach us to pray like John taught his followers to pray. So, Jesus taught them: "When you pray, pray like this:

Creator, make your name revered among us. Make your will sacred to us. Take care of our present needs through the gift of daily bread. Take care of our past needs through the gift of your mercy. Take care of our future needs through the gift of deliverance from the Accuser."

Then Jesus said to his disciplined followers, "Imagine you go to a friend's house late at night to borrow some bread because out-of-town guests have unexpectedly dropped in. You ask your friend to let you in, but your friend says, 'Go away. The door is locked and we're all in bed. My kids are with me, and I don't want to wake them up. I can't help you.' I tell you the truth: your friend will get up if you keep after him. He may not act out of kindness but will respond to your persistence. This is the way it is with prayer; not that The Compassion needs to be badgered, but you need to trust Them enough to persevere in prayer. Ask and keep on asking and you will receive. Seek and keep on seeking and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened for you.

"Let me explain it another way: Which of you who are parents, if your child asks for a fish will give her a snake? Or if your child asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? Of course, this is absurd. So, if you, whose inner most spirits are broken, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more can The Compassion be trusted to give the gift of the Divine Spirit to those who ask for it from Them?"

*Alone in my house,
I put down my phone.
My hand feels strange,
as if I have lost an appendage.*

⁵¹ This sentence is not in the Greek text but is the context for Martha's frustration: Her sister is ignoring (violating?) established social norms set for women by their patriarchal culture.

*Uncertain what to do next,
I consider picking up the remote with my other hand.
I notice that I am breathing.
I pause, my attention slowly, inextricably releases
its focus on my hands.*

*I begin to pay more attention to my breathing
(interestingly, my hands are no longer a concern).
My breathing slows, deepens.
A calm descends upon me.*

*I'm quizzical why I ever wondered about the remote.
In the calm, I feel myself embraced.
I know there is no one else in the house, yet
the entire universe is present with me.*

*Resting in this place for only a moment,
eternity passes before me.
I want this moment to remain but intuit that
I must release the moment
into the hands of the One who gifted it to me.*

And so I begin to speak, "Our Father...."

Our Abba, you are Creator of all things—seen and unseen; you are Source of All Things, yet personal and loving; You are in heaven, unapproachable, unreachable, in glory beyond our imagination. May your Name be revered, set apart as sacred, a Name to honor above all names. May the realm of your Sovereign love come to rule in our hearts and minds and lives. May your Sovereign love penetrate all human communities and cultures—in this place and everywhere, even as the heavens proclaim your praise. Give to us today what only you can give: food for body and being. Give to us today what only you can give: nourishment of communion and community. Give to us today what only you can give: healing of our spirit and soul. For to you alone belongs the name: "Sovereign," "Almighty," "Holy One of Israel."

Luke 11:14-28

Jesus was demanding an unholy spirit to leave a man who could not speak. Once the unholy spirit left, the man could speak. The crowds were filled with awe and wonder.

But some of the people accused Jesus, saying, "Sure he has *dunamis*. It comes from the Accuser. That's how he does it." Other folks merely wanted to see a divine parlor trick.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said to them, "Any empire divided and fighting among themselves is doomed to defeat. If I work with the Accuser's power yet against his will, how can he succeed? The Accuser is not stupid! I say this because you accuse me of working for it, which is as absurd as if I were to accuse your own people of the same because they too free people from bondage to unholy spirits. No, the truth is this: it's The Compassion's finger I am pointing when I send the unholy spirits packing. This is a sign, the sign that the realm of Sovereign love has arrived. When a strong man, armed to the teeth, guards his own house, it's safe until someone bigger and stronger, with more and bigger guns, comes and takes his house away. Strength is proved powerless in the face of greater strength. This is a war with no neutral ground. Either you help me defeat the Accuser or you are working for its purposes. Either you are healing with me or hurting others—serving to make creation whole or comfortable sitting by and watching all hell break loose.

"When an unholy spirit comes out of someone, it rushes into the desert in search of fresh food, soul food to devour. When it hungers because no one is found that welcomes it in, it says, 'I need to return home, where I know I can feast.' When it arrives back, it finds the house utterly empty, ready to be revisited, nothing has filled the void left by the unholy spirit. Then it goes and finds seven more spirits even more evil than itself and together they consume; they gorge; they feast. And the person is worse off than in the beginning."

Just then, a woman called out from the crowd, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth; blessed is she who nursed you."

Jesus responded, "Yes!⁵² And even more blessed are those who hear and heed the Word of God, who know the Story and fill the void in their hearts by putting it into practice."

*I walked into the crowded sanctuary knowing
"they" were against me:
their pastor had taught slander,
their people had followed.*

⁵² The Greek uses *menoun makarioi*, which can be translated either as a negation or affirmation—either, "On the contrary, blessed are..." or, "Yes, and blessed also..."

*I spoke to the deaf with
winsome clarity and determined conviction.
“They” ignored my entreaties,
my call for unity amidst our diversity.*

*On that day, the Accuser was victorious.
I refused defeat,
committing to prayer,
continuing the work,
inviting the Spirit to show me the Way.*

God, it's me. I am with you! I want to help you defeat the enemy! I want to help anyway that I can! But I need your help, O Compassion. I need your protection from the enemy that comes when you are within. So, infuse my life with a desire to be free from sin and its spirits. Instill in my life a holy discipline that leads me into obedience. Fill my life with your Word of Life that is the power beyond all powers, a sure and certain victory over the enemy.

Luke 11:29-36

As the crowd swelled, Jesus continued his teaching: “You have it all wrong. You want signs and wonders, divine parlor tricks to amuse you, ‘proofs’ and ‘evidence’ to interest you, but the only sign that will be given you has already been given, and you didn't even notice it! The sign to you is, my preaching, just like the sign to the people of Ninevah was Jonah's preaching. On the Day of Judgment, the people of Ninevah will stand and speak against you. The Ninevites repented when they heard Jonah, yet you have not changed a bit upon hearing me, and I am greater than Jonah. On the Day, the queen of Sheba will stand in The Compassion's courtroom and point her finger at you. She journeyed as far as she needed, and would have gone farther, to hear Solomon's wisdom, yet I am right here with you and you do not even listen to me, and I am greater than Solomon.

“No one lights a lamp and then puts it in the closet or under the bed. Instead, the lamp is lit to give light to all, that all may see clear and pure and true. Your eye is like a lamp for your body; it lights up your whole self. When you let your eyes shine upon the good, your whole self is filled with light. But when you focus your eyes on darkness, then darkness flows from you. Train your eyes to look for light so that your spirit will not grow dim. Train your eyes to love the light that your soul will shine for all to see.”

*She sat in the pew a caricature
of the compliant, “godly” woman many
assumed her to be.*

*Little did they know—
how could anyone have known?—
that what blazed within her was an inferno,*

*for Spirit truth had whispered
through the voice of Pastor Deborah's sermon.
The woman heard the whisper and was listening.*

*The seed the Spirit (through Deborah) had planted
grew slowly at first
and then more rapidly,*

*as the woman read new authors,
waded into deeper waters, and
found her voice: Baby steps grew into giant leaps.*

*Compliant still, but now the chrysalis broke free.
Some in the church wondered why
the woman wasn't “godly” anymore.*

Thy Word, O Lord, is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path. Teach me how to listen to your Word in whatever voice spoken, through Scripture or sermon or sacrament: One Story in three voices. Teach me to give thanks when your Word confirms the good news of your love and mercy, that you love me just the way I am. Teach me to accept its message when your Word challenges me to live deeper into truth, that you love me too much to let me stay the way I am. Teach me to rejoice in your Word when I read it, and when it reads me. Thy Word, O Lord, is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path.

Luke 11:37-54

When Jesus finished speaking, one of the Intense invited him to dinner. Jesus accepted and relaxed at the table without first washing his hands in the special, ceremonial dish, as was Jewish custom. The Intense was surprised by Jesus' neglect of tradition. But Jesus said to him, “You Intense seem to think it mighty important to clean the outside of things but you ignore what is in your hearts. Fools! You should worry as much about what's inside as out, desires as well as dishes, hearts as well as hands. Didn't The Compassion make the whole of you—

both inside and out? Turn your lives inside out; show your purity through your generosity, then your whole life will be clean.

“Shame on you, Intense ones! You can count every tree and still miss the forest. You give 10% of every dollar you earn, but you earn it through tolerance of greed and injustice, so it is tainted money. You should give 10%, yes, but even more important is to create a culture of justice for all.

“Shame on you, Intense ones! You love the fame that comes from your faith; recognition and regard are the gods you serve.

“Shame on you, Intense ones! You are like unmarked graves in a grassy field; people can walk right next to them and never know how close they are to death.”

One of the Scholars objected to Jesus' words: “My good sir, how dare you? In insulting our colleagues, you insult us also.”

“Then shame on you, too, Scholars,” Jesus answered. “Shame on you for robbing people of the gift of trust and obedience by making your religious practice a marathon and a maze. How do you expect anyone to travel through the maze you have created when you yourselves get lost?”

“Shame on you, Scholars! You build monuments to the truth-tellers your families killed. Do you really want to remember the truth-tellers, or is your memory serving your families' murder? They murdered; you remember. How convenient. How ‘honorable’ you are; you're not fooling The Compassion. This is why Wisdom says, ‘I will send them truth-tellers and sent ones, and they will commit murder and mayhem.’ Thus, every drop of holy blood spilled, from the beginning of time, from A to Z, from Abel who was killed by his brother Cain to Zechariah who was killed in the Temple's courtyard, all this blood, it's all on your hands.

“Shame on you, Scholars! You have taken the key of knowledge and locked the door. You should have used the key to unlock the door but instead hid it away. You won't even use the key for your own benefit, and you prevent others from gaining access to knowing The Compassion's embrace.”

When Jesus left, the room erupted in rage, a murderous rage. The Intense and Scholars conspired to trick him, trap him, and take everything Jesus said and twist it—anything to get Jesus.

*Loving the notion of something
is not the same as loving.*

*I claim the title: Minister of Word and Sacrament,
but do I serve the Word?*

*I call others to live in the peaceable kin-dom,
but do I live the ways of shalom?*

*I convict the transgressor,
but do I confess my own offence?*

*Mimicking devotion is not the same as
being a disciplined follower.*

God, it's me. Worrying more about outward actions that can be seen than inner attitudes that are unseen? Yep, that's me! Being more concerned with individual giving and service than with justice for the least powerful in society? Yep, that's me! Liking recognition and regard to the point of seeking others' approval for the sake of their approval? Yep, that's me! Having a list of religious rules others should follow to be a "good" Christian yet sometimes ignoring these same rules? Yep, that's me! Loving to hear Bible stories that tell all about the religious “greats” yet ignoring much of what these great people said to do? Yep, that's me! Having the Word of God in my home yet spending more time with the T.V.? Yep, that's me too! O Compassion, was Jesus really addressing the religious leaders and scholars? Because it sounds like he was talking to me. Forgive me my sins. Free me from these broken ways of living. May I turn toward you and walk the Way of Jesus the Anointed, living into the new life found in Jesus my Sovereign.

Luke 12:1-12

The crowds continued to grow until there were thousands jammed together to hear Jesus, but Jesus addressed his disciplined followers, “Beware the Intense who project an outward righteousness while their insides rot. Their hypocrisy cannot be hidden forever; eventually, it will permeate everything they do like yeast permeates bread. Whatever conversations they have in the dark of night will become front page news with the morning light; even their private whispers will be shouted on street corners.

“My friends, fear not those who can take your lives but who cannot take your Life, who can kill body but cannot touch soul! Those who take your lives kill only

your body, but you belong, body and soul, to The Compassion who is gracious. They have power to give and take both life and death, for both body and soul. If you're going to fear anyone, may the fear be a form of holy awe and sacred wonder tinged with terror before the awesome presence of The Compassion! Yet, you need not fear Them, of course. How much do a couple of pet birds cost? Not much. Yet The Compassion cares for each and every feather. Yes, and what's more, The Compassion cares for you, too, for each and every hair on your head. Fear not, my friends, fear not: you are worth more than a million birds!

"I tell you the truth, whoever accepts and honors me before others on earth, the Son of Humanity will accept and honor them before the celestial messengers of heaven. But whoever rejects me and is embarrassed to say they know me here on earth, I will disown before the messengers of heaven. You may speak against the Son of Humanity out of ignorance, fear, or spiritual illiteracy and forgiveness is still possible. But if you take aim at The Compassion, cursing the Divine Spirit, not caring who hears or what you say, then the forgiveness that would not be accepted will not be offered. When you are brought before rulers and authorities, whether sacred or secular, do not worry about what to say, about how you will rightly confess the name of Them who have held you since before the beginning of creation and will embrace you still, after the end of all things. The Spirit will guide your conviction; the Spirit will give you words of loving-kindness with which to proclaim your trust."

*I guarded SoCal beaches for a decade.
I was an "old man" compared to the kids—
high school and college swimmers,
full of piss and vinegar.*

*"Careful," said one kid to another,
"Munroe is going to be a preacher."
Both kids hid their weed as they walked by me.*

*Snider, an even older man, had guarded for 30 years,
had the social cache of the ol' surf rat he was,
heard the kids and saw them snicker.
(They thought they were so cool.)*

*"Hey, brah," Snider said to the kids,
"You have no idea what you're talking about.
"You'd be lucky to know that guy."*

Snider is not Jesus.

But, damn, it meant a lot that he spoke up for me.

How much more will it mean when...?

God, it's me. I am awed, O Compassion, I am humbled to the point of silence. What privilege is mine that Jesus would stand with me, stand before your angels, and speak my name to them? Will it be a word of introduction? Surely not a cursory word, but perhaps the introduction of—can I say it?—a friend. And then forever your angels will know me, see me and say to each other, "There goes Jesus' friend." O Compassion, may I drink deeply from the well of your Spirit; may I learn to trust you, honor your Son and then live into the full courage of my convictions as one who bears the name of "Christian," a follower of Jesus. I am humbled, O Compassion, I am awed to the point of speech.

Luke 12:13-21

Someone from the crowd yelled out, "Rabbi, tell my brother he should give me more of our family's inheritance, for he has too much and I need more." Jesus replied, "Who made me the referee in your family dispute?"

Then Jesus turned to his disciplined followers, "Be wary about all sorts of selfishness, for it sneaks into your life and then possesses your heart. The greedy heart grovels in goods, yet one's life is not defined by how many possessions one owns but by how many people one loves."

Then Jesus told the disciplined followers this parable: "A farmer had a huge harvest, his fields were filled to overflowing. The farmer thought about what to do, 'Hmm, what should I do? My barn isn't big enough to hold this whole harvest. I know! I'll build a bigger barn! The more room I have, the richer I'll be. The richer I am, the more I'll have. The more I have, the happier I'll be! Yes! It'll be party time for me and mine!' But The Compassion said to the farmer, 'You foolish, foolish person. Tonight, yes this very night, you will die. Who will get all your goods? How will having more make you happy?' This is how it will be for anyone whose life is not formed by loving-kindness and whose riches are not received from The Compassion."

"Keep going," I said. "Pile it on!"

"More roast beef! More mead! More, more, more!"

"Haven't you had enough," the chef replied.

"Not until my stomach bursts!" I shouted gleefully.

Hours later, in the Emergency Room, the surgeon, soulful, approached, "I'm so sorry," he told my wife. "Your husband died from a burst stomach."

Ah, I shouldn't have had that last éclair.

God, it's me. Where is the balance to be found between gaining goods and giving glory? How do I allow myself to be shaped by faith, in a world where I must attend to finances? O Compassion, by your mercy, turn my thinking upside-down that in this consumer obsessed society in which we live I may receive riches by giving you glory. By your call for justice, turn my living inside-out that in this world where success is defined by the wallet, I may find wealth through generosity. By fresh winds of your Spirit, breathe your life through me that in my life I may meet the needs of the body while nurturing seeds for the soul.

Luke 12:22-34

Jesus continued to teach his disciplined followers: "Relax, take a deep, deep breath, and trust The Compassion with your life. Don't fuss over food; don't become bothered by your body; don't crave certain clothes. Life is more than fine food, more than beautiful bodies, more than classy clothes. Gaze upon the beauty of nature: this is The Compassion's art, Their creative handiwork. Birds neither mortgage nor manage, they have neither shop nor office, and yet The Compassion provides for them. Amazing! And you know what, you are even more important than the birds. So, relax, take a deep, deep breath, and trust The Compassion with your life.

"Who among you will live longer because you worry harder? That's right: none of you. If worry doesn't add even a second to your life, why wallow in it? Gaze again at the beauty of nature, The Compassion's art, Their creative handiwork. Flowers neither work nor worry, and yet they grow. Amazing! Even King Solomon, rich as rich can be, was not as beautiful as even a single wildflower. So, relax, take a deep, deep breath, and trust The Compassion with your life, for if They inspire the wildflowers to be a song of praise, how much more will They attend to you, bring joy and hope, and make your life into a symphony of hallelujahs?

