**Rhythms of the God-Life**

**Advent Devotional:**

**Hebrews to Jude**

 Jesus was Jewish: born into a Jewish family in a Jewish province and raised to practice Jewish customs. He grew up to be called “Rabbi,” a Jewish teacher.

 The religious movement Jesus ignited is too often identified as a North American and Euro-centric religion, whose depictions of Jesus are of a white, blond, blue-eyed man who bears little resemblance to the historic, Jewish Jesus.

 Jesus the Galilean prophet and teacher, whom his followers claimed was the Jewish Messiah, ignited a religious revival within 1st century Judaisms. What came to be known as “The Way,” and later “Christianity,” began as a sect within Judaism. Scholars refer to first-century Judaism using the plural: “Judaisms” because there was not a single, monolithic belief system in first-century Israel. Readers of the Gospels are familiar with some of the various strands: Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, and Zealots. The people of The Way belonged to another strand.

 That the early Christians moved beyond the ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions of multiple Judaisms is well-known—Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles and the controversies over “the Judaizers” in his letters and Acts 15 depict a national religious movement expanding into a global one. However, even while Paul was “the Apostle to the Gentiles,” some Israelites practiced Judaism as framed by their rabbi: Jesus, whom they called Messiah. In this present work, I attempt to share the story of these followers of Jesus so that readers might be blessed by their faith and wisdom.

 By the time the letters to the Hebrews through Jude were written, Jesus had lived and died, been resurrected and ascended, so how can this current work be called an *Advent* devotional?

 Advent is not just stories about the birth of Jesus. Theologically, Advent points toward the spirituality of waiting for God’s deliverance, finding hope in God’s sustenance, continuing in love amidst the waiting and longing, and then rejoicing in the culmination of God’s goodness—the mighty acts of God come to earth!

 The above themes describe what will be found in this *Advent* devotional. Though these letters were written after Jesus’ earthly ministry, the passages found in this devotional speak to the themes of waiting, hope, love, and advent—six readings on each theme plus one on the theme of incarnation. They speak from their uniquely Jewish-Christian perspective to speak about the advent of Jesus—both his first and second advent!

 Finally, when using the divine name, I seek to honor the Jewish character of these letters. Following the Hebrew Bible’s example (e.g. *El-Shaddai, El-Elyon*), for each letter or group of letters, I use a different title that suggests something significant in Jewish theology and spirituality:

* “The Name” for Hebrews,
* “Sophia” for James,
* “The Sovereign” for Peter’s letters,
* “The Love” for the John’s letters,
* “The Holy,” for Jude.

I am not the first to call Yahweh by a unique characteristic. In Genesis 31:42, God is called “The Fear of Isaac” (Genesis 31:42). If God can be called “The Fear,” why not “The Name” or “The Holy”?

Brad Munroe

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**Waiting**

**Hebrews 4:14--5:10**

 Do not lose heart! Jesus, The Name’s own Son, stands between us and this divine requirement to justify all we are and all we have done—a great High Priest who brings heaven to earth and lifts us in our mortality into the heavenly realms. Jesus brings The Name to us and us to The Name.

Hold fast to this word of our hope! For Jesus has both traversed the expanse of the heavens and the dusty paths of human suffering. Jesus experienced the trials, tests, and temptations that cause us to fall yet did so as one able to stand. Therefore, we can be bold. We need not fear to give account of our lives. Rather we amble into The Name’s very throne room with confidence, as those who have already been granted the gift of his loving-kindness. We approach The Name with confidence, assured that help is on the way.

 High Priest is not a job one applies for but one for which you must be chosen and chosen by God, as Aaron, Moses’ brother, was chosen.[[1]](#endnote-1) The High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple stands[[2]](#endnote-2) before The Name’s throne and brings the people to The Name and brings The Name to the people. The High Priest represents the people—is the people’s stand-in to offer gifts of gratitude and acts of apology. The High Priest comes from among the people and shares in human obliviousness to the God-rhythms; the High Priest, like everyone else, sometimes fails the God-life (which is why he offers sacrifices for his own sins, too).

 In a similar way, The Name chose the Anointed One for the honor of becoming the last High Priest. The Name said to him,

You are the One to whom all authority is given,

for you spring from the womb of my heart.[[3]](#endnote-3)

And,

The Last High Priest you are, Eternal and Sovereign—justice and right relationships will result from your reign.[[4]](#endnote-4)

 Throughout Jesus’ life as he walked among us, he lived the life of a faithful priest: offering prayers, feeling anguish for our suffering and his own, yet always with a spirit that honored The Name. Jesus was drawn ever deeper into human obedience through what he suffered. Although everything that belonged to The Name had been given over to Jesus, yet he gave himself over to the work of attentive listening[[5]](#endnote-5)—to The Name and to the experience of suffering. Always learning, forever immersing into the human experience, Jesus became the consummate vessel for The Name’s restoration—perfect form for the function of making people their true selves. Through Jesus, all who listen attentively to the whispers of The Name’s heart are made whole and complete: today, tomorrow, and into eternity. This is why The Name anointed Jesus to be the Last High Priest, the Eternal and Sovereign One, with justice and right relationships the result of his reign.

*To stand in the gap*

*holding the hand of the dying*

*walking beside the grieving*

*listening attentively to another’s flooded emotions*

*while acknowledging one’s own loss and pain*

*is the work of a priest—*

*ushering others into The Name’s presence*

*then stepping aside to allow her to heal.*

God, it’s me. I am thankful Jesus did the heavy lifting of his priestly calling: bringing earth to heaven and heaven to earth, creating (and becoming) the path for wholeness, rewinding Death itself! Wow! All that yet never turning away from suffering—not his, not ours. How did he do it? I am not a priest, merely a “Minister of Word and Sacrament,” yet I find it difficult to lean into human suffering (and would prefer to avoid or ignore it). I am thankful Jesus is my High Priest, who did the heavy lifting for me. I am grateful that when I cannot bear to suffer alongside those whom I am called to love, Jesus is there with them. He always is and always will be.

**Hebrews 11:1--16**

 Trust is the mortar that holds the walls of our spiritual home in place. Trust is the guarantor that our conviction is sufficient foundation upon which to build our spiritual home. Trust creates our conviction that even though our physical vision is limited, yet our spiritual discernment rightly perceives The Name’s goodness and the many gifts that come from his lovingkindness.

 The ancients lived and died singing the wonders of The Name’s goodness and gifts. Our spiritual fathers and mothers discovered the blessings that can be received only through trust. Trust conceives in us wonder and awe that The Name spoke all creation into existence—from nothing to abundance as a single Word.

 Consider the lived and living witness of our spiritual fathers and mothers—all of whom received The Name’s blessing through trust.

Abel, who trusted The Name that his gift would be welcomed and who, also through trust, was welcomed into right relationship. Abel’s trust speaks to each new generation even though he is long dead.

Enoch, who trusted The Name and whose life was taken into the heavenly dwelling. Enoch made The Name’s heart happy. Without trust, it is impossible to make The Name’s heart happy, but through trusting that The Name is and loves, we are compelled to seek The Name’s face, which always shines upon those who seek him.

Noah, who trusted The Name enough to build a HUGE boat on nothing more than The Name’s warning. Noah’s trust led him to save his family. His trust declared with conviction the brokenness of the world; his trust led him to inherit right relationship with The Name.

Abraham, who trusted The Name when called to go to a foreign land, a land not his own, among a people not his own. He obeyed, taking a journey into the unknown. What Abraham knew (but only because he trusted The Name) was that The Name had made him a promise. That promise was enough for Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob to wander forward, in search of the dwelling place not constructed by human hands but grown from the seeds of trust planted in The Name’s promise.

Sarah also trusted The Name’s promise. Though she was well past the ideal age for childbearing, Sarah trusted The Name would be faithful to her and to his promise that she would bear a son through whom all nations would be blessed. From Abraham and Sarah, well-elderly though they were, came great nations—offspring as plentiful as the stars in the night sky or as abundant as the sand on the seashore. Sarah’s trust has led generations to trust.[[6]](#endnote-6)

All these ancients were still living by trust when they died. The Name’s promises were still in front of them, still their horizon. They were strangers to the experience of receiving The Name’s blessings fulfilled, foreigners to the full benefits of being citizens of The Name’s beloved community. They understood their true citizenship is not on earth but is discovered wherever The Name dwells. They weren’t looking for a country to call their own but searching for their true home in The Name’s presence, wherever it would be discovered. They weren’t looking backward, homesick for their past, but forward toward a future in which they would walk alongside The Name. And The Name welcomed them into his beloved community, for they made The Name’s heart happy.