"So do not be consumed by consuming nor worry about worrying. Free yourself from craving what you can get by feasting fully on what The Compassion gives. Plunge into Their goodness and all these other pleasures will be yours

as well, but The Compassion's goodness comes first. Fear not, my friends, fear not. It is The Compassion's joy and delight to shower you with Their Sovereign love.

"Prepare yourselves to please The Compassion; be generous to others, especially to the poor, in the way that They are generous to you. Provide for yourselves riches inflation cannot diminish, stocks that cannot crash, wealth that weather cannot damage. Place the treasures of your heart in The Compassion, for where your treasure is, is where you will live."

The mother looked into her purse and then the eager eyes of her children who had noticed the Skittles—their favorite! "Please, mom, please," they cried.

Sighing inwardly, mom hugged her son to her waist and picked her daughter up into her arms, releasing her son from the hug just long enough to insert the SNAP card into the credit machine.

Seeing her children's chagrin, Mom thought, "Some day, just not today." Hand in hand Mom walked with her children toward the bus stop that would bring them all home—together.

God, it's me. I thank you and praise you that it is your joy and delight to give me your Sovereign love. I thank you and praise you for making my life into a symphony of praise. O Compassion, with your gentle, nurturing providence, help me to trust your goodness today: through seeing your provision in nature and nurture, your provision to your creation and our community, your provision in where I am and where I will be. I long to accept and honor your beauty around me today: through seeing your presence in your creation, your presence in those I meet in my work, your presence in those I love in my home, your presence in what I know of your gospel. I thank you and praise you for your joy and delight to give me your Sovereign love. I thank you and praise you for making my life into a symphony of praise.

Luke 12:35-48

Jesus continued his teaching: "Be ready and waiting, waiting and ready to serve when the Master comes home. When the Master returns from a wedding, he wants the

door opened for him; he wants servants who have been paying attention, watching for his arrival. And yet I tell you the truth, when the Master returns, he will be the one who serves. He will invite his servants to relax at the head table and feast to the full. So be ready and waiting for the Master's return, whether he comes early or arrives in the middle of the night. Be careful: if the homeowner had known when the thief was coming, he would have stopped him from robbing his house. Likewise, you must be ready for anything, for the Son of Humanity will return when you least expect him."

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, is this parable addressed only to us or to everybody?" Jesus answered, "I am talking to any person to whom the Master has given a job. If the Master returns and finds a job well done, then more responsibility will be assigned. But suppose a servant says, 'The Master isn't here; no one is looking. I'll goof off, be lazy and mean. I can mistreat everybody else and still play all day long, drink and get drunk.' That servant will be surprised when the Master returns unannounced. That servant will be sent packing, sent to join all the other lazy, mean, goof offs. That servant, who knows what the Master expects and desires and ignores it all, will be held accountable. Of course, the servant who doesn't know what the Master wants and does things wrong will be treated more gently. The principle is this: great gifts, great expectations; greater gifts, greater expectations!"

I don't care.

I wonder if I should care.

I care a little.

It is my conviction.

I said

I intended

I attempted

It is my habit.

I once did.

I used to do.

I often do.

It is my identity.

God, it's me. You create all humankind in your image. You give to all who seek you the gift of being formed into the image of Jesus. And you give to me a unique gift, born of my family and personality, nurtured by my

history and experiences, cultivated by the coaching and counsel of others, instructed by your word, guided by your Spirit, blessed by your mercy, sent out into the world by your call. So, I ask now for the clarity to know your call, for the courage to answer your call, and for the conviction to live according to your call upon my life.

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus continued teaching his disciplined followers: "I have come to ignite a fire on earth, to burn away the world's impurities.⁵³ Oh, how I wish it were fully ablaze right now. But first, I must be baptized with a different kind of fire, and I will be restless until my baptism of suffering comes. Do you think that I'm here to honor a false harmony between people, to allow etiquette to replace ethics, to settle for civility when the Compassion requires *shalom*? No! I tell you the truth, I have come to force decisions that divide. Families will split down the middle, three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Jesus looked to the crowd and said, "You are experts in reading the weather. When you see clouds in the west you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. When the wind blows from the south you say, 'Whew, it's going to be a hot one,' and it is. Yet you hypocrites pretend not to be able to read the seasons. How can you understand weather so well yet be so confused that now is the season of The Compassion's Sovereign love? It should not be this difficult to understand that the season of Sovereign love is about to bloom.

"Use your common sense, like when you have a court date scheduled but decide to settle the lawsuit early because you think you may lose. If you go to court, you know you'll have to pay every last penny, so you decide now not to go there later. This is the kind of decision before you today: decide now—commit to live for The Compassion's justice and joy."

*A woman in Texas mourns,
her fetus not viable, her options untenable.
What would Jesus have me do?*

*Mothers mourn in Gaza,
Rachel weeps in Judah.
What would Jesus have me do?*

⁵³ c.f. Malachi 3:2-3.

*I step into the voting booth.
There, alone, in the quiet of that space,
Jesus sees what I do.*

God, it's me. Instill in me, O Compassion, a passion for justice that seeks your will. Encourage in me, Jesus, a passion for holiness that honors your will. Instill in me, Spirit, a passion for right relationships that practices your will. O Compassion, ignite your fire in my heart that tolerance of injustice might be purged from me. Jesus, burn away my impurities that accept immorality. Spirit, set my life ablaze that I might follow wherever you guide. Thrice Holy One, today may I seek your will and obey your will regardless of the cost.

Luke 13:1-9

Some of the folks there told Jesus about the Galileans Pilate murdered while they had been worshiping, mixing their own blood with the blood of their altar sacrifices. These folks' presumption was that those murdered must have been some terrible people to have received such a fate. But Jesus challenged their premise: "If you think these Galileans were worse than other Galileans because they suffered, you're wrong. And what's more, you are just like them, for you will die also, just like all of the human race. All die but not all perish. Unless you turn away from the ways of broken culture with its misaligned systems, you walk the paths of death. Unless you turn toward The Compassion and dance the God-rhythms of justice and joy, you practice the ways of death. Do you think the eighteen people the Tower of Siloam crushed when it fell were the most terrible people in Jerusalem? No, but unless you turn away from brokenness and turn toward the God-life you will perish. All will die, but not all perish."

And Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree in his garden that produced no fruit for three years. He said to his gardener, 'For three years, every time I come looking for fruit from this tree I find nothing. Cut it down so that it stops wasting good soil.' But the gardener replied, 'Why don't you leave it be; fig trees take three years of preparation before they bear fruit. The *chronos*⁵⁴ of preparation is complete, its *kairos* has come. Let me trim it and add some fertilizer. If it bears fruit, good. If it still

does not bear fruit even though the time has come for it to do so, then you can cut it down."

*The calculus seems simple:
suffering = badness, ease = goodness.
The calculus assumes
Fate, Karma, Quid Pro Quo.*

*The calculus ignores
mercy and love from One who
counts it joy to embrace.*

*I was never all that good at math,
but this I understand:
living in, for, and with You is the way to the God-life.
Calculus be damned.*

Dear Jesus,

This passage about Pilate and the Galileans is a bit bloody for my taste. In our culture we prefer to ignore death. Death is something for later, not now, something for the future. "There's plenty of time to get ready," we tell ourselves. But your words call us to attention; they puncture our false impressions of our own immortality. Your words remind us that we will all die, but will we be ready? Jesus, I'll be honest. I'm ready; I have a will, a Directive to Physicians, trust funds set up for my kids. What more do I need to do?

Excuse me? You mean I'm not necessarily ready? Well, then, Jesus, teach me what it means, not only to prepare to leave this life, but to prepare to live fully in the next life. Teach me that now is the time to turn away from brokenness, turn toward you, bear fruit and prepare for the life to come.

Your friend,
Me

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus was teaching in a gathering place one Sabbath. There was a woman there who was bent over double, crippled with disease for eighteen years. When Jesus saw

⁵⁴ There are two words for time in Greek: *chronos*, which refers to chronological or linear time, and *kairos*, which refers to the key moment in an event or the moment of transformation.

her, he called to her, saying, “Woman, you are free.” Jesus touched the woman with both hands and immediately she stood up straight. The woman sang a song of praise to The Compassion.

The leader of the gathering place was furious! “Six days you can come be healed,” he shouted at the people, “but not on the Sabbath day!”

Then Jesus answered him, “Hypocrites! You take care of your beloved animals on the Sabbath, lead them to pasture, fill their water. Should not this woman, The Compassion’s beloved child, a daughter of Abraham and Sarah, receive the same care, be led into green pastures, be filled with living water? The Accuser has kept her enslaved for eighteen years; what better day to proclaim her freedom than on the Sabbath?” The leader and his friends were deeply embarrassed, but the people were delighted and filled with awe to witness Jesus’ work.

*The teacher frowned as he examined the paper.
“How did you solve this problem?” he asked.*

*The student beamed as she answered—
explaining to her teacher in excited voice
the three different ways she had discovered
to do the math, to get the correct answer.*

“But that’s not the way I showed you how to do it.”

God, it’s me. No person is too small, no pain too slight, that your Sabbath cannot rest upon them. No evil is too big, no enslavement too powerful, that your Sabbath cannot free us. So, my soul delights in you, O Compassion. My spirit rejoices in Jesus my Savior. I hear and will heed your Spirit’s call. For to witness your work is to know the true meaning of Sabbath.

Luke 13:18-21

Then Jesus said, “How can I describe the realm of Sovereign love? What is a good illustration? It is like a tiny seed, barely visible, that a man buries in his garden. Though tiny, that seed grows into a plant and becomes like a tree and families of birds find shelter within its branches.” Again, Jesus said, “To what can I compare the realm of Sovereign love? It is like yeast that a woman puts into

dough. Though we cannot see the yeast, its effects are clearly seen, for it works its way all throughout the dough to create fresh bread for her family.”

*Two-centuries ago, someone thought,
“I think there is such a thing as an atom.”⁵⁵*

*One-century ago, someone did the math:
“proving” the hydrogen atom.⁵⁶*

*A half-century ago, someone actually saw an atom,
“This is the smallest thing in the universe.”⁵⁷*

*A decade later, two scientists said,
“Hold my beer,” and discovered the quark.⁵⁸*

*As I ponder the smallest things in the universe,
I wonder: is there anything larger than God’s love?*

Jesus, it’s me. You have told your followers, “This generation is evil.” You have told your disciplined followers, “Do not fear those who kill your body.” You have told your all the world, “I have not come to bring peace but division.” Jesus, surely conflict and strife are everywhere, tension and trouble are all around. Surely this walk of faith is an obstacle course I cannot run alone. Yet, I am not alone, am I? Though I do not see you directly, I see your presence everywhere, like a seed planted in the ground, like yeast in the dough, like love that will not let me go. Jesus, though conflict and strife are everywhere, yet I have hope for so also are you. And where you are with me, I become like a mighty tree, like fresh bread, like one able to love.

Luke 13:22-30

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he taught the Way in towns and villages. Someone asked, “Rabbi, will only a few be made whole and complete?”

Jesus refused to answer this question directly. Instead, he said, “Set your sights on The Compassion. Aim high and do not waver or compromise. Enter the dance through the narrow door, for many will seek to enter in other ways but will find those doors closed. They will bang long and loud, ‘Let us in!’ But the Dance Master will

⁵⁵ Robert Brown (1827) and John Dalton (early 1800’s) are both attributed as the one who first proposed the atom.

⁵⁶ Niels Bohr (1913).

⁵⁷ Erwin Mueller (1955).

⁵⁸ Murray Gell-Mann and George Zweig (1964).

answer, ‘Do I know you? I don’t think I do.’ The people will rationalize, ‘Of course you do! We grew up in the same neighborhood; we saw you around town. We even heard you teach a time or two.’ The Dance Master will respond, ‘That is not the kind of knowing I am talking about. My kind of knowing is the sharing of deep understanding and delicate intimacy. I do not know you in this way.’ And the door will be closed. There will be much sorrow when you look through the window and see Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, and all those who have encountered The Compassion and responded with their whole selves, dancing the God-rhythms of Sovereign love. You will regret never seeking to experience the God-life filled with justice and joy. Indeed, people will come from all directions, from north and south, from east and west, to dance at the Feast I will host when the fullness of the kin-dom is unveiled. But know this: there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

I dance in the morning when the world is begun.

I dance for the Scribe and the Pharisee.

I dance on the Sabbath, and I cure the lame.

I dance on a Friday when the sky turns black.

They cut me down, and I leap up high.

Dance, then, wherever you may be,

I am the Lord of the dance, said he,

And I’ll lead you all, wherever you may be,

And I’ll lead you all in the dance, said he.⁵⁹

God, it’s me. Show me your steps, teach me your rhythms, lead me in the dance of trust. Jesus, show me your mercy, teach me your justice, lead me in the dance of hope. Spirit, show me the many ways to love those who stand before me; lead me in the dance of love. O Compassion, may I experience a deep understanding and share a delicate intimacy with you, the One who teaches all to dance.

Luke 13:31-35

Just then some of the Intense came to Jesus to warn him, saying, “Watch out for King Herod! He’s looking to kill you.”

Jesus told them, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will continue my calling to liberate people from unholy spirits and free them

for wholeness.’ I have a journey to which I have been called, and I will not stop until I arrive at my destination, Jerusalem, for it cannot be that a truth-teller should die outside of Jerusalem.

“O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, murdering truth-tellers and abusing those whom The Compassion has sent to you! How often have I wanted to gather up your children as a hen gathers her chicks? How often have I wanted to protect your children under the shelter of Sovereign love as a hen protects her chicks under the shelter of her wing? But you refused. And now your house is empty. You will not see me again until you say, ‘Deep joy to him who comes in the name of the Sovereign!’”

*Pastor Ann reached across the hospital bed,
clasping Mildred’s hand with her left and
placing her right hand gently on Gerald’s shoulder.
Her prayer was kind and full of hope:
“O Gerald, O Gerald, fall into the arms of love.”*

*Pastor Maria opened her arms wide as
young children bounced forward, invited by her smile.
She asked the children a question and the kids knew—
the correct answer and she who asked were the same:
Jesus.*

*Kim saw God every Sunday.
Pastor Wani said many things he didn’t comprehend but
always spread her arms, near the end of church,
black robes flowing like angel wings, and
blessed him and his mommy and daddy and sister.
Kim knew God loved him.*

God, it’s me. Come unto me, O Compassion, come unto me, that you may gather me up under the shelter of your love, and I may know that I am your beloved child. Come unto me, Jesus, come unto me, that you may fill me with your purpose, and I may know that my house lives the journey you have set for it. Come unto me, Divine Spirit, come unto me, that you may feed me with deep joy, and I may know the One who comes in the name of the Sovereign over all Creation. O Compassion, O Compassion, may I come unto you. May I never refuse you but always rest beneath the shelter of your love.

the present tense as an alternative,
(<https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/lord-of-the-dance/>,
accessed December 27, 2023).

⁵⁹ Lyrics adapted from Sydney Carter, *Lord of the Dance*, (Stainer Bell: 1963, 2011). The use of present tense is taken from an article Mr. Carter gave to the website Godtube, in which he suggested

Luke 14:1-14

One Sabbath day Jesus went to eat at the house of one of the Intense, a well-known leader. Jesus was being watched carefully by those in attendance. Right next to Jesus was a man with painfully swollen joints. Jesus looked at the Intense and Scrupulous around the table and asked them, “Is it lawful to free this man from his brokenness on the Sabbath? Yes or no?” They were silent. Then Jesus reached out to the man, made him whole and sent him home. Jesus turned on the Intense and Scrupulous, asking, “Which of you would let an animal or child suffer on the Sabbath? If you saw your son in trouble on the Sabbath, you would not hesitate to do what is right.” Once again, they were silent.

When Jesus noticed how everyone was angling for the place of honor at the dinner table, he shared this advice: “You know that sitting next to the bride and groom at a wedding feast is a source of honor, but do not seek that seat for yourself because someone else more important than you will come. Then the host will take you aside and make you give up your seat. You will be both humiliated and sitting at the back of the room in the last place left. Rather do this: when you are invited somewhere, choose your seat with humility; seek the least important seat. Then the host will see you and escort you to a place of honor and everyone will know that you and the host are close friends. Whoever seeks one's own glory is a bother and a bore. Accept who you are and The Compassion will embrace who you are becoming.”

Then Jesus turned directly to his host and said, “When you give a feast, do not invite only those you know, your family and friends and important people in the community. These folks will pay you back in full with their own friendship and festivities. Rather, prepare feasts for the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Look beyond the limits set by Leviticus; move beyond the Levitical barriers.⁶⁰ Provide for those folks who cannot repay you now and you will receive your reward in full when all who live in right relationship with The Compassion receive the gift of resurrection.”

*As a leader, I find it
difficult to disappear, to be unnoticed when
people need guidance, without which
chaos (or at least confusion) blossoms.*

*As one who is
older, white, male, and a leader,
seeking the place in the back seems
disingenuous and, perhaps, negligent.*

*My privilege is an inferno,
consuming humility and equality in
equal measure, according to
unequal means.*

*What will I do when kin-dom comes?
What shall I say on that day?
Forgive me, O Compassion, have mercy on me—
Free me to live from the bottom up not the top down.*

God, it's me. Forgive me for my love of honor, my lust for power, my longing to control all situations. Free me for others who I may honor, others who I may empower, others who I may cherish regardless of the situation. Forgiven and free, may I live in right relationship with you, with others, with myself, and with the creation.

Luke 14:15-24

When someone sitting near Jesus around the table heard what Jesus had said about the resurrection in the kin-dom, he said to Jesus, “Deep joy will be with the one who feasts with you when the realm of Sovereign love is fulfilled.”

Jesus answered with a parable, “A certain man held a huge feast, inviting all his friends and acquaintances. When the day for the feast arrived, the man sent a servant to announce, ‘Now is the time for the feast!’ One by one the man's friends made excuses. One said, ‘I'm sorry, but I just bought some land I've never seen. I need to look it over. I cannot attend your feast.’ Another said, ‘I'm so sorry, but I just bought a new herd of cattle that I need to feed. I cannot attend your feast.’ Still another said, ‘I'm so sorry, but I just got married and want to stay home with my wife. I cannot attend your feast.’ When the servant returned and reported this news the man was furious and ordered his servant, ‘Quick! Go out into every street and alley of this town. Bring in all the hurting and all the hopeless you can find.’

“Master,” replied the servant, “we have already done this.”

⁶⁰ This sentence is not in the Greek text but provides context for Jesus' mentioning the kinds of people who are to be invited. Leviticus 21:18 prohibits anyone with a defect from making a food

offering. Jesus bypasses this restriction to widen the circle of inclusion within the kin-dom.

“Well then,” said the Master, “extend your search. Go out into the countryside. Leave no stone unturned. My feast must be full!”⁶¹ I tell you the truth: all are invited but those who refuses my feast cannot taste its joy.

*The grandfather and grandmother gaze
into each other's eyes, the sparkle of remembrance
joining their hearts anew.*

*It has been 56 years since the joy of their feasting—
vows and a kiss followed by mirth and dancing.*

*Now, as they look upon the dance floor, they see
their granddaughter beginning her own
journey toward becoming,
deeper than a solitary life can fathom.
What heartache and joy await her embrace?*

*The grands reach across the table,
holding each other's hands,
as if in silent confession that their
union has not always been easy but always
blessed beyond their deserving.*

*Looking up they see the bride and groom
approaching, hands extended in invitation.
“Oh, no!” they demur, “We're both too old.” But the
bride and groom will not be denied—
their invitation to dance cannot be refused.*

God, it's me. In the words of the ol' Texas Governor, "When you miss a meeting, you're not there!" O Compassion, when have I missed a feast? When do I miss out on tasting your joy because I am too busy or too distracted to realize nothing is more important than your feast? Show me the excuses I make! Then, forgive my sin of busyness and preoccupation. Free me to live in the moment of your invitation to love you. Fill me with the joy as I feast with Jesus.

Luke 14:25-34

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. He turned to them and said, “If any one of you comes to me but loves your family or friends or even your own self more than you love me, then you cannot be my follower. You may travel alongside me, but you are not following me. If any one of you is unwilling to follow me to the point of carrying a cross,⁶² which is often the result of opposing Roman values by dancing the God-rhythms of the God-life, then you are not one of my disciplined followers.

“Imagine wanting to build a building. Won't you carefully study the project costs and compare these costs to your resources? Won't you figure out ahead of time whether you can really build it? You don't want to get halfway through the project and then realize you cannot finish what you started. You'll be the laughingstock of the neighborhood.

“Or imagine a general is about to engage in war with an invading army, but the general only has 10,000 soldiers while the other army's general has 20,000. Won't the general figure out if he can defeat the other army before hostilities start? Won't he sue for peace if he knows his army will be defeated?

“In the same way, anyone who has to hang on to what they have—whether plans or people—is not my follower. Anyone who is unable to let go of everything and everyone is not my disciplined followers.

“Salt is good, but if it loses its zest, it becomes bland and is good for nothing. Bland does not work if you are to follow me. If you have ears, listen to my words.”

*I try to remember
Jesus called me to carry my own cross,
not force others to carry their crosses,
nor compel them to carry mine.*

*I am compelled to
live a life that reflects Jesus in
what I do and (equally important)
how I do it—attitude not betraying action.*

⁶¹ Placing the quotation mark here is an interpretive choice. The Greek text had no quotation marks, so it is up to translators to decide if the parable ends with the words “My feast must be full,” (as in the paraphrase) or “will taste its joy,” as in some English translations. By placing the quotation marks as I do, I suggest the last sentence is spoken by Jesus not as part of the parable but as a

commentary on it in which Jesus claims authority (“my feast”) to suggest the feast in the kin-dom belongs to him.

⁶² At this point in Jesus' ministry, he had not yet gone to the cross nor, especially, had the cross become a symbol of Christian faith. At this point in his ministry, therefore, his use of “cross” would have been understood according to its political context as an instrument of oppression.

*I realize, of course, that I
fail as often as I succeed but,
seasoned by lovingkindness from above,
I continue and ever will continue.*

*Bland is not blessed and
crosses are meant to be carried not worn.*

Saving Jesus, who can be your disciplined followers? Who follows you in this way, to this degree of commitment? If I had known at my conversion what you expect, I may not have committed myself to following you. What you ask is simply too much: my cross will kill me, and I will die. Then where will I be? I will be right where you want me: dead to myself but becoming alive to you.

Sovereign Jesus, I thank you that my conversion is not a one-time event but a lifetime journey. I thank you that I don't take this journey alone but that I travel with you and, more importantly, you travel with me. I thank you that by your lovingkindness at work in my life, I may one day not only travel with you but also follow you.

Jesus, my Friend, by your cross I am set free. By my cross I live into your freedom. Make me able, Jesus, make me able: to carry my cross, to count the costs, to be your follower and your disciplined followers. May I never be bland in your name.

Luke 15:1-10

Now some tax collectors and sinners were hanging out with Jesus. They liked to listen to what Jesus had to say. The Intense and Scrupulous saw the company Jesus was keeping and they barked like angry dogs: "Look at him! He's having fun with sinners!"

In response, Jesus told this parable: "Suppose one of you owned one hundred sheep but then lost one of them. Which one of you wouldn't leave the ninety-nine to go search after the lost one until you found it? And when you found the lost one, won't you pick it up in your arms and carry it home with joy? And when you come home, won't you call to your friends saying, 'Embrace joy with me for I have found the lost one!?' I tell you the truth, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who is found than over ninety-nine persons who are good, just and true.

"Or what woman, though she has ten coins, if she loses one, won't light a lamp and search and scrub her whole house until she finds the lost one? And when she finds the lost one, won't she call her friends and neighbors together saying, 'Embrace joy with me for I have found the lost one!?' I tell you the truth, in the same way joy overwhelms The Compassion's celestial messengers when one lost sinner who returns to The Compassion."

*Mom and dad, siblings and friends,
community gathered as dusk descends into night.
Why is the bus late today of all days?*

*Into the night the community waits,
welcome banners sagging as
fatigue and boredom commingle.*

*Dad, a former Army mechanic, hears it first;
the signature rumble of the diesel engine.
Is this the bus that will bring their baby home?*

*Across town, a mother sits, alone amidst strangers,
beneath sterile lights, their faint humming elevating
brain fog, as her thoughts flit about, ungrounded.*

*Hours pass, the mother waits, still alone, becoming
grounded in a hope borne upon her memories—
all she has to help her hang on.*

*The mother's head twitches. She jerks awake, suddenly
aware a doctor is speaking her name.
"What news, Doctor, about my baby?"*

God, it's me. Help me to embrace joy, teach me how to find joy in finding the lost. Jesus, help me to embrace joy, teach me how to hang with sinners rather than bark like a sour dog. Spirit, help me to embrace joy, teach me how to light the lamp of my life, to search after friends, to scrub the corners of possibility in order to find the lost. O Compassion may joy overwhelm the heavenly host today.

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus continued to teach the Intense and Scrupulous about The Compassion's lovingkindness: "A man had two sons. The younger son demanded his father bow to his will: 'Give me what I will get when you die!' The father allowed this disrespect and gave him a younger son's portion, one-

third of his wealth. Only a few days later the young man gathered up all his stuff and set off for a far-off, exotic place. In that place the young man wasted everything with wild partying.

“Then a severe famine attacked that whole country and the young man began to suffer. He found a job feeding slop to pigs, which violated sanctity and was considered dirty, demeaning work: He was both hungry and humiliated. ‘What have I done?’ he thought to himself. ‘In my father’s house there is food for all and here I am nearly starving! I will return to my father and confess to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am not worthy of being named a son; call me as one of your paid servants.’ The young man practiced his speech until he had it memorized and returned to his father.

“While the young man was still a long way away, the father saw him and his heart melted with compassion for his boy, his son. Disregarding cultural customs that said it was humiliating for older men to be seen running, and disregarding social customs that said the young man should have been shunned for bringing dishonor to his family, the father ran toward his boy, his son. He ran the run of one who cared not for custom; he ran the run of a father filled with joy. He ran to his boy, his son. He threw his arms around him and would not stop kissing him.

“My Father,’ the younger son began his rehearsed speech, ‘I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am not worthy of being named a...’ But the Father heard none of what his son had said: ‘Quick!’ the father called out, ‘Bring the best clothes and clothe him! Bring the family ring and honor him! Bring sandals and cover his bare feet! Bring the fattest calf we have and butcher it, for we are going to feast! This, my son was dead but is alive again; he was lost but now is found!’ So, they began a time of joyful feasting.

“All this time the older son was working hard in the field. When the older son approached the house, he heard the joyful music and dancing. He called one of the servants over and asked what was happening.

“Your brother has returned,’ the servant replied, ‘and your father butchered the fattest calf he owns for his son is home safe and sound.’ The older son was livid! He refused the feast. Against custom, the father humiliated himself by going out to his stubborn son. The son deepened the humiliation by shouting at his own father, ‘How dare you? I have been your slave for years and never disobeyed your word. Yet you never gave me even a skinny goat so that my friends and I could party. But when this son of yours shows up after wasting your property with wild living, you butcher the fattest calf!’

“My son,’ whispered the father, ‘you are in my heart and in my mind, in my body and in my soul. All that I have belongs to you. But we had to embrace joy, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

From the Great Awakenings (I and II) to the “Billys” (Sunday and Graham), only the younger’s story seems to matter. “Conversion” Christians, not “Cradle” Christians, celebrated as the narrative of faith.

What of those whose trust was taught at mother’s breast and in gently rocking cradle, who learned to read using a Bible decorated with brightly colored pictures?

What shall we say about those who cannot remember their own baptism while we cherish images of them swathed in pulpit robes?

What story shall be told of those whose faith was bludgeoned into them: Sunday School, Church, Youth Group, Mission Trip, rinse and repeat, until it is their babe held in pastor’s arms?

Can we save a slice of cake for the olders among us?

God, it’s me. I desire more than a wild party with my friends; I long for a joyful feast with my true family. Why settle for a skinny goat when you are willing to give the fattest calf? I desire more than to be called a servant; I long to be named your child. Why settle for hired status when I can be with your heart? I desire more than an exotic place and a far away land; I long to know my true home. Why settle for death when I can be alive? Why settle for lost when I can be found with you, now and forevermore?

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciplined followers, “A wealthy businessperson hired someone who managed their business. Rumors were reported to the wealthy person that the manager was dishonest; the manager had been rash and reckless with the business. ‘What have you been doing with

my business?’ the businessperson barked. ‘I want to see an audit of all your books, then you’re fired!’

“The manager thought, ‘Oh, no! What will I do? I am too weak to work and too ashamed to beg. I know! I’ll make nice with my owner’s debtors. Perhaps they will help me out when I am out of work.’ So, the dishonest manager slithered around town. To one debtor they asked, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,’ answered the debtor. ‘Quick, forget the high interest rate I’ve been charging you. Write a new bill for the principal only, for four hundred.’ To another debtor they asked, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ answered the second debtor. ‘Quick, you too forget the high interest rate I’ve been charging you. Write a new bill for the principal only, for eight hundred.’

“Now the wealthy businessperson complimented the dishonest manager for their shrewdness upon discovering what they had done. The manager had street smarts and savvy, much more savvy than good, honest people often have. I tell you, you also are to be street smart and savvy for tough times will come and you must learn to build relationships by wit and wisdom if you are to survive, thrive and be welcomed into the fullness of the realm of Sovereign love.

“The one who is just and true in little things, will be just and true in larger things. The one who is a liar and a cheat in little things, will lie and cheat in everything! If you cannot be just and true in earthly matters, who will entrust you with heavenly treasures? If you have not been just and true with another’s work, who will entrust you with your own calling? No one can serve two masters: either you will hate one and love the other, or love one and hate the other. You cannot serve The Compassion and put your trust only money.”

*If even...*⁶³

*If even the malignant heart can love,
if even the greedy industrialist can share,
if even the warmonger can lay down arms,
if even the unethical understand mercy,*

How much more...

*how much more will the one who trusts
blossom in their becoming;*

*how much more will the one who hopes
bloom in their inner being;*

*how much more will the one who loves
bear the fruit of shalom into the world;*

*how much more will those embraced by mercy
be bridges of reconciliation for all who need Jesus.*

Spirit of God, help me to sweat the small stuff, that I may be just and true even in little things. Spirit of God, help me to be street smart and savvy, that I may be entrusted with heavenly treasures. Spirit of God, help me to serve my Savior only, that I may be master of my money rather than have it master me!

Luke 16:14-18

The Intense, who loved, even lusted, for money, heard Jesus’ words and laughed at him as being hopelessly naive: What could he know about being shrewd in the “real” world? But Jesus would not back down: “You make yourselves look important and knowledgeable in front of others but looks can deceive. The Compassion knows your heart. What makes you look good to others makes The Compassion want to puke.

“The Compassion’s sacred writings, the law and the words of truth-tellers, are received as gifts to Their people that remain even today as your guides to Their will. But something greater was added to them when John the Baptizer began to preach: the Story of The Compassion’s Sovereign love. People are scratching and clawing to be known by this Sovereign love. And know this: Sovereign love secures Sovereign law. What has been around for a while will abide forever. It is easier to ground heaven and earth into sawdust than for even a comma to be lost from the law. Sovereign love empowers Sovereign law: Divorce in service of lust is still lust and therefore adultery. Marriage in service of lust is still lust and therefore also adultery.”

⁶³ Jesus’ Parable of the Shrewd Manager is often misunderstood because readers assume all of Jesus’ parable are prescriptive—telling us how we are to act. However, this parable presents an evaluative contrast—essentially saying, “if even an unethical

manager can understand The Compassion’s forgiving and generous nature, how much more should Jesus’ followers comprehend this truth?” The poem seeks to present this contrast.

*The mourners shuffled into the chapel,
dark suits and tea length dresses,
obligatory somber faces at the Reverend's words
bland as the finger sandwiches
served at the funeral reception.*

*The twins giggled in the limousine,
whispering despite their mother's fierce glare.
Their finery looked brighter than the grownups.
At the graveside, the children wondered why
solemnity triumphed over smiles.*

*They would miss their "Opa"—
his big hugs and the cookies he snuck to them,
his stories of yesteryear.
But these stories made them happy, not sad,
made all things somehow new.*

*Later, the parents' heads bounced upon their pillows,
"God I'm glad that's over with."
Rest eluded them.
The children dreamed of cookies and mischief,
at peace because they knew the true measure of a life.*

God, it's me. Holy One, when do I treat something as base when it is sacred and thereby degrade it? When do I use another as an object rather than treat them as a sacred vessel and thereby demean them? When do I desire only the fulfillment of my wants while ignoring your will and thereby bring dishonor upon myself? Gracious One, lead me toward the discovery of the sacred in the ordinary and everyday that I may love! Lead me toward the appreciation of your sacred presence in everyone that at all times I may love! Lead me toward the fulfillment of your will for my wants, my needs, my life that in all ways I may love!

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus continued his teaching on earthly riches and used a common literary technique of his day: the Father Abraham story.⁶⁴ Jesus said, "A rich man, dressed in purple linen so fine it was like woven air, lived a life of conspicuous consumption. A beggar named Lazarus, with sores all over him, camped in his driveway. Lazarus' best friends were the dogs who licked his sores.