*Life shatters, sometimes, like a broken mirror,*

*distorting the image I see before me.*

*My brother and father died the same week.*

*The Capitol was invaded and officers died.*

*My friend without insurance needs a hip replacement.*

*What is trust when the mirror breaks?*

*What image do I see*

*What reflections as I look into its fractured shards?*

*Trust sees the hurting child within another.*

*Trust hears the plaintive cry in the harsh barking.*

*Trust feels civility’s heartbeat—not quite dead, yet.*

*Trust extends an olive branch in spite of the evidence.*

*Trust looks in the shattered mirror*

*and sees the one becoming like Jesus.*

God, it’s me. It’s hard to trust when your brother attacks—did Cain compromise Abel’s trust? It’s easy to trust on Easy Street—Ah, to be escorted to heaven like Enoch! It’s scary to trust in the face of cataclysm—“foxhole faith” that endures, like Noah possessed, is easier said than done. I like the experience of Abraham and Sarah, for mutual support and encouragement make trusting much easier. The Name, however it happens, help me to trust that you exist and you love, now and for always.

**Hebrews 12:1—3**

 Look around at all the people who have lived trusting The Name—a throng of sacred testimony to The Name’s work among them and through them, a chorus of witness from every century, singing songs of praise to The Name’s justice and joy. With mentors like this, be inspired! Be encouraged! Take your broken ways of living, stuff them in a box, and set the box out front to be collected with the trash. Persevere toward the goal of becoming your true self. Turn the agony[[7]](#endnote-7) of sin into the triumph of transformation through daily practices that become holy habits.

 Here is a good place to start this work of transformation: Look at Jesus—don’t turn away and don’t take your eyes from him. Jesus started us on the path of trusting and will accompany us every step of our journey. He will make our trusting whole and complete so that we will become our true selves, which will be his great joy to see. For the sake of this joy Jesus endured the Cross, didn’t care a whit that others thought it shameful, for he knew it was the Way that would lead us back to The Name. At The Name’s side is where we can find Jesus now, running the family business of *agape*.

 More than just glancing at Jesus, keep looking, then ponder and wonder: How deep was his love for us that he would endure such hostility and hatred? As you ponder and wonder, turn your thoughts toward meditation—give it a good think. Then you will be inspired and encouraged. You will neither fade nor falter from the sacred work of keeping your gaze on Jesus.

*The willow beckons*

*its arms lifted vertically in praise*

*inviting me to join in silent admiration.*

*The dove dips its beak into the fountain*

*thirsty for The Name’s provision*

*inviting me to relish creation’s goodness.*

*The Cross, a multi-colored Talavera, hangs*

*like Jesus to whom it points*

*reminding me to celebrate because I am not alone on this journey.*

*Seeing, looking, pondering until I perceive*

*the cloud of witnesses in creation and community,*

*with Jesus, my Savior, my beatific vision.*

God, it’s me. Fix my eyes on Jesus. Let me not look away—when social media roars or church gossip whispers. Let my gaze remain steadfast—when family troubles erupt or obligations burden. Let me perceive the One who entered into human suffering to bear it and break its power. Let me ponder the truth that only that which is endured can be transformed. Fix my eyes on Jesus. Let me not look away.

**James 1:9-11**

 Those of lowly status (in the eyes of the culture) often must be God-reliant rather than self-reliant. This is a matter for rejoicing—exult that you are learning lessons in trusting Sophia. Those of high status (in the eyes of the culture) are often only self-reliant, which is a cause for lament. Be forewarned: Those riches last for a moment, like a spring flower scorched by the summer heat. Riches fade but God-reliance lasts forever.

*Trusting wealth—fool’s game.*

*Becoming God-reliant –*

*Path of the Wise Ones*

God, it’s me. I am a middle-class, white-collar professional with a full-time job. How easy it is to delude myself into thinking I am self-reliant. Remind me, Sophia, of my need for you. Instruct me, Spirit, to be ever more God-reliant. Teach me, Jesus, compassion for those without the option of self-reliance.

**James 5:7—11**

 Now to the rest of us I say: Endure until the Day of Jesus when Sophia’s kin-dom will be revealed in full. For inspiration, look to the farmer as an example of patience. Day and night the farmer toils without evidence of a crop, planting and plowing, seeding and searching until the day when the crop sprouts, grows, and, finally, is ready to harvest. Endure with patience and trust, for the Day of Jesus is nearer today than it has ever been. Neither murmur nor grumble against one another, as our ancestors did in the desert.[[8]](#endnote-8) Frustration grows during trying times, yet we are not to judge one another. There is one who is Judge (and it's not any of us), and the Judge will speak when the time is right.

 Until that time, beloved, endure with patience. For more inspiration, look also to the truth-tellers from ages past who suffered for speaking Sophia’s truth. They named broken systems and corrupt practices. They called out the powerful and privileged, even kings! And they suffered because of their words. Yet we consider these truth-tellers blessed because they endured, their resilience a sign of their trust in Sophia. Job also endured and look what happened: He was restored to honor. Sophia’s compassion is abundant, her mercy never-ending; therefore, I urge you again to endure.

*Enduring in hope*

*Resilience as active trust*

*Patient faithfulness*

God, it’s me. Teach me to endure hardship when it comes. Not seeking it but standing true to who I am as your beloved. Not hiding from it when called to stand in solidarity with others. Neither hiding nor seeking but walking in faith, hope, and love, trusting we journey together.

**2 Peter 3:11—18**

 The sage once said, “Begin with the end in mind.”[[9]](#endnote-9) New creation comes: Who will you be? What will you do? Dance the God-rhythms! Devote yourselves to the God-life! Work toward the kin-dom and desire it earnestly.[[10]](#endnote-10) On that day, all Heaven will break loose—calamity and chaos becoming new creation, heaven and earth becoming one, and right relationships dwelling[[11]](#endnote-11) in and through all.

 Beloved, as you look forward and long for new creation, live as those becoming your best and true selves. Live as those who seek justice and, even if you fall short of its ideal, live so that others will say you love mercy and walk humbly. Remember, The Sovereign’s patience means others may also become whole and complete, their true selves.

Our beloved brother, Paul, makes the same point in his letters, which are sacred writings even though they can be difficult to understand at times and people twist their meaning for broken purposes. Whoever distorts The Sovereign’s Word, whether in Paul or any other of our sacred writings, does so to their own harm.

Thus, forewarned, be wary and aware of those who perpetrate fraud and promote license in the God-life. Don’t become ineffective or aimless[[12]](#endnote-12) in how you live. Rather, grow more fully into the gift that is the God-life. Root yourselves more deeply in its wisdom. Rejoice that you know and are known by Jesus the Anointed, our Healer, who is sovereign above Caesar. To Jesus be songs of praise today and into all tomorrows. So be it!

*On the horizon*

*sun rising*

*new day dawning*

*On the horizon*

*son risen*

*new creation dawning*

*Toward the horizon*

*journey embarked*

*kin-dom restoring.*

*Horizon, O Horizon!*

*How I long to see*

*your dawning become Day!*

God, it’s me. Who will I be this day? What will I do? Will I live deeper into your truth for me: beloved and chosen, called and sent? Will I live faithfully to what you require of me: justice and mercy and humility? As I look to the horizon of your new creation—heaven come to earth—make me an instrument of your peace.

**Hope**

**Hebrews 10:19--25**

 Because we have been released from our own brokenness by Jesus’ healing balm, we are confident—assured that we belong to The Name’s family. Because we have been liberated from our own orneriness, we walk forward with conviction that Jesus escorts us into The Name’s Divine Dwelling—assured Jesus offered his service freely; indeed, it brought him joy to serve in this way.

Therefore, we draw near, resting ourselves upon The Name’s bosom, with confidence, conviction, and trust that we are both declared innocent and immersed into the renewing waters of the God-life. We grab hold of The Name’s hand knowing he will never let us go. We walk beside The Name rejoicing in his faithfulness, rejoicing that his promise is our hope.