"Lazarus died. The angels came to carry this beggar into Abraham's arms. The rich man also died. Others buried him. Suffering torment, the rich man looked up and saw Abraham far, far away, with Lazarus in his arms. He called out, 'Abba Abraham! Please have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip even the tip of his pinky into water to cool my tongue! I am in agony!' But Abraham replied, 'Child, remember that in your life on earth you received great pleasure while Lazarus was inflicted with great pain; now he is at peace and you are in pain. What is more, between us is a chasm that cannot be crossed from here to there or there to here.'

"Then I beg you, Abba Abraham,' pleaded the man, 'send Lazarus to warn my family, for I have five brothers. I do not want them to come to this place also.' 'Child,' answered Abraham, 'they have Moses and the truth-tellers to warn them: Let them listen to the Story and truly hear.' 'No, Abba, no!' cried the man, 'they will not listen to the Story! But if someone goes to them from the dead, they will return to worship and serve The Compassion!' Abraham replied, 'If they cannot discern The Compassion's will from Moses and the truth-tellers, they will not trust even an eyewitness to resurrection.'"

*Don't pretend you didn't see, for
I saw you...*

*step over the man whose leg was extended,
avert your eyes from his outstretched hand,
act like you never heard his pleas for mercy.*

*Don't pretend you didn't say, for
I heard you...*

*pontificate about not wanting to "give one a fish,"
judging the audacity of one desperate enough to beg,
ramble on as if you just sped away
from a sociology experiment, not a person.*

*Don't pretend you didn't see and didn't say.
Don't pretend you care Lazarus is on your driveway.*

"I'm sorry. Were you talking to me?"

God, it's me. Who is Lazarus? The bag lady I pass by as I walk the sidewalks of downtown? The cancer patient shriveling away into grayness? The child who

a well-known literary conceit that readers would have heard for its metaphorical value.

⁶⁴ In Israelite culture of the 1st century, "Father Abraham" stories were similar to our custom of "St. Peter at Heaven's Gate" jokes—

sees the world with empty eyes? Where is Lazarus? In downtown Phoenix and rural West Virginia? In distant Cairo and Sao Paulo? In my neighborhood and, perhaps, my home? Why is Lazarus? Is it because I drove around him, windows up, radio blaring, while he lay on my driveway? Is it because I did not take Moses and the truth-tellers and Jesus, "my personal Lord and Savior," seriously? Is it because I did not care then, do not care now, and will only care when it's too late? O Compassion, show me Lazarus while he still suffers, before my heart is hard, before it's too late either for him or me.

Luke 17:1-10

Jesus said to his disciplined followers, "Temptations to sin will seek to overwhelm you, but deep shame on the one through whom they are offered. It is better to wear concrete slippers and jump in the river than to lead a little one into a life of sin.

"Be aware. If a brother or sister sins, correct them; and if one turns their life around, says they are sorry for their wrong, forgive. Even if their actions were personal, aimed at you, forgive. If they sin against you seven times in a single day and seven times come to you saying, 'I am sorry. I repent,' then seven times you must forgive. Forgiveness is a core value; it is to be a part of your integrity."

The disciplined followers were shocked: "Increase our trust!"

Jesus responded, "You need not have a large amount of trust—quality over quantity is what matters. Pure trust is powerful. Even the tiniest amount would let you say to this giant oak tree, 'Go jump in a lake!' and it would obey you.

"Suppose one of you hires a worker. When they finish with their first task, do you pamper them and tell them to rest, relax and take the remainder of the day off? Of course not! Instead, you say, 'Keep going, there's more work to be done. I have some unfinished business for you to do.' Later, do you hold a parade for your worker for merely doing their job? Again, no! In the same way, when you have finished all your work of forgiveness and trust, don't break your arm patting yourself on the back: you have merely completed the kin-dom's basic business."

*Sleep cruts my eyes, as I
slide quietly out of bed,
tiptoeing toward the nursery.*

*Entering the dimly lit room,
I reach into the crib,
my child's cries lessening.*

*I speak no words as I lay my child down,
for no words are necessary,
mom and baby both know what comes next.*

*Twenty minutes pass,
soft cooing, like a dove, a sign of my slumber,
while mom lays our child gently back into the crib.*

*Nothing extraordinary happens:
only what is expected
from those who love.*

God, it's me. Show me my sin. Where have I stumbled? Where have I caused others to fall? Show me my brokenness that I may desire your healing? Then, help me turn away from my past actions and discover new ways of living, new habits of relating. Mold my inward spirit into the image of Jesus that my outward actions might reflect his goodness. Then, perhaps, I'll be ready for you to teach me to forgive. Help me to release a past I cannot change and restore a present that can be changed by you. Show me this day the ways that I, sinner and saint that I am, can practice the art of forgiving.

Luke 17:11-19

As Jesus journeyed along the way to Jerusalem and his destiny, he walked the border between Samaria and Galilee. (Now the Samaritans were enemies of the Israelites because the Assyrians had long ago invaded the area, slaughtered Israelite men, and remained, forcing the Israelite women to marry them.)⁶⁵ As he entered one village, ten lepers came out to meet him, but the lepers kept their distance from him as the law commanded.⁶⁶ From that distance they shouted out together, "Jesus, Master, place your mercy upon us!"

⁶⁵ The parenthetical note is not in the Greek text but added to provide interpretive context for the historic enmity between Samaritans and Israelites.

⁶⁶ c.f. Leviticus 13:45-46.

When Jesus saw the lepers, he said, "Go and show yourselves to the priests as the law commands."⁶⁷ The lepers left. Along the way, their skin disease disappeared; they were "clean." One of the lepers, once he noticed that he was clean, ran back to Jesus shouting praises to The Compassion. He flung himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him over and over and over. This leper was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Weren't there ten lepers whom I made clean? What happened to the other nine? Is there no one else willing to return in praise except this foreigner?" Then Jesus turned to look the man in the eye and said, "Get up. Go along the way. Your trust has made you whole."

*The soul breaks when songs of praise are stifled—
the tongue without thanksgiving a mere
slab of flesh unable to taste bitter or sweet;
the voice, betrayed by muted lips, mirroring the heart.*

*Thanksgiving lifts voice and eyes and heart
beyond self, inviting the soul to join
the song begun by stars,
their distant echoes of creation renewed by praise.*

*O my soul, lift up your voice!⁶⁸
I lift it to The Compassion!
O my soul, give thanks to The Compassion!
It is right to give Them thanks and praise!*

Praise and thanksgiving!!! Praise breaking out all over! Thanksgiving bursting forth and bubbling up! It cannot be stopped, will not be quenched. Of course, who would want to stop the song of praise or quench the symphony of thanksgiving or silence the salvation that comes when they are given voice? Praise will be my constant theme. Thanksgiving my companion forever, reminding me of the salvation I am receiving from you, O Compassion, whose love is revealed through Jesus, and whose praise is empowered by Divine Spirit. Praise and thanksgiving!!!

Luke 17:20-37

The religious leaders confronted Jesus and challenged him to name the day when the realm of Sovereign love would arrive. Jesus answered them, "You

don't get it, do you? The realm of Sovereign love is not about time or place but about the heart and mind open to The Compassion's rule. People can't say, 'Here it is!' or 'Look there!' for Sovereign love lives within you."

Then Jesus said to his disciplined followers, "Soon you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Humanity but no such day will be found. And people will say to you, 'Here he is!' or 'Look there!' Don't fall for it. You will know when the Son of Humanity returns; it will be like a flash of lightning across the sky: heaven and earth will be enlightened on that Day and all will know the Son of Humanity has returned. But first he must suffer, suffer long, suffer hard, and be rejected by this generation of people.

"The return of the Son of Humanity will be like the days of Noah. People were living their lives like nothing was wrong, just business as usual until the day Noah entered the ark and the flood came to give right relationships a new beginning. In the same way, it will be like the days of Lot, when the people of Sodom thought nothing of their mistreatment of Lot's guests until a firestorm destroyed their town. That is how it will be when the Son of Humanity returns: an immediate purging away of everything that does not reflect The Compassion.

"When the Day comes, don't look back, don't hold on to the past. If you are working in the yard, don't run inside the house to get anything. If you are out in a field, leave everything behind. Remember how Lot's wife looked longingly to Sodom, back to her past. No, on that day, only what is ahead matters. Whoever seeks to hold on to one's old life will lose it. But whoever loses one's old life grabs hold of the God-life. I tell you the truth: when that night comes, two people will be side by side; one will be invited into the God-life and for the other their invitation will be rescinded. Similarly, two women will be working together; one will accept the invitation to the God-life and the other will reject it." Hearing all this, Jesus' disciplined followers were most anxious and asked him, "Where will this happen?" Jesus answered, "God's vultures will soar around the body of my death."

*Children squealed,
fleeing as the bell rang, announcing
summer freedom, the release from all
responsibility to read, to write, to add, to learn.*

the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving for Holy Communion used in liturgical worship.

⁶⁷ c.f. Leviticus 14:2ff.

⁶⁸ This stanza varies my editorial choice that avoids using traditional religious language. The stanza mirrors the litany used in

*The sisters skipped into the sunshine.
Beads of sweat forming on their foreheads could not
wipe the smiles from their faces, the joy of
summer sunshine and idle time spent with friends.*

*The older sister, more experienced at
adjusting to summer rhythms, sighed, knowing
her return in August would be accompanied by
heat, assignments, and examinations.*

*The younger sister, refusing to imagine
a renewal of her confinement, rejected reading.
How could she be expected to learn
when summer play invited?*

One sister welcomed the coming of August.

God, it's me. Forgive me for all the ways I look to the old life and so fail to grasp the God-Life to which you invite me. Jesus, forgive me for all the times I seek life in the things around me and so fail to receive your God-life within me. Spirit, free me to see and to hear, to know and to live with a fresh understanding of the realm of Sovereign love, that I may fly, yes, even soar like an eagle.

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciplined followers a parable to teach them that they should pray always and forever, never quitting, never giving up. He said: "There was once a judge who cared little for The Compassion and less for people. And there was also a widow who came to that judge to ask him for justice: 'Help me, please! Protect me from my enemy!' But the judge would not listen to the widow because, after all, who was she? She was only a widow. But the widow, though powerless in her society, would not quit. She pestered, bothered and harassed this judge until finally he said, 'Enough! Even though I care little for The Compassion and less for people, I will give this widow what she wants just so that she will leave me alone.'" And then Jesus said, "Do you hear what the judge said? If even this judge will do that, what more will The Compassion do? They will overwhelm with loving-kindness, showering *agape* upon those who call out to Them? Yes, and They will do it quickly! But the question is: will the Son of Humanity find such persevering prayer, such tough and tenacious trust when he returns on earth?"

*I lay in bed, still awakening to the day.
Choices lay before me—how shall I spend my time?
Work beckons but first a shower and breakfast.*

*As my body moves away from slumber,
I ask myself which shall be first: surge into exercise
or succumb to the Siren I clutch in my hand?*

*I scroll through my daily ritual:
Apple News, ESPN, Candy Crush.
Nothing life giving to be found here.*

*Leaving my yoga mat in the corner,
I wolf down a banana and cup of coffee,
open my email and get on with the day.*

*Is there any other way to greet the dawn?
Another day, another dollar.
Another missed opportunity.*

God, it's me. You are a judge of a different kind, not indifferent to cries of injustice, not uncaring to your people's cry. You are a judge of a different way, one whose justice is placed on yourself, one whose justice is the path to mercy. O Compassion, teach me tenacious trust that lives and moves and acts in accord with your justice. Put within me the patient and persevering prayer life able to discover anew each day your desire to grant me mercy. Pour out upon me the courage to pray always and forever, never quitting, never giving up.

Luke 18:9-17

To some folks who trusted in their own goodness and looked down at others, even hating others for their faults, Jesus told this parable. He said, "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One man was a religious leader and the other a known sinner, a tax man who collaborated with the Romans to oppress his own people. The religious leader stood up straight, tall and proud, in the middle of everybody. He prayed, 'O Compassion, I thank you that I am better than other folks: thieves and thugs, liars or losers like that sinner over there. I fast. I pray. I give ten percent of my money off the top!' But the tax man, the sinner, stood off to the side, alone, and could not even get his chin off his chest. He prayed, 'O Compassion, bathe me in mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.' I tell you the truth, the religious leader merely walked out of the Temple, but the tax man went home justified; that is, made right with The

Compassion. Self serving snobs will be put in their place, while those willing to be honest about themselves will become their true self."

Folks brought babies to Jesus, hoping his touch might bring his blessing, but the disciplined followers tried to stop these folks from bothering Jesus. Jesus looked beyond his disciplined followers directly to the children and said, "Let the little children come to me. Do not discourage them, for the realm of Sovereign love belongs to these beloved, whose minds are open to wonder and whose hearts are open to joy. I tell you the truth, unless you too can embrace the gifts The Compassion desires to give you, you will never dance the God-rhythms nor live fully the God-life."

*I love to compare myself to the one who
cannot get out of their own way—
who is their own worst enemy,
ridiculed, if not despised, by many, if not all.*

*What a savory morsel it is—
indeed, a sumptuous feast—
to dine upon disdain and condescension,
heaped upon my plate in ever larger portions.*

*Gorged I am, to the point of bursting,
as I wolf down sugary self-congratulation for dessert.
Shielding my eyes from my brilliance,
I observe with eyes closed my wondrous reflection.*

God, it's me. Forgive me, O Compassion, for how easily I see another's sin yet ignore my own sinfulness; for how quickly I leap to judgment while all day long seeking mercy; for how badly I want to see myself as better than everybody else. Free me, Jesus, for an honest humility that sees myself as you see me; for a caring humility that accepts others as you accept them; for a courageous humility able to see self and others in all our beauty. Mold me, Divine Spirit, into a reflection of the image of Jesus as my true self.

Luke 18:18-30

A power broker who thought flattery would impress Jesus asked, "Good Teacher, what work shall I do or what achievement might I accomplish to be given eternal life as a free gift?"

Jesus was not impressed: "Why do you call me good?" he asked. "Only The Compassion is good. You

know the commandments: 'be faithful, preserve life, protect property, be truthful, honor your mother and father.'"

The power broker responded, "Of course, I have kept all these since I was a mere boy."

But Jesus saw into the man and said to him, "One thing you lack, and it is the only thing that matters. Let go of that which you hold more precious than The Compassion: Sell your property and provide for the poor, then you will own prime property, clear title to treasure in heaven. Then, come and follow me." When the power broker heard Jesus' words, his face fell flat and deep sorrow descended upon him, for his earthly riches were too great to give up or give away.

When Jesus saw the power broker's reaction he said, "How difficult it is for those who have the power of great possessions to be overwhelmed by Sovereign love. It is easier for a camel to walk through the eye of a needle than for one ruled by great possessions to recognize Sovereign love."

When the disciplined followers heard Jesus' words, they were worried, "Who, then, can be made whole and complete, their true self?"

"What men and women cannot do on their own, The Compassion can do for them," answered Jesus.

"Well, then," continued Peter, "what about us? We have left everything to follow you."

So, Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, everyone who has left everything—family or friends, work or well-being—to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life, will also be given more than they can imagine in this life, and then, in the age to come, eternal life!"

*Oh, how I am living my best life now!
A mighty castle—spiers ascending into the clouds
Jewels befitting a dragon's lair
6.2 million followers on Instagram*

*Always writing thank you notes for every gift
Putting shopping cart away not stashing it by my car
Giving a dollar to the person with a cardboard sign*

*What more do I need?
What more must I do?
What, I ask, what is needed to earn a gift?*

*Seek and share and serve together in unity—
be with and be for and become
one in life and in love.*

God, it's me. Praise to you Holy One. You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you; no one else will suffice; you and you alone are worthy of praise. You are Sovereign, and there is no other; no one else gives life. You are the Eternal One, and all others are pretenders. It belongs to you alone to call; no one else may command our praise. Praise to you Holy and Eternal One.

Luke 18:31-34

And having assured the disciplined followers with this promise of The Compassion's blessing, Jesus took aside the Twelve, his core group, and said to them, "It is time to get ready for what is to come. We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything written about the Son of Humanity by the truth-tellers of long ago will be lived into reality. For the Son of Humanity will be betrayed into the hands of the Romans and will be beaten, bruised and broken; they will torment and torture him into death, but on the third day he will be raised into life." Jesus spoke these words clearly, but the disciplined followers were confused. Jesus spoke plainly, and they were perplexed as to what he might mean.

*This is The Compassion, and
The Compassion is like this.⁶⁹*

*Not greater than Jesus is in this humiliation.
Not more glorious than Jesus is in this self-surrender.
Not more powerful than Jesus is in this helplessness.
Not more divine than Jesus is in this humanity.*

*The divine reversal—
creativity turning upside-down and inside-out,*

*creating both for lawless and law-abiding,
creating love where there is hate,
creating freedom where there is oppression,
creating the Way that triumphs over death.*

God, it's me. I have something the Twelve did not: I know the full story. I have read the ending and know both the tragedy and transformation that is to come. It is the tragedy that remains something of a mystery to me. Why did Jesus have to die? What is the necessity

of redemptive suffering? Why plunge into the depths merely to ascend into the heights of heaven itself? I understand this cycle of death and resurrection on a cognitive level—I do! Yet my entire adult life has been spent seeking deeper insight into its mystery; I long to appreciate fully its beauty and majesty. O Compassion, I believe—help my unbelief!

Luke 18:35-43

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man sat by the road and begged. Hearing a large number of people passing by the blind beggar asked what was happening. Folks told him, "Jesus, from the city of Nazareth, is walking this way." Immediately, the beggar shouted out to Jesus using the political phrase referring to Messiah, "Jesus, Son of David, mercy! Pour mercy out on me!"

Those standing in front of the beggar snarled their rebuke, "Shut up you coot!"

But the beggar, desperate for Jesus, shouted with even greater fury, "JESUS, SON OF DAVID, MERCY! POUR YOUR MERCY ON ME!"

Jesus stopped; he commanded that the blind man be led to him. "What is this deep desire you would have me fulfill for you?" Jesus asked.

"Sovereign," replied the man, "I desire to see."

And so, Jesus said to him, "Then see. Your trust has made you whole." At that instant, the man saw Jesus, followed him and burst into a song of praise. The people, when they saw all this, united their voices together to form a choir singing The Compassion's praise.

*Fluorescent light hums down upon the linoleum,
creating splotches of glare on the pattern chosen for
being utterly inoffensive and easy to clean.*

*Muted voices utter platitudes lost in a haze of
anxiety and waiting for someone to
speak good news.*

Is that the doctor?

*No, only a staffer, returning an insurance card to
the frail 80-something who sits alone.*

*We all sit alone,
even the families chatting amongst themselves,
who, though together, each clutch their own fear.*

⁶⁹ The first stanza is quoted from Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 295.

Jesus, mercy!

Pour your mercy upon me!

Pour your mercy upon us all!

God, it's me. I'm a little embarrassed by the blind beggar. He seems so desperate! I confess that it has been a long time since I have been that desperate for you. Have I ever been that desperate? I confess that my embarrassment with the blind beggar comes from another source as well: where is the decorum? Where is the reserve? Doesn't he know how impolite it is to shout, to be so forthcoming with his needs? Isn't he "oversharing"? Or is the blind beggar the only one who sees you clearly, precisely because he is desperate. While others see you according to your human origins as Jesus of Nazareth, he sees you according to your Messianic title as Jesus, Son of David. O Compassion, give me the courage to recognize my own need, to be not ashamed of the knowledge that I need you to save me. Teach me to see you for who you are: my Savior, my only hope. Make me desperate for you, Jesus, Son of David.

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus approached Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. A man named Zacchaeus lived there; he was the chief tax collector, which meant that he helped the Romans take money from his fellow Israelites. As a tax-collector, he was, of course, very rich.

Zacchaeus wandered outside of town⁷⁰ with the rest of the crowd who wanted to see Jesus, but he could not see over the crowd because he was a short man. So, Zacchaeus ran ahead of Jesus to a sycamore tree and climbed up into one of its branches. When Jesus passed the tree, he saw Zacchaeus and said to him, "Zacchaeus, scurry on down. I have come to abide in your home today." Zacchaeus scampered down and welcomed Jesus with joy.

When the crowd around Jesus saw what happened, they grumbled and grinched, "This holy man seeks out one of our oppressors!" Zacchaeus stood before Jesus, humbled: "Half of all that I have I will share with the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I will return to them four times what I have taken." (This amount was far greater than

required by Torah, which required an additional one-fifth be returned.⁷¹) Jesus looked at Zacchaeus and said to the crowd, "Today The Compassion's wholeness has been restored to this home, and *shalom* has been placed upon it, for he too is a child of Abraham and Sarah. The Son of Humanity came to seek for the broken and make them whole, to look for and to love the lost."

"Reparations" sparks controversy

in a country whose wealth was built by the whip.

Why should kings hand over their treasures?

Why should soldiers give up their pillage?

Must Zacchaeus' guilty conscious be my template?

I have shown you, O Mortal, what is good

and what The Compassion requires of you:

to do justice,

to love mercy,

to walk humbly.⁷²

Next question.

Jesus, it's me. You noticed Zacchaeus as he sat, like a fool, in a tree—a grown man balancing on a branch, a desperate to know the possibility of hope. You noticed because you love the lost and came to seek the broken—people such as me when I am far from you, such as him or her or us when we do not live as our best selves. Jesus, you noticed Zacchaeus and restored him to his spiritual family, to that place where provision is shared with the poor and greed is reversed through restitution—where you, Jesus, are welcomed with joy.

Luke 19:11-28

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, he told a parable to those traveling with him who thought The Compassion was going to bring back King David's rule and the Romans would be kicked out of Israel at any moment. Jesus said, "A man who came from a royal family went into a far country to receive his crown and then return. The ruler called in ten servants and gave them each about three months' wages, saying, 'Invest this money and use it to carry out my business until I return.' But the citizens of that country, who hated

into town. This passage foreshadows (and bookends) the triumphal entry at the end of the chapter.

⁷¹ c.f. Leviticus 6:5.

⁷² c.f. Micah 6:8.

⁷⁰ The text does not explicitly reference where this meeting took place. However, Israelites considered sycamore trees a scrub tree and did not allow them within city limits. It was a common practice for crowds to go out of town to meet a "great man" and escort him

the ruler, sent a group to the far country to protest his rule, saying, 'We don't want this man to rule over us.'

"When the ruler returned with his crown, he called in the servants, saying, 'What have you done with my money?' The first servant said, 'I doubled it!' 'Well done, good servant!' replied the ruler. 'You have been faithful with a little, so now I will trust you with a lot: take charge of ten cities.' The second servant said, 'I increased your money fifty percent!' 'Way to go, good servant! I will trust you to take charge of five cities,' replied the ruler. Then a third servant came forward, saying, 'Master, here is your money without a penny lost. I kept it wrapped nice and neat in a napkin. You see, I was afraid because you have a reputation for being a hard man with high standards who hates poor performance.' 'Then I will judge your performance by your very own words,' said the ruler. 'You knew, did you, that I was a hard man who expects great things from others? Then why didn't you at least put my money in a bank where it could gather interest?' Then the ruler said to those standing around him, 'Take this man's money and give it to the first servant.' Those standing around said to him, 'But, Master, he already has so much?' 'I tell you the truth,' said the ruler, 'no risk means no reward; if you do not gather you cannot gain. As for those who rejected my rule, treat them like my enemies.'" After Jesus told this parable, he went directly up to Jerusalem.

The preacher looked upon the cavernous sanctuary speckled with 27 parishioners. Ascending the pulpit's six steps seemed silly amidst so sparse a crowd.

Summoning courage and conviction her gaze alighted upon the young mother bedazzled by two, wiggly children on either side of her. What shall she say to her little lambs?

In the back row, she noticed a man adorned in humiliation, whose current sobriety was an open question. What shall she say to her little lambs?

*Clearing her throat, she said: "The Lord be with you!"
"And also with you!"
"Lift up your hearts!"
"We lift them to the Lord!"*

Dear Jesus,

How I long to hear you say, "Well done, good servant!" I blush in anticipation of showing you what I have done to further your work in this world: I hope it will be enough! I know that it can only be enough if I trust you, so give me courage enough to take risks, to try new challenges, and to invest all that I am—even my own life—for the sake of your work in the world. I believe that you will return one day to claim the rule that is rightfully yours: I pray that I will be ready for that day. I know that I will be ready if only my faithfulness to you is even a dim reflection of your faithfulness to me.

Yours truly,
Me

Luke 19:29-40

As Jesus drew near to Bethphage and Bethany on the outskirts of Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciplined followers into a village, saying, "Go into the village. There you will find a young donkey tied up upon which no one has ever sat. Untie the donkey and bring it. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying the donkey?' say to them, 'The Compassion needs it.'"

As the disciplined followers were untying the donkey, its owners asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

They answered, "The Compassion needs it."

Then the disciplined followers brought the donkey to Jesus; they threw their coats over the animal and then set Jesus on its back. As Jesus rode the donkey, people began to treat the occasion like a victory parade, for indeed Jesus' actions were similar to the way Judas Maccabeus celebrated the Jewish victory over the Greek armies.⁷³ The crowd threw their coats in front of the donkey, giving Jesus the red-carpet treatment. They burst into praise and sang songs of thanksgiving to The Compassion at the top of their lungs for all the wonderful works they had seen with their own eyes. They shouted out to Jesus, "Deep joy is received from the Sovereign who comes, who reflects The Compassion's image! Peace! Peace! Glory in the highest heaven!"

politician today standing in a boat while soldiers row him or her across the Delaware. We would recognize the reference.

⁷³ The reference to the Maccabean victory is not in the Greek text but added to provide interpretive context. Jesus' 1st century observers would have recognized the similarities; akin to a

Some of the Intense in the crowd were horrified: “Teacher,” they scolded Jesus, “tell the people to stop! Demand they shut up!”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, if these men and women here were silent, those stones over there would weep with joy and their voice you could not shut-up nor shut-down.”

*Political rallies,
breeding ground for idolatry:
mixing nationalism and messianism equals a
dangerous brew.*

*What “unintended consequence” do we create as
little children parade around the sanctuary
holding palm leaves aloft
singing “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna.”*

*I have learned idolatry’s lesson well,
nurtured as I am in mixing dangerous brews,
nourished now by the conviction that
my guy (it’s seems to always be a guy) is THE guy.*

*I wonder how surprised the crowds were to
learn Jesus of Nazareth was not like Judas Maccabeus.*

*How quickly their cheering turned to jeering upon
discovering he planned not to vanquish the Romans.*

*How desperate the betrayal to discover that, all along,
Jesus’ plan was to vanquish their own hearts.*

God, it’s me. Praise! Praise! Joyful praise to you, Jesus the Anointed! For victory over the Accuser and its destruction, praise! For victory over death and the grave, praise! For victory over the devastation of sin, praise! For your willingness to empty yourself of the rights and privileges of heaven, praise! For your willingness to take on the form of a servant, even mortal flesh, praise! For your willingness to endure death, even death on a cross, praise! For your light that would not let us descend into darkness, praise! For your love that would not let us go, praise! For your life that will lead us to live with you forever, praise! Praise! Praise! Joyful praise to Jesus the Anointed!

Luke 19:41-44

When Jesus saw Jerusalem, he wept over it. He cried out to its children, “If only you had been willing to know the *shalom* The Compassion longs to give you! But now it is hidden from you. The days will come when your enemies will surround you and storm your walls; your enemies will overcome and overwhelm you. Then you will be destroyed, bit by bit, from the ground up. And why? Because you refused to accept the moment of The Compassion’s personal visit to you.”

*Callously he kneeled upon a man’s neck.
Tick-tock.
Ignoring the passing of time until
time stopped and rage ignited.*

*Years of failed plans could not deter
seeking again and again and again, for
they only needed to succeed one time.
Tick-tick, BOOM! And rage ignited.*

*The Creator’s eyes moisten, despite
some theologians saying such cannot be,
but the angels bear witness to the moment that
seems eternal.*

*Jerusalem, O Jerusalem!
New York, O New York!
Kyiv, O Kyiv!
Jakarta, O Jakarta!*

God, it’s me. Great sorrow is in Jesus’ heart and upon his lips! Sorrow for lost opportunities and lonely souls, sorrow for senseless killing and wanton destruction, sorrow for those who refuse to know your great love for them. O Jesus, great sorrow is in your heart and upon your lips! Sorrow that you could not prevent them from desiring hate and violence and war, sorrow that you could not bring them the peace you so desire to give, sorrow that you could not protect your children from themselves. O Compassion, what can I do that you have not? Great sorrow is in my heart and upon my lips! And so I pray, so I advocate, so I take to the streets in non-violent protest! What more can I do?

Luke 19:45-48

Jesus' sadness transitioned to anger. Jesus was in Jerusalem and went to the Temple. What he witnessed there led him to create chaos by knocking over tables and forcing out those who sold the animals for sacrifice at inflated prices. He shouted at them, "The Word is clear: 'My house will be a place of prayer,' but you have turned it into a casino!"⁷⁴

Jesus taught in the Temple every day even though the Intense and Scrupulous were seeking a way to assassinate him. But they couldn't do anything while Jesus was in the Temple because the people listened with honest desire to his every word.

*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
thou was once a little child.*⁷⁵

*Activism is devotion.
Advocacy is ethics.*

*Christian children all should be,
Mile, obedient, good as He.*⁷⁶

*When prayer is not enough,
take to the streets.*

Jesus my Friend, your passion is startling to the "proper," your zeal for holiness more than a bit unsettling. You challenge my every notion of decorum. Jesus my Savior, cleanse me of every reserved and restrained, pompous and pretentious, self-conscious and self-absorbed desire I bring to my time alone with you. Jesus my Sovereign, create in me a life of prayer that is God-centered, God-dependent, God-hungry-n-thirsty, and God-filled that your dwelling within me may be a place of prayer.

Luke 20:1-8

One day Jesus was teaching in the garden area outside of the Temple and telling people about the realm of Sovereign love. The Intense and Scrupulous, along with the Old Ones, approached Jesus with a trap: "Tell us," they

demanded, "who gave you the authority to speak and act as you do?"

Jesus answered, "Let me ask you a question: Was John's baptism and baptismal message a word from The Compassion, or did he just make it up on his own?"

Now the Intense and Scrupulous were stuck. They huddled together: "If we say John's works and words were from The Compassion, he will ask us why we didn't trust John and follow the path he showed us. If we say John was acting on his own, the people will riot because they think John was a straight-talking truth-teller—The Compassion's mouthpiece. Either way, we can't win." So, they refused to answer Jesus' question. Jesus responded, "Then neither will I play your little game of cat-n-mouse."

*The throb behind my eyes pounds ever harder.
Waves of fatigue bombard my spirit (and body).
Sleep comes too quickly yet is never sufficient.*

*I Am. So Damn. Tired of. The Gaslighting!
Make it stop, O Compassion!
Make it stop!*

*I long for the days of
straight-talking John and wily Jesus,
who yet always said what was needful.*

*Administer to me, O Compassion, the antidote to this
epidemic of obfuscation, now confirmed to be
far deadlier than a mere virus.*

God, it's me. There will always be those who want to challenge, to question, to trick, and I need not engage them in confrontation. There will always be those who refuse to accept, to trust, to follow, and I need not follow their example. O Compassion, there will always be those who do not, will not, cannot hear the Story of your Sovereign Love, but I need to hear it in full, for John's message is spoken to us all: "Turn around! Turn around!"

Luke 20:9-19

While still in the outer gardens of the Temple, Jesus told the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and hired several employees to work and manage

⁷⁴ c.f. Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.

⁷⁵ Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*: "Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild," 1742.

⁷⁶ Cecil Frances Alexander, *Hymns for Little Children*: "Once in Royal David's City," 1848.

the land. Then, the owner left the country on a long trip. From time to time the owner sent his representatives to collect any receipts the employees had gathered, but the employees beat the owner's representatives and sent them packing empty handed. The same routine happened several times. Finally, frustrated about the situation and tired of the harassment, the owner sent his son to collect the vineyard receipts. 'Surely,' he thought, 'this mob running my vineyard will treat my son with respect; surely they will know better than to abuse him too.' But when the employees saw the son, their madness multiplied: 'Let's kill him!' they all shouted. 'All that belongs to the owner we'll grasp for ourselves!' And they killed the son. What do you think the owner will do to his employees? Right! He will destroy these wicked men and give—not sell, not lease, but give—his vineyard to others, entrusting them to nurture and care for the vineyard.”

When the people heard Jesus' words, they responded, “Incredible! Astounding! Atrocious! We can't believe anyone would abuse the vineyard owner's son in this way!”

“Oh, no?” came the reply from Jesus. “Then why does the Scripture say, ‘the stone the builders rejected has become the foundation upon which The Compassion's house is built’? Everyone who falls on the stone will be broken to pieces, and if it falls on any one they will be crushed.”

The Intense and Scrupulous seethed. They yearned to have Jesus arrested on the spot because they knew the parable was about them. But they did nothing at the time because they were afraid of the people.

Madness multiplies.

Biblical plagues in modern dress around every corner.

Violence toward children, violence by children, violence, violence, violence!