Therefore, we plan day and night how to encourage each other toward *agape* and inspire each other toward goodness. We gather together because we know it builds a strong foundation for our being “In-Courage-Minted.” We continue to gather because we know we are “In-Sprit-led” when we are together instead of isolated, alone, and without the support that only our family in Jesus can provide. This is important! And we need each other all the more as we await the Day of Jesus to be revealed.

*COVID cases rise,*

*my temptation to hunker down rises, too.*

*My head lies to my heart,*

*“I don’t need other people around.”*

*COVID cases rise,*

*my determination rising faster.*

*My heart responds,*

*“Separate doesn’t have to mean isolation.”*

*COVID cases continue,*

*my affection for the Body of Jesus grows.*

*“Christian” is always a plural, never singular:*

*“me” and “we” intertwined in love.*

God, it’s me. Though an individual, grant unto me the gift of community. Though I have my own thoughts, grant unto me the joy of learning from others. Though I enjoy a little “alone time,” grant unto me the joy of knowing your fellowship of love. Though I like “me,” grant unto me an even greater appreciation for “we.”

**Hebrews 13:20-25**

 The Name’s peace rest upon you. The Name’s power work through you. The Name’s purpose inspire your vision and direct your service. The same The Name who spoke a sacred promise, who raised Jesus from the dead, and who designated Jesus to be the Good Shepherd of her sheep. May The Name equip you for all you will do, empower all your doing, and be pleased by all you have done, through Jesus the Anointed, to whom all doxology is sung today and into all tomorrows. Amen.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Beloved, endure with patience my words of encouragement and exhortation, which I have written briefly. I want you to know Timothy is no longer in prison—Yay! If he comes soon, I’ll bring him with me when I visit. Greet all your leaders and laypeople alike. The beloved in Italy send greetings. The Name’s loving-kindness surround and embrace you all.

*Peace, limp without power.*

*Power, lifeless without purpose.*

*Promise, pointing to the plan.*

*Plan fulfilled in the person of Jesus.*

*Equipped and empowered—both are needed to*

*Please the One to whom all doxology is sung.*

God, it’s me. May this become my daily prayer: may I know your peace, power, and purpose; may I remember your promise fulfilled in Jesus; may I be equipped and empowered to serve you through loving all whom I meet, ever pleased and ever pleasing in your sight.

**1 Peter 1:3—9**

 Sing joyous songs to The Sovereign of Jesus the Anointed, who himself is sovereign above Caesar. The Sovereign’s mercy overshadowed us, and we have been born into a hope that lives among us and moves through us. Our hope sprung to life when The Sovereign raised Jesus the Anointed from the dead, making us a part of the family. Now we have an inheritance that can never die, never degrade, and never diminish, for it is preserved and protected in heaven for us—just waiting for us to get there! Until then, The Sovereign’s power preserves and protects us in the here and now and prepares us to be revealed as whole and complete, our true selves, when the fullness of The Sovereign’s kin-dom[[14]](#endnote-14) arrives for all to see.

 Joy dances with grief for those who belong to The Sovereign (as you know well), for the hope which is our inheritance is commingled with trials that test us. We rejoice though, do we not, because our trusting is genuine, authentic, the real deal. We’re not playing games as we seek to honor Jesus the Anointed. Instead, we are demonstrating our trust in the midst of difficulties, being refined by fire,[[15]](#endnote-15) which is better than gold. The authenticity of our trust helps us discover the full blessings of the God-life. Genuine trust reveals Jesus.

 You have not seen Jesus with your eyes, yet you love him without condition. Though Jesus is not seen, yet you trust him, which fills you with joy no words can convey. The culmination of your trust is The Sovereign’s gift: your true self as you are intended to be.

*The assurance of being beloved*

*side-by-side with moments of doubt*

*Times of sorrow*

*accompanied by courage permeating the heart*

*Pain in loving when*

*joy dances with grief*

*The God-life is not either-or but*

*one over-writing the other until all becomes whole*

God, it’s me. For the blessings of knowing you, I offer my praise. For the joy that is mine to share with others, I praise your name. Even when difficulties come, I know your Spirit leads and guides me. Especially then, your Spirit is my strength and my shield. May I not avoid grief and sorrows but embrace them with the hope that is my inheritance, until all mourning is turned into dancing and all sorrows transformed by joy.

**1 Peter 1:10—16**

 The truth-tellers from ages past told about the Story that makes us whole and complete, our true selves as we are intended to be. They spoke of it as a gift. Like scientists peering into a microscope, the truth-tellers looked for the smallest clue that would unlock to them its mysteries.[[16]](#endnote-16) Their quest for discovery was the Divine Spirit at work in them, to crack open for them foreknowledge of the Anointed.

Their “Eureka!” moment unveiled to them the truth that the Anointed would both bear our brokenness in himself and radiate The Sovereign’s brilliance to all people—suffering and sorrow borne in the one Anointed. The Divine Spirit unveiled to them that this knowledge about the Anointed was not for themselves alone but for future generations, to be told by those whom Jesus would send, through whom the Spirit would speak heaven’s message. Even the angels were jealous.

So, with this in mind, fully informed, aware and alert, set your sights on this hope: the gift to be unleashed when Jesus the Anointed is unveiled in his full glory. Let hope be your North Star. Be obedient, too. Let your hope set the course for your journey and then walk the Way set out for you. Don’t be poured into the mold of moral blindness and ethical ignorance—neither greed nor corruption are to be your North Star! “Just because I want it" does not make an action good and just and true. Instead, seek to be like The Sovereign, who said in Torah:

Be like me!

Live the God-life!

Dance to the God-rhythms!

Be like me!

*I almost never find what I’m looking for…*

*I search for selfish things, easy things.*

*I usually find the unexpected:*

*How raising children transformed me (for the better),*

*How life is more fragile (and precious) than I imagined,*

*How sorrow and joy both teach deep truths.*

*The Anointed immersed in suffering*

*The Anointed engulfed by blessing*

*The same Anointed—the same, the same.*

God, it’s me. I seek to be holy, as you are holy. I long to be set apart for meaningful work, for service that makes a difference: touches a life with love, heals a hurting heart, provides food and shelter to those in need. I long for these things because you planted a seed in me that refused to die. May I nurture that seed unto harvest—blessed to be a blessing. O Sovereign, may I be holy as you are holy.

**1 Peter 3:13–22**

 A passion for good protects you from bitterness. Eagerness for the right douses anger’s flames. As Isaiah the truth-teller wrote:

You need not wallow in fear, even when conspiracies abound and persecution is around every corner, for you bear the imprint of The Sovereign’s blessing upon you. The Holy One of Israel has called you.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Instead of fear, turn your hearts toward the Anointed, who is sovereign above Caesar. Revere the Anointed and fear will flee!

 Always be prepared to speak hope into the world. Don’t offend through arrogance and presumption, but gently and respectfully speak of the hope that lives within you in Jesus. Give no one a cause to slander you by the way you behave. If you must suffer, better to suffer for doing good than because you deserve it. Neither being a “Goofball for Jesus” nor “Obnoxious for Christ” is The Sovereign’s will.

 And here is a summary of our hope in Jesus:[[18]](#endnote-18) The Anointed suffered for our sins. The one who was just confronted evil and overcame it to bring us into The Sovereign’s presence. His confrontation with evil brought him to the Cross,[[19]](#endnote-19) where the Accuser sought to turn his heart inward toward hate. But the Accuser failed, for the Anointed’s heart remained outward in love for all people.

Though the Anointed’s body was put to death, the Breath[[20]](#endnote-20) still enlivened his soul. The Breath led him into the abyss, to those who had died long ago, in the days of Noah. There the Anointed proclaimed The Sovereign’s mercy to those who had never had a chance to hear of it—The Sovereign’s heart had been hidden from them, but the Anointed revealed it by sharing Good News.

 And so The Sovereign’s plan to bring new creation came full circle: through the waters of the flood, righteousness was given a new beginning, and eight people were saved through the waters that foreshadowed the waters of baptism.[[21]](#endnote-21) Now, you all are made whole and complete through baptismal waters, cleansed not from dirt upon the body but purified in your moral conscience. Baptism River flows through Jesus’ resurrection and into heaven itself, carrying us to Jesus, who sits next to The Sovereign. There the heavenly hosts sing praises to his name.