And the madness multiplies more and more!

Where is your Son, O Compassion?

Madness multiplies and we know it not.

Numb we are, callous of soul and twisted of thought.

Maybe it's just a drug induced stupor,

or Netflix induced apathy.

And the madness multiplies more and more!

Where is Jesus?

How can I call you Savior?

You who allow the vineyard to be ruined.

You who allow yourself to be run off to a cross.

You who didn't (or couldn't) stop the madness!

Where are you, Son of The Compassion?

How can I call you Sovereign?

You who give the vineyard to me.

You who entrust it to my care.

*You who expect me to confront the madness—
to fight against the madness,*

to stop the madness in your name!

Where are you, Jesus?

You are with me.

*Jesus, the madness is too much for me—
without you.*

God it's me. I long to be a good steward—a faithful servant—of what you have entrusted to me. I seek to make wise choices based on my core, ethical values. I try to discern the wisdom and leading of your Spirit. O Compassion, all that I have comes from you! May I use it well—to your glory, to your honor, to your praise! O Compassion, I don't want to be just another employee in your vineyard but someone you trust. I long to be enfolded into your family, as your beloved.

Luke 20:20-26

The Intense and Scrupulous continued their plotting against Jesus, for they wanted to trick Jesus into saying something that would get him in trouble with the Roman authorities. They sent their spies to Jesus posed as honest seekers. The spies tried to flatter Jesus, “Rabbi, we know you shoot straight when you teach about The Compassion. Is it moral to pay taxes to Caesar, to the Roman government?”

But Jesus sensed the deceit of their hearts and said to them, “Show me a coin. Look at the face on the coin. Whose image⁷⁷ is that?”

The spies answered, “It is Caesar's image.”

So, Jesus said to them, “Give Caesar's image to Caesar, but give to The Compassion the image that belongs

⁷⁷ The Greek word used in this passage that translates as “image” is *eikon*. Jesus is using *eikon* as a play on words to refer to Genesis 1:27 where humanity is created in The Compassion's image.

to Them.” Stunned by his answer, the spies were speechless and knew that Jesus was too clever for them to trick.

The question is put to me daily: Caesar or God?

*Will I define myself by
culture or covenant?*

*Will I respond with more urgency to
secular suggestions or Christ’s commandments?*

*Will I worship at the altar of
democratic tolerance or divine obedience?*

To whom will I bow today?

God it’s me. In the world of “Two Cities,”⁷⁸ it is difficult to discern how to live in the City of God while visiting the City of Humankind. In a world where you have entrusted rule to Caesar, it is hard to know where the boundary is between Caesar’s entrusted Rule and your inalienable Right, to know where the limits of Caesar’s power stops in a world where your Providence stands forever. O Compassion, grant me wisdom to understand what Caesar is due; grant me courage to give you your due. May I give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give to you the glory and honor, the faith and obedience, the discipline and devotion, the laughter, love and life due your name. May I give you myself—created in your image to glorify you and enjoy you forever.⁷⁹

Luke 20:27-40

Some of the Elite—who didn’t accept resurrection to eternal life—approached Jesus with a question, “Rabbi, Moses taught in the law that if a married man dies without children, then his oldest brother must marry the wife and try to have children with her, for the sake of the brother. Now, what if a family of seven brothers each married the same woman in turn and none of them could give her children, whose wife would she be in the resurrection?”

Jesus answered, “Your argument is based on a false assumption: no one marries in the resurrected life. Marriage is a big deal here in this life, but in the resurrected life, all intimacies will be with The Compassion. We will be like the celestial messengers and live in communion with the Divine and perfect community with one another. If you can imagine it, (and maybe you cannot), marriage will be no big deal. So don’t worry about marriage.

“Now, as I sort through your sophistry, your question is really about the resurrection, so let me respond to that. Moses, when he stood before the burning bush, heard The Compassion say, “I am the Holy One of Abraham, the Holy One of Isaac, and the Holy One of Jacob.” To say someone is the Holy One rather than was the Holy One means the person is alive, for The Compassion is Sovereign over the living not the dead. We are all alive to The Compassion, even those who have fallen asleep in this life.”

Some of the Scrupulous were impressed: “You have spoken well.” And, for a time, people stopped asking Jesus questions. They didn’t dare.

*When religion becomes a college debate,
when faith gets distorted into a courtroom drama,
when ethics are learned on the back of a cereal box,
I feel we have somehow lost the narrative*

*of justice and joy dancing the God-rhythms,
of shalom opening a door for wholeness,
of the God-life embracing us into eternity.
This narrative is too important to lose.*

God, it’s me. Do the angels laugh heartily when they hear my questions or only get a good chuckle? How limited are my concerns, how finite my perspective? Teach me, O Compassion, to remember the foundation: a living faith in the Living One. Show me the ways I fall short of living the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Gift to me trust that lives beyond this life and into the next, where I will live with you and all your people in the glorious presence of Jesus, the resurrected.

both cities ultimately belong to The Compassion, who is Sovereign over creation. Therefore, the government only has provincial rule over the City of Humankind, and it is the Church’s moral responsibility to serve as prophetic conscience when government strays into injustice and harm of its people.

⁷⁹ c.f. The Westminster Catechism, Question and Answer #1.

⁷⁸ The “Doctrine of the Two Cities” was coined by St. Augustine in the 4th century: God ruled the sacred, the “City of God” (through the Roman Catholic Church), while the government (which in Augustine’s day was the Roman Empire) ruled the secular “City of Man” (sic). The Reformer Martin Luther affirmed Augustine’s distinction; however, John Calvin, Luther’s fellow Reformer, revised the “Doctrine of the Two Cities” to clarify that

Luke 20:41 – 21:4

Having fended off everyone's attempts to trick him, Jesus showed that he too could play the game of theological cat-n-mouse. He asked the Elite and the Intense this: "Here's one for you. How can people say the Anointed is David's son? David himself says in the Psalms, 'The Sovereign said to my Sovereign, sit on my right until I put your enemies under your feet.' How can the Anointed be both David's son and David's Sovereign at the same time?" Then Jesus laughed a hearty laugh before getting serious again.

He turned to his disciplined followers and said to them in front of all the people, "Be careful. The Scrupulous like to run around rich, looking important and being honored. They try to impress others with their long, self-indulgent prayers, but they don't impress The Compassion! They're fooling themselves if they think They are impressed."

Just then Jesus saw rich folks giving their gifts in the collection plate. Then Jesus saw a poor widow put in a couple of pennies, probably her last two. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, that poor widow over there has given more than all these other folks. These other folks gave what they had to give; they won't miss what they gave at all. But she gave what she could not afford to give. She gave her all!"

*The echo chamber is quite full today;
it's getting crowded in here—
too many a *holes for just one opinion.*

*"The person must be rescued
from the individual."⁸⁰*

*I claw my way to the exterior door but find it locked.
I set fear down gently (Goodbye, Old Friend),
open the window and climb through it.*

*"The individual does not think;
he secretes cliches."⁸¹*

*I wonder, as a person:
Can I rescue myself from the collective?
Is community an achievement or a gift?⁸²*

*"I wonder if there are twenty men alive in the world now
who see things as they really are."⁸³*

God, it's me. I praise you for your wisdom that is above all human wisdom. Help me to see and perceive it. I revere you for your Providence that crafted mercy and love before the beginning of creation. Help me to embrace and accept it. I glory in the greatness you have, the grandeur you reveal, the grace you share with all your people. Deepen my contemplation of your mercy and love—enacted upon us from before the beginning of time—that I may dance the God-rhythms of your God-life into eternity.

Luke 21:5-38

As Jesus gathered with crowds of people in the Temple courts, he noticed how they admired the elaborate artistry and gorgeous gifts people had given to beautify the Temple. Jesus told them, "What you see all around you is as nothing; it is rubble and pebbles waiting to happen. In time, all this will disappear."

The people responded, "Teacher, how will we know when this will happen? What sign should we be looking for?"

Jesus replied, "Watch, be aware, and take care that others do not deceive you. Many will proclaim doom and gloom and say, 'Only I can save you,' and 'The end is near!' but do not follow such charlatans. You will hear of wars and riots, but do not fear. These things are merely human brokenness spilling itself on to the ground, but it is not the end."

Then Jesus told them, "Nation will fight against nation, power against power. There will be fear inducing trauma all over the planet; it will seem as if heaven itself has unleashed its Voice like a baby's wailing.

"Even before all this happens, authorities will arrest you—take you in to take you down. Torment and torture at the hands of powers both sacred and secular will befall you because of me. It's not about you; it's about Me! Fear not. Instead, choose now to let me speak for you then. Trust now that I will speak through you then with words and wisdom beyond what you know: words rooted in truth,

⁸⁰ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (New Directions: Cambridge, MA), 38. Merton's uses the dichotomy of true self and false self, and extends the dichotomy to include person vs. individual as well as authentic community vs. mere collective.

⁸¹ Merton, 55.

⁸² Merton, 55.

⁸³ Merton, 203.

wisdom embedded in love that cannot fail you. You will be betrayed by all sorts of people: parents, brothers and sisters, aunt and uncles, friends. And some of you will be put to death. It's not about you; it's about Me! Fear not. You are known and named. So, stand firm to discover The Compassion's has got you. Stand firm to discover the God-life!

"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by soldiers: Think! It is about to be destroyed. Run fast and hard to the mountains. Get out of town quick. Whatever you do, don't go into the city, for the Day of Destruction is upon her walls and upon her people. How horrible it will be, especially for expectant mothers and nursing mothers. There will be hardship and anger everywhere: swords slicing, prisoners taking, hunger threatening mass starvation, city trampling destruction. And the Roman soldiers that invade Jerusalem will show no mercy until no mercy can be shown.

"It will seem like Hell has erupted on earth—sun, moon and stars, earth, sea and sky, shaken as if to their roots, seemingly ready to crumble even as Jerusalem crumbled. Panic will be pervasive, trust will be tossed aside. But then! Then! Then will all people see the Son of Humanity coming in glory, returning in the strength of Sovereign love. When you see these things happening, stand tall and stand strong, chin up and head held high, for the kin-dom is about to be revealed in all fullness."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Check out a fig tree or any tree for that matter. Trees reveal to us signs of the seasons: when its leaves sprout, Summer is near. Likewise, when you see the signs I have told you about, know that the realm of Sovereign love is about to be revealed, nothing hidden, all fully known. I speak the truth to you and to all generations: You cannot avoid this full and complete unveiling of my words. Heaven and earth may disappear over the ages, but my words will live for eternity. So be careful. Watch and wait. Wait and watch. Be alert and aware. Live in an awareness of the God-life among you and the God-life within you. Avoid a lifestyle of scattered showers of drunkenness followed by parched days of anxiousness; such a lifestyle is a trap, an always lethal trap. The only way out of this trap is to live from a God-center, to live trusting my words: All will be held account for their actions; no one will escape, but you will be well. So, live with the Son of Humanity now that you may stand before him then."

Each day during this last week of his life, Jesus taught in the Temple. Every evening, he went out to spend the night on the Mount of Olives. The next morning the people were back, wanting to hear Jesus, ready for more.

*A mother in Gaza hears Jesus' words—
she knows they are about her and her family.*

*A father huddles in a frozen hedge in Ukraine—
he tries to hide from the fear that stalks him.*

*I try to be aware of micro-aggressions and
alert to triggers that provoke trauma—
I do not want them to defeat me.*

*I try to stand firm for The Compassion and
stay aware of the God-life among and within me—
I keep getting distracted!*

*I try and I try and I cannot and cannot—
only can I trust that when I cannot you already have
completely, utterly, and absolutely.*

Rest well, O my soul, rest well.

God, it's me. Like a child in bed on a stormy night so am I when hearing Jesus' words: "apocalyptic" others call these words. "Strange," "incomprehensible," and "fearful," I call them. Yet, one thing is clear: I trust you. The world may vanish, but you will remain. Human brokenness may indeed spill itself upon the ground, but your Son has spilled his blood upon the same ground, and upon the depth of his love I will stand, with his love all will be well and all manner of things will be well now and then and into eternity. O Compassion, create within me a confidence that cannot be broken though the whole world is shaken. Cultivate within me a faith that cannot forget your love and will not fear others' hate. Claim me as your own child that I may one day stand in the hour of trial, as I will one day stand with you in the Day of your eternity.

Luke 22:1-23

The Day of Passover was approaching, and the Elite and Scrupulous were searching for a way to destroy Jesus because they were threatened by the people's love for him. Then the Accuser went to live within Judas Iscariot, who was one of Jesus' twelve, core followers. Judas went to the leader of the Elite as well as the officers of the Temple police. Judas schemed with them ways he could betray Jesus. They were delighted to give Judas money for his betrayal. And Judas affirmed his evil intent. Judas searched

for an opportunity to betray Jesus in the secret of darkness, where the crowd would not witness.

Thursday of that week was the Day of Passover. The Passover feast required a perfect lamb be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John into town, “Go prepare our Passover feast.”

“Where should we prepare it?” they asked.

Jesus replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jug of water will be waiting for you. Follow him. The man will lead you to a house, and you are to say to the owner of that house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room where I will eat the Passover feast with my followers?’ The owner of the house will show you a large, upper room that will have everything there that you need to prepare the Passover feast.” Peter and John left and found that Jesus’ words had preceded them. They prepared the Passover feast.

When it was time for the Passover feast to begin, Jesus and his sent ones relaxed around the table. Jesus looked at his friends and said, “I have wanted to experience this moment with all my heart, to share this Passover feast with you before I suffer. I will not eat another Passover feast until the perfect freedom to which this meal points is unveiled in all fullness, according to the purpose of The Compassion’s Sovereign love. Taking a cup of wine, Jesus thanked The Compassion and said to his friends, “Share this among yourselves, for I tell you the truth that I will not share any more in this fellowship of the vine until the realm of Sovereign love is fully unveiled.

Then Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, broke it, and gave it to his disciplined followers, saying, “This is my body broken for you; do this to remember and evoke an experience of my presence with you.” In the same manner, Jesus took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant—the sacred promise of love that will not let you go—it is the promise made through my blood, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sin.”

Jesus continued, “The hand of my betrayer is with mine at this table. The Son of Humanity will be killed as it has been decided by The Compassion’s Sovereign purpose, but sorrow and sadness beyond comprehension will accompany my betrayer forever.” Jesus’ disciplined followers immediately erupted in gossip and accusation as they wondered who among them could do such a thing!

I have broken

Hawaiian sweet bread and Scottish short bread,

Russian black bread and Rwandan Ola-Ola,

Japanese rice cakes and Mexican tortillas—

from the four corners of the earth, your self-giving is

*remembered, re-member-ed,
and, somehow, through our membering,
you are felt, known, experienced.
We rejoice and are renewed.*

*I have poured
thick red wine and watery Welch’s,
and, when nothing else was available,
cranberry juice from the retreat center fountain—
all that was poured out was poured from the
depths and breadth of your love,
that will not let us go,
that shapes and forms and transforms us
into your blessing in the world.*

*May our living be a part of
the life of your kin-dom.*

*May our loving be your love reaching into
the life of your world.*

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God,
have mercy upon us.

Lord Jesus, Perfect Sacrifice,
have mercy upon us.

Lord Jesus, Savior of the World,
grant us your peace.

Great is the Mystery of faith;
deep is the wonder of Sovereign love.

Certain is the Divine purpose;
the surety of love that will not let us go.

It will not change;
it cannot be moved.

Luke 22:24-38

Then Jesus’ friends began to argue about who was the greatest, the most important, who should be in charge when Jesus was gone, and he hadn’t even left! Jesus looked at them in amazement and said, “Presidents seek power and Generals seek control and both pretend their authority is for others’ good. But no one believes their nonsense, and no one will believe you if you seek power and control in that way. You are to be different; you are to live differently. Sure, we would all like to be served rather than wait on tables, but I, your Teacher, am at the Table as your servant. Live according to my example. You have stood by me in tough times, don’t quit now. One day, you will experience The Compassion’s Sovereign love in full. One day, you will be

served by the celestial messengers, while you sit at table surrounded by the fullness of The Compassion's Sovereign love. One day, you will even judge the twelve tribes of Israel according to the fullness of Sovereign love. All this will be yours; this is my sacred promise to you today.

"Simon, Simon, even tougher times are ahead, especially for you. The Accuser is seeking your soul; he wants to separate you from me, like a farmer separates chaff from wheat. Courage, Simon! I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail completely. You will fall, but your trust will not fail. So, after you fall and have returned to the God-life, allow your woundedness to become a source of strength for your friends."

Peter was horrified: "Me, fall? Never! I am ready and willing to go all the way, even to prison, even to death!"

"Peter," Jesus answered, "the truth is you will deny me. Mark my words: before the rooster crows once you will deny me three times."