*Tiptoe between*

*anger and fear*

*awkwardly stumbling*

*on the journey.*

*Better by far to be zealous for*

*Kindness, respect*

*drifting on baptismal waters*

*toward hope.*

God, it’s me. The whispers of hope I speak are drowned by shouts—angry shouting, a cacophony of bitterness, resentment, and indignation. Can I speak light into this darkness, O Sovereign? Can my words effect goodness? I confess that at times I despair. Renew in me a vision of Jesus on the Cross—confronting the powers with emptiness, overcoming hatred with love, defeated in the moment yet victorious forever.

**2 Peter 1:1—11**

 Simon (my original name), now known as Peter (the name given me by Jesus, meaning “Rock”),[[22]](#endnote-22) a servant and sent one[[23]](#endnote-23) of Jesus the Anointed. To those who have been gifted with a right relationship with The Sovereign through trusting, which itself is a gift and privilege and honor: May gifts of goodness and the presence of The Sovereign’s peace surround and embrace you through Jesus, who is sovereign above Caesar.

 The Sovereign’s *dunamis[[24]](#endnote-24)* gifts to us all we can need, hope, or desire to dance the God-rhythms of the God-life. With these gifts we discern our true purpose: to honor The Sovereign through lives of virtue. Through these gifts The Sovereign bestows, [[25]](#endnote-25) and we receive, the full promise of life in Jesus: to share in *koinonia,[[26]](#endnote-26)* with his image being formed within us to transform us into our true self. For this we were created. For this we escaped the broken world of abuse, betrayal, and corruption.

 For this reason, therefore, come alongside[[27]](#endnote-27) Jesus who comes alongside you. Give yourself both to Jesus and to the work of being your best and true self. With energy and enthusiasm, amplify your trust with virtue, your virtue with wisdom, and your wisdom with mastery of self. With passion and power, magnify your mastery of self through perseverance and your perseverance through devotion. And then bring all these to climax and culmination through tenderness that leads to affection and affection that leads to *agape*—love that is whole, complete, and without precondition.

 Growing ever deeper into these virtues will keep you from being confused or befuddled when you try to discern the ways and wisdom of Jesus the Anointed, who is sovereign above Caesar. Those without these virtues can’t see their own shadow—oblivious to the God-life! Therefore, my beloved, live ever deeper into these virtues. Remind yourselves that you were called before the beginning of time—The Sovereign chose you, named you, and embraced you. Then live according to this truth. Live like this and you will always dance the God-rhythms, and, when the moment is right, you will be welcomed by Jesus himself into the kin-dom with a grand celebration. And he can do it, for he is the Healer of All and sovereign above Caesar.

*Virtue*

*not seen by the naked eye*

*obvious to the human heart.*

*Virtue*

*creating character*

*preventing corruption.*

*Virtue*

*in search of self-discovery*

*never-ending journey.*

God, it’s me. Grant to me the virtuous gifts—not that I may claim them as my own but rejoice that they are gifts from your Spirit. Grant to me the virtuous gifts—not so others will see me and be impressed but that they will see you more clearly. Grant to me the virtuous gifts—that I may discover my best and true self through love that is whole, complete, and without precondition.

**Love**

**James 2:8-13**

 If you fulfill the purpose[[28]](#endnote-28) of the royal law revealed in Sophia’s Word, “Love[[29]](#endnote-29) and keep loving; love stranger as neighbor and neighbor as yourself,”[[30]](#endnote-30) you will show honor and demonstrate your nobility. If, however, you submit to society’s hierarchy of wealth-based value, that same law exposes the corruption of your thinking, believing, and behaving.

The law is not intended for your personal convenience! You don’t get to pick and choose which parts you like and to which you will be obedient. Consider this example. Sophia said we are to be faithful to our spouse (“You shall not commit adultery”) and protect life as sacred (“You shall not commit murder”).[[31]](#endnote-31) If you murder your neighbor but are faithful to your spouse, you’re still a lawbreaker.

Let your talk and your walk agree. Let there be no distinction between what you say and what you do. Live in the freedom[[32]](#endnote-32) to which the law invites you and by which it will judge you. You are free to love your neighbor as yourself, so do it! You are free to embrace equality and reject discrimination, so do it! According to the freedom given you by the law, turn upside-down society’s hierarchy of wealth-based value, remembering Sophia honors every act of mercy. Sophia’s intention is mercy. Mercy beats judgment in Sophia’s eyes!

*Loving my neighbor*

*Steps toward God’s horizon*

*Freedom’s true intent*

God, it’s me. Renew in me a holy desire to serve, to love, and to forgive all whom I encounter this day. Restore to me the love of stranger and neighbor as I embrace them equally. Reclaim for me the sacred intention to talk and walk the Way of Jesus. May mercy exult over judgment[[33]](#endnote-33) in all I do.

**James 2:14-17**

 Beloved, trust divorced from action is a mirage—is it really trust if there is no action? Such alleged trust does no one any good. Imagine someone you claim to love is naked and starving. You walk by, stop, and say, “Hello! How’s it going?” Then you keep walking before they have time to answer, and you don’t even notice they are naked and starving! Is that what you call trust worthy of Sophia? Or maybe you give them a pep talk, “Buck up, little buckeroo. It’ll be okay! Sophia’s going to take care of you. Don’t you worry.” True trust is compelled to act. Action is trust exhaling.

*Sophia at work*

*In and through faith, hope, and love*

*Divine dance through us!*

God, it’s me. May my words mirror my deeds. May the height of words in Sunday worship be matched by the depths to which I will kneel in service to others Monday through Saturday, for your name’s sake and for my own healing and wholeness. Teach me to exhale my faith.

**James 2:18-25**

 Now some folks spout nonsense such as, “Trust, works, to-mah-to, to-may-to. What does it matter so long as you have one or the other?” What does trusting Sophia without works even look like? Trust that only tries to hold its breath, that never exhales, will sooner or later pass out. Actions express your trust—people do what they truly believe. You say you believe in Sophia: great! But caring for your neighbor, naked and starving, tells me who you are and what you believe better than words ever will.

 Here is something to consider. The evil one’s minions know the truth about Sophia, and it terrifies them! Does their knowledge constitute belief? Hardly. Mere intellectual assent, such as they possess, is a mirage of trust.

*Words, words, words, words, words.*

*Or feeding the world’s hungry*

*Faith expressed through love*

God, it’s me. As a preacher, I love, love, love me some words of faith, words of hope, even wonky words of theological disputation. I don’t care, just give me some words. I’ll dine upon words for three meals a day and a bedtime snack. And when I am fully gorged, I realize words alone are not enough. I need to be put on a diet of doing justice, inspired to fast by loving mercy, placed on a hunger strike that I may walk humbly with you. O Sophia, may I feast upon your Word as I also discover the God-rhythms of walking the Way of Jesus.

**1 Peter 3:8--12**

 To all I say: share a common purpose, shower each other with compassion and caring, be tender-hearted and humble. Don’t return evil for evil or insult for insult. Instead, repay evil with blessing and insult with affirmation, remembering you are heirs of The Sovereign’s blessing. As the Psalmist wrote:

Do you love life and desire goodness?

Then tame the tongue!

Let no evil drip from your lips:

honesty not deceit,

transparency not manipulation is what I require.

Turn away from evil and turn toward goodness.

Seek The Sovereign’s *shalom!*

Seek and keep seeking until you are in its embrace.

The Sovereign sees and hears.

The Sovereign is attentive to all goodness,

and turns away from evil.[[34]](#endnote-34)

*Kindness is life-giving.*

*Kind words the Balm of Gilead.*

*Easy to hate, to spew venom.*

*Tongue’s poison the serpent’s legacy.*

*No one deserves venom.*

*None have the right to bite.*

God, it’s me. Make me an instrument of civility in uncivil times. Attune my ear both to the words I say and the tone with which I speak. As I have been blessed, make me a blessing. As I have been loved, teach me to love. In your shalom may I find a home large enough for all to find shelter.

**1 John 3:16—24**

 The experience of *agape* is in this: Jesus the Anointed gave himself for us. Likewise, we should give ourselves for our brothers and sisters in the Body. If you perceive one of them is in need and close your heart[[35]](#endnote-35) to their pain, The Love’s *agape* is but a visitor to your home rather than a full-time resident.

My little lambs, *agape* always dives deep into the truth of the God-life; it is an action not a feeling, doing and not mere speaking. By living into *agape,* we are able to discern that we are in the truth, and this sets our hearts at ease. (Even if our hearts are troubled and worry overwhelms us, The Love is greater than our hearts.) The Love knows who we are and whose we are. So my beloved, take heart. Be encouraged. And trust this truth: if our hearts are not troubled as we live into *agape*, then we are fully and unequivocally assured that we belong to The Love.

As we belong to The Love, we take hold of those things that are *of* The Love and *in* The Love. As we follow the Way of Jesus and obey all The Love’s commands, we bring joy to The Love’s heart. And this is the first and best command: that we trust the character and integrity of Jesus the Anointed, love one another with *agape* (as he commanded us to do), and make our home in The Love just as The Love makes a home in our hearts. The experience of home is this: The Love lives in us and gave us the Divine Spirit as a housewarming present.

*“Greater than our hearts”*

*seems like the bar is set too low,*

*for my heart leads to*

*doubt,*

*despair,*

*distrust.*

*“Knows whose we are”*

*is a truth that brings comfort,*

*for I am not*

*in charge,*

*in control,*

*in constant need to prove myself worthy.*

*“Makes a home in our hearts”*

*is exactly what I need,*

*for the pilgrim journey is a*

*long walk toward trust,*

*life worth living,*

*love that will not let me go.*

God, it’s me. I thank you for the many ways I receive *agape* from you and others. May I also give *agape* to others in your name. I thank you that you are greater than my heart. May I encourage others that they may move forward in hope. I thank you that I belong to you. May I be a messenger of peace that others may know they, too, are welcome in your home.

**1 John 4:7-12**

 Beloved, do *agape*: now, always, and forever. Do *agape* with everyone, especially the Body. *Agape* is birthed in The Love and flows from the experience of The Love because The Love is *agape*. If you cannot or will not do *agape*, then your experience of The Love is lacking.

We saw and experienced *agape* when The Love sent Jesus into the world—The Love’s own son—so that we could live in him and he live in us—now, always, and forever. In Jesus’ life and death, in his kin-dom words of comfort and challenge, in his resurrection and ascension, in everything that happened to Jesus and through Jesus,[[36]](#endnote-36) The Love’s craving for justice was satisfied[[37]](#endnote-37) and we were brought into oneness—now, always, and forever. Therefore, as we have been showered with *agape,* so we should show *agape* to others. No one has seen The Love face to face so *agape* is the Way that The Love makes a home in us and, breath by breath, makes our *agape* whole and complete.

*Remembering a song:*

*Behold what manner of love*

*the Father has given unto us!*

*That we should be called children of God!*

*Joy again fills my heart.*

*Behold indeed.*

*Being held.*

*Now, always, and forever.*

God, it’s me. I rejoice that I am being held. I give thanks that I am called one of your children. I rejoice that, through Jesus, I can show *agape* to all whom I encounter. In Jesus, I am one with you—now, always, and forever. Amen and amen!

**1 John 4:13-21**

 We experience living in The Love and The Love living in us through the Divine Spirit. This is why we who have seen and perceived that The Love sent the son into the world bear witness that the son is the rescuer of all the world. As you confess that the son belongs to The Love, then The Love lives in you and you in The Love. In this way, we experience and trust The Love’s *agape* for us. The Love is *agape* and whoever makes *agape* their home also opens their heart and makes their heart a home for The Love.

 Loving with *agape* makes us whole and complete, our true selves. Loving with *agape* builds our confidence that when the Day comes, and The Love’s kin-dom is unveiled in its fullness, we will stand with The Love and with one another. Side by side with The Love, we will stand together as one in the midst of the broken world becoming new creation.

 So fear not! *Agape* knows no fear; *agape* made whole and complete drives fear away. Fear is a response to threat, to punishment. *Agape*, when made whole and complete, cannot fear, for it knows that we have been loved from before the beginning of time and will be loved even after the end of all things. Such love overshadowed us, and we have responded to it, each in its own time: first the *agape* from above and then our *agape* in response.

 So love with *agape*! Whoever says, “I love The Love,” yet hates a brother or sister, that person lies. If we cannot love with *agape* the one we see before us, how can we hope to love The Love whom we have never seen? So remember the commandment: Show *agape* to all: first to The Love then also to our brothers and sisters.

*As the world seems to fray at the seams*

*there is much to fear.*

*Wars begun by Russia or because of Roe invite*

*our hearts to quiver with hatred for “the other.”*

*But who is “other” in a world*

*created for love by The Love?*

*Helping us see fear’s frail shape,*

agape *drives away hatred.*

*Under the influence of* agape,

*fear becomes an apparition in the light of the Day.*

*No one will be “other” when the Day is unveiled*

*for those known and named by The Love for love.*

God, it’s me. You have created me in love, for love, to love. Help me live toward the fullness of my calling as one who follows Jesus. May fear loosen its grip upon me as I abide in you, and you abide in me.

 **Second Advent**

**Hebrews 1:1—14**

 The Name[[38]](#endnote-38) has always been about the business of restoring the creation: speaking to our ancestors through truth-tellers time and again and in ways too numerous to count. Recently The Name intensified his speaking—almost shouted, as if from the rooftop—through his Anointed One, his Son, whom he established as the One who will receive all things: heaven and earth, the creation and the cosmos, every atom, proton and quark. The Son will receive all these things because The Name created all things through him—they came from the Son and will return to the Son.

 The Son is the radiance that flashes in the night, illuminating all, making everything so that it can be seen for what it is—its true nature. The Son reflects The Name’s light and life into the creation, making it new creation. The Son whispers and The Name’s *dunamis[[39]](#endnote-39)* is unleashed, new creation bursting forth in praise, galaxies singing The Hallelujah Chorus. The Son purged[[40]](#endnote-40) the dross from human abuse, betrayal, and corruption to give our fractured minds and splintered spirits hope for new beginnings, and then he went to heaven to chill with The Name, as The Name’s right hand.

 Lots of people are impressed with angels and rightly so, but the Son is so far superior to the angels that it’s unfair to compare them. Of which angel did The Name ever say,

You are my Son, my begotten,

now I have brought you forth to shine.[[41]](#endnote-41) Or,

I’ll be The Name to you,

You will be my Son.[[42]](#endnote-42) Or,

Hey, Angels, come take a peek at my Son![[43]](#endnote-43)

When The Name has spoken about the angels, what did he say? He said nice things, yes, but nothing so lofty:

I created you angels as spirits,

You are servants who help purge me the dross.[[44]](#endnote-44)

Being one of The Name’s servants is a high honor, but it’s not in the Son’s league:

Come, sit on your throne!

Take your time: it will be here for all eternity.

Come, hold your scepter!

Hold it high, for it is a symbol of justice for all.

Come, you who adore right relationships![[45]](#endnote-45)

I have fixed you as the brightest light in highest heaven.

Come, you who abhor abuse, betrayal, and corruption!

My joy will refresh you—always and forever.[[46]](#endnote-46)

The Name also says of the Son,

From the beginning, you are Sovereign,

You laid earth’s foundation and set heaven’s lights.

Though heaven and earth perish,

You will be and abide and be adored,

Though heaven and earth become a raggedy robe,

You will be clothed in glory and honor and majesty.

Though heaven and earth suffer corruption,

You endure into all eternity—always who you are.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Let’s be honest with one another. The Name never said to one of the angels,

Come, chill next to me!

Rest your feet upon my enemies’ backs.[[48]](#endnote-48)

Angels are wonderful, yes, and they have a sacred purpose: to serve, to encourage, to support the becoming of our true self as we become whole and complete in the Son.

*Above those who caused laughter.[[49]](#endnote-49)*

*Above the one who silenced the tongue.[[50]](#endnote-50)*

*Above the one who declared a maiden’s exaltation.[[51]](#endnote-51)*

*Radiance.*

*Reflection.*

*Reality that exists in Creation’s heart.*

*Alleluia!*

*Alleluia!*

*Amen.*

God, it’s me. I celebrate Jesus! I honor his name that is above all names. I rejoice that he is honored above the angels. Yet in my rejoicing, teach me also the ways of respect for those who do nor or cannot see Jesus as I see him. Give me humility to acknowledge the many times and too numerous to count ways I and my fellow Christians have brought dishonor to his name. Reveal to me the moments when my lips must remain shut even while my heart bursts in praise. Show me the times when I must walk the path of humility and confession for the sake of my Lord, in whose name injustice was done.