Then Jesus addressed all his followers: "When I sent you out without supplies, did you lack anything?"

"Nothing," they answered.

Jesus continued, "But now the situation is different; you will need to be well stocked and prepared for the work to which The Compassion sends you—dressed for the journey, even armed for the fight. Don't take any short-cuts on your preparation, for the hour of darkness has come when what the Word declared comes alive in your presence: 'He was considered a criminal.'⁸⁴ This will happen to me. Indeed, all that the Word says about me is coming alive as we speak."

Jesus' disciplined followers declared with bravado, "Sovereign, we have two swords."

"Enough!" Jesus silenced them, "let there be no more talk of swords."

*Thomas Merton, mystic and saint,
said the greatest monk could blend perfectly into
the choir of communion and community—
their true self disappearing into love.*

*I look upon my passions for ego and glory—
Merton would be disgusted.
I search in vain for applause and adulation—
my false self delights.*

*My true self—the true person chosen
from before the beginning of time and
embraced even after the end of all things—
must surrender the individual I celebrate
that I may be embraced in community.*

*Me and thee and we—
dancing the God-rhythms together.
Saints and sinners and servants all—
entwined in the God-life forever.*

God, it's me. I rejoice in the knowledge of your sacred promise to me that I will one day sit with you at Table, to hear your hearty laughter, to share in your joy. Your promise gives me hope; your sacred promise gives me the encouragement I need this day to serve others in your name. By your loving-kindness, make me a servant. Through your mercy upon me, make me like you until the realm of Sovereign love is unveiled in all its fullness, and I see you face to face—across the Table.

Luke 22:39-53

Jesus left the upper room in the city and went to the Mount of Olives, the hill that overlooked Jerusalem. His disciplined followers followed him there. Upon arriving, Jesus turned to his followers and said to them, "Pray that you do not fall to temptation." Then Jesus walked away about a stone's throw and dropped to his knees in prayer: "O Compassion, if you are willing, take this cup of sorrow from me, yet may your purpose rule this day." When Jesus stood up from his prayer, he returned to where his followers were waiting; they were asleep, exhausted. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" Jesus asked them. "Get up! Pray! Pray that you will not fall to temptation."

While Jesus was still talking a cloud of hate descended upon the mount, and Judas himself was leading a mob. Judas approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said, "Judas, do you offer a sign of love to seal your hateful deed? Will you betray the Son of Humanity with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what was happening, they descended into confusion, asking Jesus, "Rabbi, what should we do? Should we fight back?" One of Jesus' followers didn't wait for an answer; he took his sword and cut off the ear of the chief Ruler's servant.

⁸⁴ c.f. Isaiah 52:13c.

“Enough!” Jesus demanded. “There will be no more violence from us.” Jesus touched the servant’s ear and healed it.

Then Jesus turned to the Rulers and temple police as well as the Old Ones who were in attendance for this assault: “Am I leading a revolution that requires violence? Every day I was in plain view in the Temple, but you did not touch me. Truly this is your hour, the hour when darkness seems triumphant.”

*I recognize that mob,
encountered in church halls
and on my computer
where people seek to define the Divine will
by email and innuendo.*

*I am learning the hard lesson:
When conflict approaches at midnight
do not flee,
do not hide,
do not chase the setting sun.*

*The only Way forward is into the darkness,
to move toward the conflict,
to engage with my true self—clear, calm, consistent,
to “Go east”⁸⁵ into the darkness, and through it,
to the only place where I encounter the rising Son.*

God, it’s me. Not my will but your will be done. Not what I want but what you want accomplished. Not my work but what you create, redeem and sustain be in me, through me, for me and for all this day. Teach me, Jesus, to wait with you in your sorrow, to pray with others in their sorrow, to live with the world in its sorrow, for it cannot see the God-life through its darkness. May I learn to trust that the hour of darkness will pass, the dawn of your light will come, and the power of your love will triumph, for the world will see in you the Anointed, who makes all things new.

Luke 22:54-62

The Rulers had their cronies, the soldiers, arrest Jesus and lead him away to their leader, who was called the Chief Priest. Peter followed but kept a safe distance. Outside the leader’s home, the leader’s entourage and other

spectators gathered in the courtyard and built a fire. Peter was one of the spectators. A servant woman eyed Peter by the fire’s light. When she started to stare, Peter started to squirm. “You were with him,” the woman said to Peter.

But Peter denied Jesus, “I don’t know him!”

A little later someone else spoke up, “You are one of his followers.”

Again, Peter denied his Master, “I am not!”

An hour or so later still another accused Peter of trusting Jesus, saying, “You must be a follower for your accent sounds Galilean.”

Once again Peter denied Jesus, “I tell you I have no idea what you are talking about.” At that very moment, the rooster crowed. Jesus turned and looked into Peter’s eyes, and Peter remembered Jesus’ words: “You will deny me three times before the rooster crows.” Peter was shattered; he ran from the courtyard and wept bitterness.

*My emotions glide back and forth,
like the pendulum of a clock,
between fear and rage—
both a form of denial.*

*Fear evokes my silence.
Rage evokes my outburst.
Neither are the voice of conscience—
Paul’s “speak the truth in love.”⁸⁶*

*To stand for Jesus amidst culture wars,
enflamed by bravado and faux outrage,
allegedly seeking “purity” or “justice” yet
neglecting kindness and walking humbly.
Is this the new Way of Jesus?*

God, it’s me. How like Peter I can be! Oh, I may not be so stupidly direct in my denials but deny you I can; deny you I do. I may be subtle, but denial comes in many forms: embarrassed to share your good news Story with my friend; tolerance evoking silence rather than standing for truth; unwilling or unable to see how my lifestyle in this country withholds justice from the desperate poor in this and other countries. In all these ways, I deny that I know you. My cowardice shames me. Like Peter, I have fallen, yet by your loving-kindness my faith has not yet failed. O Compassion, like Peter, restore me to yourself and restore me to myself. Like

⁸⁵ Sittser, Gerald, *A Grace Disguised* (Audible). (Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI), 2021.

⁸⁶ c.f. Ephesians 4:15.

Peter, use my woundedness as the means toward becoming a source of strength for others.

Luke 22:63 – 23:25

The soldiers holding Jesus pushed him around, beat him with their fists, blind-folded and harassed him, saying, “If you know so much, tell us who just hit you!” The soldiers tormented Jesus throughout the night.

When day came darkness still ruled the moment, and the Rulers, Elite, and Intense gathered to convict Jesus. “Tell us,” they demanded, “are you the Anointed One?”

Jesus responded, “If I say who I am, you will not believe. If I ask you who I am, you will not answer. Having neither knowledge nor wisdom, let me help you: Know the Son of Humanity will sit next to The Compassion when the realm of Sovereign love is unveiled in its fullness.”

“So, you admit that you are The Compassion’s Anointed One?” they accused.

“Now you speak the truth,” Jesus answered.

“What more do we need to hear? We have heard what we want to hear.” The Elite convicted Jesus.

The entire mob dragged Jesus off to Pilate’s mansion; Pilate was the Roman Governor. The mob continued to accuse Jesus, saying, “This man corrupted our nation by keeping us from Roman ways and Roman reverence. He says that he is the Anointed One, a king.”

Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus responded, “You have said it.”

Pilate told the Rulers and the gathering crowd, “This man has committed no crime.”

But the Rulers were insistent, “He stirs up the people. He incites rebellion throughout the area, even up into Galilee.”

When Pilate heard this, he asked if Jesus was a Galilean because, if Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate could wash his hands of the affair because Galilee was Herod’s responsibility. When he heard that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent him to Herod. For his part, Herod was happy to see Jesus. Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time and hoped that Jesus would perform a parlor trick like some birthday party magician. Herod approached Jesus with questions, but Jesus remained silent. Enraged, the Rulers and Scrupulous hurled verbal assaults at Jesus. The soldiers pummeled and assaulted him. They abused and humiliated Jesus and returned him to Pilate wearing a mock “king’s robe.” Herod and Pilate became fast friends that day, whereas they had previously been rivals.

Pilate then called everyone together—Rulers, Elite, and Intense as well as a crowd of people. Pilate addressed them all: “You accuse this man of corrupting people, but neither I nor Herod can find anything wrong. He has done nothing that deserves death. I’ll tell you what, let me have my soldiers beat him senseless, really teach him a lesson, then I will release him.”

But no one would allow Pilate such softness; everyone shouted, “Kill him! Release Barabbas!” (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for causing riots and for murder.) Pilate was confused, he tried to reason with the crowds, but they would not relent and shouted even louder, “Crucify him! CRUCIFY HIM!”

A third time Pilate tried to reason with the crowds, “Why? This man has done nothing that deserves death. Trust me: my soldiers will beat him to within an inch of his life before I release him.” But the crowd would not relent, for they were possessed with a thirst for Jesus’ blood. Their desire for blood triumphed. Pilate submitted to their will. Pilate gave the order: crucifixion. As for Barabbas, Pilate released him for Jesus.

*Driving from San Antonio to western Colorado,
I missed the sign, and
continued straight rather than turn.
A small misjudgment with outsized consequences,*

*Like my ancestors who
committed genocide against Indigenous,
practiced slavery against Africans,
interned Japanese in their own country.*

*How is it that religious sentiment
enables hatred of one’s enemies,
perpetuates power at all costs,
rejoices in one’s thirst for vengeance?*

*When I found myself on the Front Range
a mountain range stood between me and my destiny:
either arduous journey up and over
or return journey reversing my missteps.*

*All because of one, missed sign—
the consequence of missing a single turn.*

God, it’s me. Into the chaos you speak; into the swirling chaos of death, you speak; into the heart of darkness, you speak your Word of Life: Jesus’ death is the path that leads to you. I do not understand the chaos, nor

why Jesus entered the swirl of death. Yet, help me to see my own weakness in Pilate's surrender, to hear my own voice in the shouts of the crowds, to confess my sin that made his sacrifice necessary. And then teach me to rejoice that Jesus' death, though necessary, was given freely.

Luke 23:26-46

The soldiers next dragged Jesus into the streets, where they grabbed a pilgrim named Simon, who had journeyed from Libya, and made him carry Jesus' cross. A large crowd walked behind and alongside Jesus, including some of the female followers who wept and wailed. Jesus turned to them, saying, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me but for yourselves and your children. The days will come when folks say, 'Lucky are the women who have no children! Lucky are the women who have never loved a little one!' The days will come when folks will pray for the mountain to crush them, pray for the hills to smother them, for such is the evil coming upon Jerusalem. If people commit such crimes when the tree lives and breathes, what will they do when it is dry and rotting?"

Two men, both criminals, joined Jesus in this festival of death. When the mob had come to a hill called "The Skull" the soldiers crucified Jesus in the middle between the two criminals. Jesus prayed, "O Compassion, forgive them, for they don't understand what they are doing." While Jesus prayed, the soldiers gambled to see who would get his clothes.

People stood around watching the spectacle; the Rulers jeered Jesus, taunting, "He saved others; let's see him save himself! Hey Anointed! Hey Chosen One! What's wrong, big man?"

Laughing, the soldiers joined in the fun, "Here, O Great King of Jews, is your cup," they said as they offered Jesus some sour wine as an anesthetic. They said this because "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" was written on a sign above Jesus' head.

Even one of the criminals who hung next to Jesus on the cross joined in mocking him, "What's wrong with this picture? If you are the Anointed, save yourself and us too!"

But the second criminal defended Jesus, "Don't you have any respect for The Compassion?" he asked the first criminal. "You will meet Them today just as I will and just as he will, but we are judged with justice. We are getting what we deserve! But not him. He is an innocent man." Turning to Jesus, the second criminal prayed, "Jesus,

remember me, when you receive your Sovereignty; remember me when you wear your crown of love."

Jesus assured him, "I tell you the truth: Today you will share my joy in paradise."

It was now high noon, and darkness had descended upon the entire country. For the next three hours, darkness triumphed. The curtain in the temple that divided the people from The Compassion's presence was torn in two. Jesus called out loudly, "O Compassion, into your hands I entrust my spirit." Then Jesus breathed his last breath.

*Impact came suddenly—jarring
the child's seat, straining
the restraints intended to keep him safe.*

*Fear invaded him as
the car rolled over and over, and
someone screamed as if underwater.*

*Disorientation descended upon Carlos—
even as the vehicle stilled.
The chorus of voices outside conveyed dread.*

*His mother wept.
His father was silent.
Carlos closed his eyes and slept.*

O Jesus, what have we done? To hear your passion is to experience a symbol of your pain, and it is almost unbearable to me! What must it have been like for you? I cannot and have no desire to imagine. I am far more comfortable keeping your passion at arm's length, doing anything but entering into your passion. Yet when I find the courage to enter into the experience of your passion, even if only in symbolic form, I find a strange, new sense, a feeling of well-being I did not expect. I discover a love so perfect, so divine, that it transforms all anguish into joy, all regret into righteousness, all sin into salvation that leads to service. O Jesus, what have you done? What are you doing?

Luke 23:47-56

When the Roman sergeant witnessed Jesus' death, he was filled with the wonder of awe and whispered in praise, "In truth and in love, this man was innocent!" The formerly jeering, taunting crowds were now silent. Having come to witness a spectacle, they returned home in deep

grief. Those who knew Jesus, both male and female, remained in the area to continue to witness what would happen next in this Story of sorrow.

One of the Rulers, a man named Joseph from the town of Arimathea, was a good and just man who had not affirmed—but rather argued against—Jesus’ death. Joseph was seeking the realm of Sovereign love for his life and for Israel. Joseph went to Pilate and requested permission to bury Jesus’ body with respect. Pilate granted him this permission. Joseph took Jesus’ body, wrapped it completely in cloth according to Jewish custom, and laid it in a cave that served as a tomb. It was Friday, the day before the Sabbath, so Joseph had to hurry and not all the preparations for burial, such as spices to delay the stench of death, were completed. The women, who had come with Jesus from Galilee, followed Joseph and witnessed how Jesus had been laid into the tomb. Then the women returned home to prepare spices and ointments for the body. But first they rested, in obedience to Torah, for it was the Sabbath.

Easter begins in death.

Before new life, the old dirge.

Before “He is risen!” he is laid in a tomb.

Easter reminds me: I must die in order to live.

Before “self-actualization,”⁸⁷

I must be crucified with Christ.⁸⁸

Before finding my life hidden with Christ in God,⁸⁹

I must die to self.⁹⁰

Easter invites me to live

where God-life is found,

where sorrow transforms into joy, and

what is laid in the tomb is not the end of our story.

God, it’s me. By your mercy, transform this spectacle of suffering into a vision of your victory—of love over hatred, of light over darkness, of life over death. By your gift of loving-kindness, transform this story of sorrow into a song of hope. By your pardon, transform the sight of such sin into the gaze of love. By your Spirit, make our hearts like those who witnessed Jesus’ death; fill us with the wonder of awe; teach us to whisper your praise; give us the courage to continue to witness what happens next in your Story.

Luke 24:1-12

The dawn of the first day of the week, in the beginning of the New Creation, the women walked to the tomb with spices they had prepared for Jesus, to complete the ritual of death. They discovered the large stone in front of the tomb was rolled away. Journeying into the tomb they found it empty and did not find the body of Jesus. While the women were pondering and confused about all this, two men, in clothes like lightning, came and stood by them. The women bowed in terror, but the men spoke to them that they might rise in trust: “Why do you seek the Living among the dead? Remember his words in Galilee: ‘the Son of Humanity must suffer, suffer long and suffer hard. And, yes, he must be killed, but on the third day be raised to life.’” The women remembered Jesus’ words and danced away from death to tell all of Jesus’ sent ones the Story of this new life. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and some other women told them the Story. But the sent ones did not believe; they could not conceive that such a Story could be true, to perceive the power of The Compassion to reverse the arc of death. Yet Peter got up and sprinted to the tomb. He bent down and entered the place of death to see only the death cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus. But Peter did not see Jesus. Confused and bewildered, Peter pondered what all this might mean.

There is a story—

apocryphal no doubt—

*about a pastor giving a children’s sermon on Easter,
the church filled with the scent of lilies.*

The pastor complemented a girl’s frilly dress.

*The girl responded, “Thank you, but my mama says,
‘It’s a b**** to iron.’”*

Hilarity ensued in the congregation.

*Pastor, cheeks reddened, tried to compose himself,
girl with a cheshire smile sparkled,
mom slinked lower in the pew—
she did not escape others’ side eye.*

*The hilarity of the apocryphal—not limited to Easter
but found in wakes and “celebrations of life,”
as if laughter is an ethical commodity and
smiles the bitcoin of modern spirituality.*

⁸⁷ Trappist monk Thomas Merton distinguished the individual from the person—public self from true self, ego unbounded versus eternally beloved.