**Hebrews 2:10—18**

 Now why am I comparing the Son to angels? Because many assume the angels are superior to humanity and, therefore, the God-life cannot be repaired by mere humanity.[[52]](#endnote-52) However, in leading the beloved to reflect the divine image, The Name acted conspicuously,[[53]](#endnote-53) through a “mere human.” All heaven and earth exist because of The Name and for The Name, and he chose a mere human as the Archetype[[54]](#endnote-54) and Author of new creation! Indeed, so audacious was The Name that he leads the beloved to become new creation through the Holy One who suffered! The Holy One sets apart the beloved for a purpose: to join together as The Name’s family in the kin-dom. And Jesus is pleased to call by their true name those whom The Name wooed to his bosom: beloved. He says,

I celebrate you, my beloved!

I sing thanksgiving and joy among The Name’s gathered.[[55]](#endnote-55)

I have full confidence in you all,

that you can be persuaded by what is trustworthy.[[56]](#endnote-56)

So here I stand with my beloved,

with all those whom The Name has entrusted to me.[[57]](#endnote-57)

 Because those The Name entrusted to Jesus are flesh and blood, Jesus shared their humanity, becoming incarnate, God *en carne*.[[58]](#endnote-58) He embraced the form of mere humanity in order to give us eternal dignity. He immersed into human experience in order to absorb death itself into his person, and so be able to make null and void[[59]](#endnote-59) the power of the Accuser—Death is now idle and need not be feared. The angels don’t need this help—but humanity does!

The Holy One was fashioned into human form—made fully human in every way—so that he could be the living exemplar of both The Name’s mercy and human trusting. So that he could serve not just as a priest but as the High Priest, to bring together heaven and earth, to embrace humanity with his deity and usher humans into the divine presence. He gets how hard it is to be human! He entered into human suffering that he might transform it, embraced our brokenness that he might heal it, accepted being tested that he might help others pass their test. As the High Priest, he makes us whole and complete.

*Experience*

*when shared*

*creates intimacy,*

*a way of knowing and being known*

*that transcends cognition and*

*saturates the soul*

*with love.*

God, it’s me. Wonder and awe fill my spirit as I contemplate the mystery of Jesus: the lowly One healing all creation, with suffering as the balm used to mend broken hearts, embracing the human experience as the path back to the divine. Audacious, indeed!

**1 Peter 1:17–25**

 The Sovereign doesn’t play favorites and expects us all to live the God-life. Though we are on this earth only for a brief time, we are to live with reverence and respect.

We are like refugees—in this world but not to live according to its values. Our human dignity depends not on riches—silver and gold do not define us—but on our being redeemed.[[60]](#endnote-60) As slaves in the market have had their freedom purchased for them, so The Sovereign purchased our freedom from the clutches of the evil one through the self-giving of Jesus. Jesus the Anointed is like a lamb without blemish, upon whom the world’s brokenness was placed, a scapegoat that takes away the sin of the world.[[61]](#endnote-61)

Before time began, Jesus was appointed this task. In more recent times, Jesus was unveiled for you, that you might trust The Sovereign, letting go of old practices that bring death to be embraced by the ways that raise us to life. It is The Sovereign at work through Jesus, raising him from death to life and making his name to shine like the sun, that infuses our trust with perseverance and causes our hope to shine like the North Star it is.

 You opened yourselves to the transforming work of the Spirit when you submitted yourselves to truth. Your authenticity as followers of Jesus is demonstrated by how you love[[62]](#endnote-62) one another. Keep loving! Love deeply and sincerely from the heart, for you are new creation. Seeds of corruption were not planted in your hearts but eternal seeds, seeds that endure, seeds that cause The Sovereign’s Word to live and abide within you. As the truth-teller Isaiah wrote,

All humans are grass,

our glory like the flowers of the field,

grass withers and flowers fade,

The Sovereign’s Word endures.[[63]](#endnote-63)

This is the Word that was told you—the Story that endures.

*Forest wind--*

*dry, barren arms silhouette gray skies.*

*Brown tufts peek on the trampled path,*

*awaiting the renewal of spring.*

*Fall and fade we must,*

*but wind ushers in*

*hope and the promise of life,*

*dreams we will live again.*

*Wind*

*breaks and blesses,*

*creates belovedness*

*in all in whom the Word abides.*

God, it’s me. May I learn humility as I accept my mortality. May maturity deepen not through length of years but by plumbing the depths of your Word’s understanding, acceptance, and embrace. For in its pages, I find Jesus and am found by him. In its pages I learn the Story of true freedom. May I abide in your Word and your Word abide in me.

**2 Peter 3:1—10**

 Beloved, this is my second letter to you all and in both I have written with a purpose: to give you genuine insight, uncorrupted clarity, and the ability to reason with both depth and breadth. I have written that you might remember the words, discern the justice, and live according to the truth-tellers of ages past and the sent ones of Jesus, who is sovereign above Caesar.

 You need to realize there will be those who will mock the justice and joy of Jesus. These are the same people who hear The Sovereign’s promise of *shalom* and ridicule it. They would heap scorn on their own mothers to make a buck.

 Those who mock will ask, “Where is Jesus’ second coming? Why is he taking so long? Nothing ever changes—same old, same old.” They neglect to remember The Sovereign’s power: that heaven and earth were formed by The Sovereign’s Word, dividing water from water,[[64]](#endnote-64) and that The Sovereign also used water to give righteousness a new beginning through the waters of the flood. The *kairos* will come when heaven and earth endure their just judgment, and on that day all creation shall receive The Sovereign’s purification. Only that which conforms to the God-life will endure. All else will endure the Refiner’s fire.[[65]](#endnote-65)

 Beloved, what is time to The Sovereign? A thousand years are like a day! The Sovereign does not dawdle but waits patiently. The promise of new creation will be fulfilled; there is no rush nor hurry. Instead, The Sovereign waits and works, inviting some and luring others, but desiring for all to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life.

Now, when the *chronos* becomes *kairos,* The Sovereign will act decisively! What is experienced as chaos and calamity to some will be perceived by us as new creation being revealed. We who trust in Jesus the Anointed will see it all unfold, behold its beauty, and rejoice that we get to be a part of The Sovereign’s eternal kin-dom.

*Rejoice (even amidst Buffalo’s sorrow).[[66]](#endnote-66)*

*Revel (even amidst Laguna Wood’s tribulation).*

*Recognize (even amidst Uvalde’s lament) that*

*new creation is promised (as much now as ever),*

*new creation is coming (yet not fully present),*

*new creation will overcome the old.*

*Don’t mock. Trust and work.*

*Don’t despair. Strive for the solution.*

*Don’t fear. Jesus is coming.*

*He does not look pleased.*

God, it’s me. Visions of “baby Jesus” collide with visions of Jesus as “the just and righteous Judge who comes to restore heaven and earth.” I know these are not mutually exclusive roles for Jesus. The former is promise in love; the latter is promise, too, in holiness. One proclaims your desire and will; the other enacts the same. One invites repentance; the other inflicts it upon heaven and earth. O Sovereign, may I accept your invitation to dance the God-rhythms because I trust your desire and will. May I welcome your promise in love. In your mercy, hear my prayer.

**1 John 1:1-4**

 Before the beginning of time, before all that is seen and unseen, the Word of Life lived and moved and had its being, dancing the God-rhythms together with The Love and with their Divine Spirit—a fellowship of sacred Trinity. Then, in the fullness of time—when human *chronos* became The Love’s *kairos[[67]](#endnote-67)*—we heard, we saw, and we touched the Word of Life. The Word of Life was unveiled to us, and we cannot deny what we witnessed but must testify to its truth: The Love is revealed through the Word of Life, and we are invited into sacred *koinonia[[68]](#endnote-68)* through him. Amazing, right? The Love invites us to dance the God-rhythms through Jesus the Anointed, invites us to join the celebration that is the fellowship of sacred Trinity. It is our joy to tell you this truth. Our joy is made whole and complete as we write this to you all.