⁸⁸ c.f. Galatians 2:20.

⁸⁹ c.f. Colossians 3:3.

⁹⁰ c.f. Romans 6:5.

*The hilarity of the Divine Comedy
seems more than can be told in three parts⁹¹
but consists in a single act and a singular one,
whose mysteries confuse and bewilder.*

And whose Story I must ponder.

Praise to you, O Morning Star. The grave could not defeat you; death could not hold you. And so, the promise of life is before me and before all whom you call; the gift of life awaits us. Praise to you, O Morning Star. Teach me this day to recognize all the ways I try to cover the stench of the grave with the spices of death. Show me this day how I pursue things that feed my ego but do not lead to the God-life. Give me this day the courage to let go of the spices of death to dance the God-rhythms with you eternally.

Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of New Creation, two disciplined followers were journeying to the village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were discussing all that had happened in Jerusalem when Jesus drew near and joined them, but they were prevented from discerning⁹² that it was Jesus. “What are you talking about?” Jesus asked.

They stopped and looked at Jesus in amazement. One of them, named Cleopas, asked, “You must be kidding? Are you the only one in Jerusalem who doesn’t know about what happened there these past few days?”

Jesus played cat-n-mouse with them, “What things?”

“The things about Jesus of Nazareth, of course!” they almost shouted. “Jesus was a truth-teller, bold and brave, powerful in word and work, God-centered and beloved by people. Our leaders, both secular and sacred, betrayed him, played judge and jury with him, then sentenced him to death by crucifixion. We had hoped that he would restore Sovereign love to Israel, take back Israel for The Compassion. Yes, and to confuse matters, it has been three days since all this happened and some of our women went to the tomb this morning but did not find

Jesus’ body. The women returned from the tomb telling the Story of having seen two celestial messengers who said that Jesus was alive! A couple of our friends went to the tomb to look around. Everything they saw was just like the women described, but there was no sign of Jesus.”

Jesus replied to them: “O you of little trust and less vision—hard-headed and hard-hearted! Don’t you get it? Don’t you understand that the Anointed had to suffer, suffer long and suffer hard, before he could enter into glory?” Then, beginning in the beginning, in Genesis, Jesus took the two Disciplined followers on a journey through the Scriptures; he revealed to them passage after passage after passage that referred to him.

As they approached the village of Emmaus, Jesus pretended to be going further, but the two Disciplined followers would have none of that, for night was approaching and walking on the road would be unsafe, especially alone! They exclaimed, “The day is almost over; the night is almost here. It’s not safe!” They insisted Jesus come home with them. So, Jesus abided with them.

When they were at table together, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to The Compassion, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciplined followers. In that moment, in the very instant, their eyes were opened, and they discerned it was Jesus—his presence they perceived.⁹³

Then Jesus disappeared from their sight. “Did not our hearts burn with fire as we talked? Were we not more alive as he opened the Scriptures to our understanding?”

Immediately the two disciplined followers arose⁹⁴ and returned to Jerusalem, even though it was night. They could not bear to wait; they had to tell others the Story. They finally found Peter, James, John, and the other disciplined followers in Jerusalem. These others had also experienced Jesus: “It is true! The Lord is risen! He appeared to Simon!” Then the two from Emmaus told the Story of their journey with Jesus and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

*I perceive danger in the dark of night—
empty streets, poorly lit,
a troubled neighborhood.*

⁹¹ Dante’s *Divine Comedy* was written in three parts: Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso.

⁹² Here in verse 16 and later in verse 31 (c.f. next note), Luke uses *epignosko*, which can be translated as “know, recognize, discern, experience, or perceive.” I chose to play with variations on discern and perceive as this is my post-Easter experience of encountering Jesus.

⁹³ See previous note.

⁹⁴ Luke used the verb *anistemi*, which in Luke 24:7 and 46 refers to Jesus’ resurrection. The disciplined followers didn’t merely “get up” from the table; there is a sense of resurrection life in their actions.

*I discern my vocational path—
education and gifts, skills and passion,
converging in harmony, a veritable oratorio.*

*I experience compassion—
the stranger when my car broke down in the desert,
my friend for whom it is never too late to call.*

*Perception, discernment, and experience—
so common, so accepted in daily life,
yet I must have “proof” that God exists?*

O Compassion, show me Jesus!

God, it's me. I thank you for the life you have and the life you give. I thank you for walking with me along life's roads. I thank you that you reveal yourself in the breaking of the bread: O Compassion, show me Jesus. And when I discern the presence of Jesus, grant me the wisdom to perceive and the courage to trust what your Spirit leads me to: Jesus with and within me. Grant me an open heart to accept all that the Scriptures teach that, through your Word, I may experience Jesus.

Luke 24:36-52

As Cleopas and the other from Emmaus were telling the Story, Jesus revealed himself again, saying, “*Shalom!* Peace be with you.” The disciplined followers were surprised, afraid and thought, perhaps, they were seeing a vision. But Jesus spoke to them, “Why are you anxious? Why do you allow questions to flood your mind with doubt? Look at my wounds; see my hands and feet. It's really me; touch and see for yourself. Hold me and hug me; know that I am here, flesh and bones and not merely a spirit.” The disciplined followers could not believe it, yet their joy could not deny it. “How...?” they wondered. While they were wallowing in wonder, Jesus asked, “Do you have anything to eat? I'm hungry.” The disciplined followers served Jesus some fish, which he took and ate.

Then Jesus looked at his followers' stunned faces and said, “This is what I was talking about when I told you that everything written about me in all the Scriptures, every law, every truth-teller's warning, every psalm, every proverb, all of it must be lived into truth.” Then Jesus taught them from the Scriptures and opened to them insight and comprehension, saying, “You see, it is all right here, in writing: the Anointed must suffer but on the third day rise from the dead; the gift of repentance and forgiveness must

be proclaimed to all nations of people, beginning right here in Jerusalem, but not only here in Jerusalem. You are my witnesses, martyrs if necessary, of what you have seen and heard from me. Fear not, my friends, fear not. As overwhelming as your work will be, I will not leave you alone. Wait here in Jerusalem until I send The Compassion's promised advocate and comforter, the Divine Spirit, to live within you. You will be filled with courage and have the *dunamis* you need to do this incredible work.”

Then Jesus and all his friends left Jerusalem and traveled as far as Bethany. Lifting up his hands, Jesus blessed his beloved friends. While blessing them, Jesus returned home to heaven. The disciplined followers returned to Jerusalem, to their great mission. With joy the disciplined followers worshipped Jesus; day and night they worshipped him. And they continued to dance the God-rhythms of the God-life.

*The water trickles from the fountain,
propelled up by a small motor—
I hear its soft hum underneath the
chirping of birds.*

*Birds slake their thirst from my fountain
unaware their water source is
not real, unnatural, an artificial
contrivance of human ingenuity.*

*I am proud of my ingenuity—
Master of my surroundings,
Lord of my manor.
Destiny is my servant.*

*The freedom of the birds unsettles me.
How is it that the birds flit about,
wary of dangers, but, seemingly, experiencing a
liberty I cannot imagine?*

*The birds do not pay homage to me for my fountain,
their freedom a slap in my face.
How dare they flit about, chirping songs of praise?
Do they not recognize my beneficence?*

*I sip my coffee, ignoring Mother Earth,
oblivious to the pulsing energy of photosynthesis, as if
life revolves around me, as if
new life is mine to give.*

I refuse to forgive the birds their disrespect.

Jesus, continue the dance in me, the dance of joy: through worship and praise, through study and Spirit, through work and witness. Bless me with heart and mind that dances the dance of Easter: trust that dances your new life, trust that follows your promised Spirit, trust that walks and skips and leaps into the God-life for the sake of a hurting world. Jesus, continue your dance through me, the dance of joy that it is the God-life.

Soli Gloria Deo

Appendix A: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Bible Study

Format

1. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.

1. *Round 1—NOTICE*

Write⁹⁵ and then share five (5) "I notice..." statements about the passages' textual or literary content (e.g., "The word joy is repeated," "The speaker is Moses," "The younger son went to a distant country"). Focus only on the text's content but not meaning or ethics (e.g. Not, "I think this means," or, "What I hear God saying is..."). There will be an opportunity to focus on meaning and action in later steps.

Focus = DATA and DETAILS

2. *Round 2—WONDER*

Write and then share four (4) "I wonder about..." statements or questions. Questions can focus on textual content, theological meaning, or ethical expression (e.g. "I wonder about how this passage relates to Psalm 119?" "I wonder why David was so angry?")

Focus = INQUISITIVENESS

3. *Round 3—THINK*

Write and then share three (3) "I think..." statements about what this passage means. These three statements are the cognitive and intellectual expressions of your engaging Scripture (e.g. "This passage expresses God's mercy," or, "God hates injustice").

Focus = CLARITY AND COHERENCE

4. *Round 4—VALUE*

Write and then share two (2) "I value..." statements that describe the two values to which you are being called by the passage (e.g. "I am called to express humility," or, "God wants me to value corporate unity"). There may be many values implicit in the passage, but only write the two values to which you are most strongly being called today.

Focus = CORE CONVICTIONS

5. *Round 5—COMMIT*

Write and then share one (1) "I commit..." statement that says one action to which you will commit as a response to this passage (e.g. "I will give you my full attention when you speak," or, "I will honor the sabbath this week by...").

Focus = ACTION

6. Close by praying for each other!

⁹⁵ Writing can be done either before or during the study.

Appendix B: 3P Bible Study

Format

1. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.
2. *Round 1—PARAPHRASE*

Have each participant choose one passage of Scripture from the assigned text that stood out for them. It may have stood out because it inspired them or challenged them. It may have stood out because it caused them to wonder or answered a question. Invite each participant to share the passage that, for them, stood out and speak to why they chose the passage they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections of a passage for the group to discuss. For each verse or section, invite participants to respond with what they notice, appreciate or wonder about. Invite participants to respond also to the core comfort, conviction, or challenge they hear in the verse or section.

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections from an English Bible. Invite participants to write their own paraphrase. If they choose to do so, participants may share their paraphrase with the group.

3. *Round 2—POETRY*

Have each participant choose one passage of poetry from the assigned text that stood out for them. How did the poem speak to them? What insights into Scripture or life did the poem invite? Invite each participant to share the poem that, for them, spoke to them.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two poems for the group to discuss. How does the poem tell the Scripture "slant"? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) Facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a poem based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

4. *Round 3—PRAYER*

Have each participant choose one prayer from the assigned text that stood out for them. What in the prayer spoke? Did the prayer evoke "amen" or "may it never be," or some other kind of response? Invite each participant to share the prayer that, for them, stood out and why they chose the prayer they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two prayers for the group to discuss. How does the prayer reflect the Scripture? How does it flow from Scripture to life? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a prayer based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

5. *Round 4—3P FREE-FOR-ALL*

Invite participants to share something they have written from the assigned text. It may be their own paraphrase, a poem, or prayer. Invite each participant to share something they have written.

6. Close by praying for each other!

Appendix C: Writing Exercises

Poetry Writing Exercises

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Haiku that focuses on the word or phrase.

Five syllables

Seven syllables

Five syllables

The Haiku may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

2. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Cinquain that focuses on the word or phrase.

One word

Two words

Three words

Four words

One word

The Cinquain may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

3. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a free verse poem that focuses on the word or phrase. The poem need not rhyme but it may. The poem can have one stanza or several. The point is not to explicate or summarize the word or phrase but to engage the Word. The poem may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

Prayer Writing Exercise

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your prayer. (C) Write a prayer that uses one of the literary themes listed below:

ACTS Prayer	/	Colloquial Alternative (different order from ACTS)
Adoration		Please!
Confession		Thank you!
Thanksgiving		Oops!
Supplication		Wow!

(D) Additional challenge: using the same passage, choose one of the other literary themes above and write another prayer. It's okay to write four prayers that each have a different literary focus!

Write!

Write!

Write!

Paraphrase Exercises

Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV): “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,⁶¹ and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’⁶² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister⁶³ will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’⁶⁴ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matthew 5:21-22 (TIP): “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Murder someone and you will be judged.’ But I take it further: even anger is a kind of murder; to degrade another a form of killing. To call your beloved a ‘Fool!’ is to invite the fires of purification, for surely you are missing the grace of offering life to one another. Life shared in friendship is among the greatest gifts we can give.”

Your Paraphrase:

Mark 8:31-32 (NIV): He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.⁸² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Mark 8:31-32 (TIP): Then Jesus begins to teach them what it means to say he is the Anointed One. “It means suffering,” he tells them. “The Son of Humanity must suffer—he will be rejected by the Elite, the Intense and the Scrupulous. And, working together with the Collaborators, he will be killed. But after three days rise again.” Jesus says this plainly. He doesn’t stutter.

Your Paraphrase:

Luke 1:1-4 (NIV): Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled¹ among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke 1:1-4 (TIP): The Story has been told many times in many ways: of divine love alive among us, walking beside us, living, breathing, being. This is the Story told by those who were there, of the things they saw with their eyes, things they heard, touched, felt, experienced. These trustworthy eyewitnesses are servants of the Word. This is the Story to which I have disciplined followers my life, O Friend of The Compassion. I share this Story with you so that you too may know it, so that you too may know Them: The Compassion who loved, the Man who lived, whose light shined upon us.

Your Paraphrase:

John 1:1-3 (NIV): In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 1:1-3 (TIP): In the beginning was the Verb, and the Verb was with The I WILL BE, and the Verb was The I WILL BE. The Verb was in the beginning and the source of creation—the WHOOSH! that ignited the cosmos, the generative energy that unleashed everything: every atom and every quark and even the dark matter in between. Neither what is, nor what has ever been, nor what will someday be came about by accident but through divine intention and purpose: spoken into being by the Verb.

Your Paraphrase:

Acts 10:12-14 (NIV): It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” ¹⁴“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

Acts 10:12-14 (TIP): The blanket was covered with every variety of beast from earth and sky, those considered clean and unclean, those deemed pure and impure. A voice spoke: “Take and eat, Peter. All of it is sacred.” Peter rebelled against the voice, “Never! My lips have never been soiled by such vile impurity.”

Your Paraphrase:

Appendix D: Reading Plan for Rhythms of the God Life - Luke

Luke

Week 1:	Introduction and Luke 1-2
Week 2:	Luke 3-5
Week 3:	Luke 6-9:50
Week 4:	Luke 9:51-13:35
Week 5:	Luke 14-16
Week 6:	Luke 17-19:27
Week 7:	Luke 19:28-22:46
Week 8:	Luke 22:47-24:53

About Rhythms of the God-Life

“...an interpretive paraphrase rooted in the Greek text that gives wings to God’s Word through paraphrase, poetry, and prayer. By providing cultural insights to help the reader understand the Word’s meaning, *Rhythms* seeks to capture the beat and harmony of the original text yet also convey wisdom, ethics, and hope for today.”

“...a comprehensive study of biblical scripture, and a confronting, immersive read...with an ability to fascinate even the less experienced reader on the subject through an accessible authorial voice and an in-depth analysis of the language....[The author’s] choices of focus allow deeper analysis on the history of the text, and creates a layered approach that can be used in a contemporary setting. It is a compelling and well researched read, showing the author’s deep knowledge and understanding. The assured writing style, attention to detail, and clarity of the research set out in the work make this work one that will intrigue and fascinate.”

A Poem on Luke 1:39-56

*A young woman
stares into the dark liquid cupped in her hands,
noticing the steam rise and
drift away with her ruminations.*

Warmth from the ceramic upon her palms invites calm.

*Auntie sips her tea,
looking over the cup’s brim at her niece,
imagining what her life could have been
under different circumstances.*

*Auntie hesitates, concerned to avoid
too quickly expressing her own joy
given the trepidation she imagines
unfolding within her niece.*

*Auntie knows people
exult of her blessedness:
no longer barren,
no longer bereft.*

*Auntie imagines what people
whisper about her niece:
ruined and ruinous,
“It’s good she got out of town.”*

*Auntie places her cup upon the table between them.
Taking her niece’s hands,
she guides her to let go
of the Cup and place it upon the Table.*

*“It will be alright,” Auntie says gently,
cradling her niece’s hands.*

*“I know,” replies the young woman.
“Still, it’s a lot to take in.”*

*“We are in this together,” assures Auntie.
“Our children are united forever,”
replies her niece quickly,
surprising Auntie with her strength.*

Together, they sit back,

About the Author

The Rev. Dr. Brad Munroe is Pastor to the Presbytery for the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and the Presbytery de Cristo. He earned his Doctor of Ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary, receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Ministry award for his dissertation in which he coined the phrase “blended worship.” He is also the author of *Waging Peace: Developing Interpersonal Skills for Conflict Transformation* and numerous devotional works and curriculum that can be downloaded at www.BradMunroe.org.

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WAS THE VERB...”