*What do you know?*

*How do you know it?*

*What have you seen, heard, and touched*

*that enlivened your soul?*

*To witness Life leads us to Love:*

*As it was in the beginning, is now, and forever shall be.*

God, it’s me. I love to dance the God-rhythms—to love effortlessly and breathlessly, to be lifted upon the winds of the Spirit and breathe the Spirit of Jesus. O Love, as I live, may you dance through me—teaching me to love as you love, helping me to live as you live. As I live, may my life bear witness to how great is your faithfulness.

**1 John 3:1-3**

 Look! Listen! Discern the moment: The Love surrounded us in *agape* when he claimed us as family, calling us children! Beloved is who we are. The broken culture cannot accept us (and we cannot be intimate with it) because it did not recognize The Love. Friends, though we are now indeed The Love’s beloved, the fullness of what we will become remains a mystery—the unveiling of our true self an unformed hope. But of this we can be confident: When the Anointed is unveiled, it will be the transformative moment of our lives. We will see Jesus in his perfect humanity and become our true selves.[[69]](#endnote-69) Those who walk toward this horizon journey toward the sacred, as he is sacred.

*Who hasn’t wondered*

*what it would be like to be*

*Captain America or Marilyn Monroe?*

*Who hasn’t wanted*

*to go back to a certain age*

*and get a do-over?*

*Who*

*looks not backward but forward*

*to the horizon of our hope?*

*That one becomes and will become*

*the one The Love saw*

*when Creation sprang forth in the Word: “Let….”*

God, it’s me. I long for the beatific vision: Jesus in glory, standing before my kneeling self. When I think of that moment, I am filled with awe and wonder yet also chagrin, for I am confident it will not be what I expect. I will have gotten so many things wrong about Jesus (who will have neither blond hair nor blue eyes)! Yet I rejoice that you have brought into right relationship with you I can ask for nothing more; I long for nothing else.

**2 John 1:7-13**

 I remind you to love with *agape* in all you do because many oppose the God-life through deceit and manipulation. These opposers do the bidding of the Accuser. They refuse to accept that Jesus the Anointed came *en-carne*; that is, incarnate, in a human body. He did not merely “seem”[[70]](#endnote-70) to be flesh but actually ate and drank, grew tired and slept, suffered in heart, mind, and body as do we all. Those who preach and teach that Jesus only seemed to be human oppose the God-life, for that which is not assumed cannot be redeemed.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Be wary and aware of the opposers. Do not allow them to influence you nor lead you astray. Instead be assured that you make Jesus happy as you walk toward the true teaching about the Anointed—keep on keeping on. Only the true teaching about Jesus leads to the God-life: that Jesus walked through deserts and down dusty roads; he worked for equity and equality; he is the crucified one whose humanity reveals The Love.[[72]](#endnote-72)

The opposers who teach a spiritualized Jesus cannot heal the world’s brokenness; such teaching is so heavenly bound as to be no earthly good. Do not welcome them into your home. To honor them with your hospitality is tacit endorsement of their teaching—may it never be! Do not share *koinonia* in work that destroys the Way of Jesus.

I have much more I could write about this but prefer to speak with you face-to-face. Seeing each other will make our joy complete. The children of your sister, who also was claimed and named by The Love, send their greetings.

*An Ode to Isaiah 58[[73]](#endnote-73)*

*“On the day of your fasting you do as you please,*

*and exploit all your workers.”*

*“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:*

*to loose the chains of injustice?”*

*“Is this the kind of fasting I have chosen,*

*only a day to humble themselves?”*

*“Is it not to share your food with the hungry,*

*to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?”*

*We would see Jesus!*

 *Do you dare?*

God, it’s me. Help me to see my neighbor in need (and not look away). Help me to hear the cries of strangers (and listen, listen, listen). Help me to act as one who follows Jesus, who suffered hunger, fatigue, taunting, and torture. In a virtual world, help me keep it real.

**Incarnation**

**Jude 1:24-25**

 To The Holy, who is willing and who is able to keep you from stumbling and make you to stand[[74]](#endnote-74) even before his presence—

 To The Holy, who is willing and who is able to present you before the heavenly host without fault (and a very great joy it is to do!)—

 To The Holy, who is our Rescue, be the radiance of a thousand suns and the glory of ten-thousand galaxies, be the shouts of all rulers and the whispers of all who are oppressed—

 To The Holy, through Jesus the Anointed, he who is sovereign above all creation today and into all tomorrows, be our joy, our gratitude, and our thanksgiving! Amen.

*The Doxology*

*is more than singing a song*

*life of thanksgiving*

God, it’s me. Yes. Yes. Yes. And yes.

1. c.f. Exodus 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Scholars dispute the dating of the composition of Hebrews. If written before 70 C.E., the Jerusalem Temple would still have been standing and the Temple priests would have been standing to offer sacrifices. If Hebrews was written after 70 C.E., the Temple would have been destroyed by Rome and this verb would need to be past tense. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. c.f. Psalm 2:7. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. c.f. Psalm 110:4. The Greek text says Jesus is priest in the order of Melchizedek, which is a Hebrew compound word of king (*melek*) and righteousness (*tzedek*). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The phrase translated as “listen attentively” here and below is from the Greek word *hupakoe*, which is often translated as “obedience.” *Hupakoe* has as its root *akouo,* “to hear,” and so has nuances that focus not just on following a rule (our ordinary sense of being obedient) but of submission to what is heard or listening attentively to the word that must be followed, the word that compels. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. English translations say Sarah “considered God faithful.” The Greek word used that is usually translated as “considered” or “of the opinion,” is *hegomai*, which can mean these English phrases but links linguistically to *hegemon* which conveys one who is a thought leader or who leads the opinions of others (often used of government officials). It seems to me the author of Hebrews isn’t merely conveying the notion that Sarah had a particular opinion but that her trusting The Name was particularly powerful and has led others to trust as well. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The Greek word used in this verse is *agon*, from which we derive the English “agony.” The author is exhorting listeners to accept discomfort and embrace difficulty for the sake of growing into our true self. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. c.f. Exodus 15:23-24 and 16:2-3 ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. This is one of the chapter titles from Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Free Press, 1989). This quote is, obviously, not in the Greek text but conveys the sense of what Peter writes and how he uses the culminating words of chapter two to call forth focus and behavior. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The Greek word *speudo* can mean either “hasten, speed along” or “desire earnestly.” The interpretive paraphrase incorporates both meanings but leans toward the latter definition in its emphasis. As a Reformed pastor, my theological orientation trusts what The Sovereign does more than what we humans do! However, I am aware that both the progressive Social Gospel movement of the early 1900s and the fundamentalist, dispensationalist preachers of the late 20th century (e.g. John Hagee) interpret *speudo* as “hasten” and believe their efforts can speed along the culmination of all things. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The Greek word used is *kataoikesai*, which is a cognate of *oikeo* with its rich connotations of residing, abiding, and home. The verb, translated as “dwells,” has a rich, biblical history, beginning with the stories of Israel’s Tabernacle (c.f. Exodus 26-27ff.) in which the Lord’s presence was said to dwell. The “dwelling place of God” transitioned to the Solomonic Temple (c.f. 1 Kings 8ff.) and later God’s presence “dwelled among us” in the Word made flesh (John 1:14) and promises to dwell in “spirit and truth” (John 4:23) among all people. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The Greek word used is *ekpipto*, which can translate as “fall away” or “become ineffective.” Falling away has been co-opted by some theologies to suggest eternal peril for those who have been claimed by Jesus. However, *ekpipto* in Greek culture has a nautical connotation as in “off course,” suggesting believers may stray like lost sheep (c.f. Luke 15:1-8) or wander from the truth (c.f. James 5:19-20) but that such is not eternal peril. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. This paragraph has a homiletic quality to it, so I have crafted a version for use when speaking the text publicly. As I imagine the text as spoken Word, I hear the phrases within each paragraph expand upon what comes before to build toward a crescendo.

The Name’s peace rest upon you. The Name’s power work through you. The Name’s purpose inspire your vision and direct your service.

The same The Name who spoke a sacred promise. The same The Name who raised Jesus from the dead. The same The Name who designated Jesus to be the Good Shepherd of her sheep.

May The Name equip you for all you will do. May The Name empower all your doing. May The Name be pleased by all you have done, through Jesus the Anointed, to whom all doxology is sung today and into all tomorrows. Amen. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Kin-dom is a gender-neutral alternative for kingdom, reign of God, or rule of God. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. c.f. Malachi 3:3 (the penultimate chapter in the Hebrew Bible) for an example of the biblical concept of the “Redeemer’s Fire.” Rather than Dante’s “fire as punishment,” the biblical metaphor for fire is as a cleansing, purifying agent that destroys that which is dross and leaves that which is precious. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The Greek text uses *exezetesan* and *exeraunesan* back to back, which are translated as “seek” and “search for, investigate.” I attempt to capture Peter’s emphasis in the paraphrase. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. c.f. Isaiah 8:12-13, though only Isaiah 8:12 is in the Greek text. Allusion seems to be made to Isaiah 8:13 though it is not quoted specifically. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. This phrase is not in the Greek text, but Peter’s paragraph in chapter 3 is clearly a summation of the hope we are to be prepared to share. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. What follows is interpretive paraphrase and offers a description of an atonement theory (re: explanation of what happened on the Cross) known as Christus Victor, which was the Church’s dominant theory for the first 1,000 years. Christus Victor emphasizes Jesus’ victory over sin, death, and evil and contrasts with atonement theories that presume a judicial framework. Theories of atonement that emphasize a judicial perspective are known as either satisfaction theory or penal substitution theory, which are more common and better known within Protestant churches. (The third major theory is known as the moral exemplar theory, and there are variations on the theme for each atonement theory.) The New Testament hints at each of these theories but does not specify any of them as the sole, perfect explanation of what happened when Jesus went to the Cross. It is best to remember the ancient axiom: “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, diversity. In all things, charity.” [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. The Greek and Hebrew words for “spirit” also mean “breath” or “wind.” [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. c.f. Genesis 6-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. c.f. Mark 3:16. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. The Greek word *apostolos* literally means “one who is sent,” from which we get the word “apostle.” [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Dunamis* is the word translated as “power” but from which we get dynamite and dynamic. I paraphrase the Greek with the Greek, for we become more dynamic when we release our power to allow God’s dynamite to unlock opportunities and overcome challenges. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. The Greek word used here and in the next verse is *dedoremenos*, which translates as “give” or “bestow generously.” Significantly, both verbs use the Greek middle voice (“I and you do together”). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The noun form of koinonia is used and can be translated as “partakers of the divine nature.” K*oinonia* translates as “fellowship” and also conveys a deep sense of spiritual and social kinship. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. The Greek word used is *pareisenenkantes,* which the English Study Bible translates rather prosaically as “make.” However, it has the connotation both of “close beside” and “bring deeply into,” which I try to convey in the paraphrase. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. The Greek word used is a cognate of *teleos*, which conveys the sense of “fulfillment, accomplishment, and wholeness.” [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. The Greek word used is a cognate of *agape*, which conveys a holistic sense of perfect, unconditional love. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. c.f. Leviticus 19:18. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. c.f. Exodus 20:13, 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. This passage presents a choice for translators centered on the Greek word *mellontes,* which can be translated either as “to be about to” or “intends.” The Greek has an interesting intersection of *mellontes* with the words for “freedom,” and “judgment” (*eluetherias* and *krinesthai)*. Greek syntax allows *mellontes* to be connected to either freedom or judgment (but not both). The NIV and ESV translate *mellontes* as “about to” and connect it to judgment: “…those who are going to be judged.” (ESV) However, I connect *mellontes* to freedom to translate *mellontes* as intends: i.e. “freedom is the intention for which the law is given.” Thus, in my paraphrase I reject the insinuation that the motivation for obedience is a fear of judgment and seek to convey the Jewish perspective of the Torah (law) that sees it not as a list of obligations but as a path toward personal, community, and national liberation—this is who Sophia intends for us to be and what she intends for us to do. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. “Mercy exults over judgment” is a literal translation of the Greek of 2:13. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. c.f. Psalm 34:12-16. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. The Greek text, *kleise ta splanchna*, literally translates as “close your intestines.” This idiom could be paraphrased as “If your guts don’t pour out” because of others’ pain. My paraphrase seems tame—I may change it in future editions 😉 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Most readers are more familiar with Paul’s connecting of atonement to the cross. Here in 4:9-10, John connects atonement to Jesus’ incarnation—not just the cross but the fullness of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. The Greek word used is *hilasmos*, which can mean “atoning sacrifice or propitiation.” There is a sense in *hilasmos* of The Love’s anger or vengeance needing to be satisfied, which is the familiar connotation adopted by many Protestants. Critics of this perspective suggest this sounds like divine child abuse. Further, such vengeance-as-motivation is at odds with other passages in the New Testament that imply The Love’s motivation is born out of mercy (c.f. 2 Peter 3:9, John 3:16). The paraphrase seeks to walk the tightrope between justice and mercy in a way similar to Romans 3:26, which declares The Love to be “just and the one who justifies….” [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Jewish adherents do not speak God’s name out of respect. Instead, they substitute *ha shem*, which in Hebrew means The Name. In this work I experiment with using The Name when speaking of the divine and rotate using masculine and feminine pronouns by passage.

*The Name* is Aramaic (the common language Jesus likely spoke) for “daddy,” while *The Name* is Aramaic for “mommy.” In an attempt to be gender inclusive, I rotate between the use of The Name and The Name by passage. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *Dunamis* is the word translated as “power” but from which we get dynamite and dynamic. I paraphrase the Greek with the Greek, for we become more dynamic when we release our power to allow God’s dynamite to unlock opportunities and overcome challenges. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. HELPS Word Studies 2512: “*katharismos* (“to purge”) – purification resulting from God removing undesirable admixtures (eliminating impurities).” [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. c.f. Psalm 2:7. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. c.f. 1 Samuel 7:14. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. c.f. Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Septuagint (Greek) text. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. c.f. Psalm 104:4. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. The Greek word used is *dikaiosune*, which is usually translated as righteousness. In this work, *dikaiosune* will be paraphrased as right relationships for two reasons: for its linguistic connections with the Hebrew words for justice (*tzedakah* and *mishpat*, both of which connote relational nuances). Righteousness in the English language has adopted an almost exclusively behavior focus that I want to redirect toward a more biblical perspective. For the record, though, I am not opposed to ethical behavior. 😉 [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. c.f. Psalm 45:6-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. c.f. Psalm 102:25-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. c.f. Psalm 110:1. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. c.f. Genesis 18:10-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. c.f. Luke 1:19-20. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. c.f. Luke 1:35. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. These two sentences are not in the Greek text and are added to provide cultural context. The passage transitions from arguing Jesus’ superiority to angels even though he was human (1:1—2:9) to begin to reason why it was necessary that a human be the agent of salvation. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. The Greek word used is *eprepon*, often translated as “fitting” yet also connotes “conspicuous.” [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. The Greek word used is *archegon*, which may convey “author” and “originator,” and suggests the English “archetype.” [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. c.f. Psalm 22:22. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. c.f. Isaiah 8:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. c.f. Isaiah 8:18. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Literally, “in meat.” [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. The Greek word used is *katargeo*, which Strongs defines as “(a) I make idle (inactive), make of no effect, annul, abolish, bring to naught, (b) I discharge, sever, separate from.” (Strongs: 2673) [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. The following sentences describe the economic, market context that define the meaning of “redeem.” [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. c.f. Leviticus 16:8-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. The Greek text uses both *philia* and *agape*, both of which translate as “love.” The former connotes familial love while the latter connotes a love without condition. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. c.f. Isaiah 40:6-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. c.f. Genesis 1:7. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. c.f. Malachi 3:3 (the penultimate chapter in the Hebrew Bible) for an example of the biblical concept of the “Redeemer’s Fire.” Rather than Dante’s “fire as punishment,” the biblical metaphor for fire is as a cleansing, purifying agent that destroys that which is dross and leaves that which is precious. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. This stanza refers to the mass shootings in May 2002 in Buffalo, New York, Laguna Woods, California, and Uvalde, Texas. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Greek has two words for “time.” *Chronos* depicts linear, chronological time. *Kairos* depicts the key moment when transformation comes (e.g. when the expecting mother tells her partner, “It’s time.”) [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. K*oinonia* translates as “fellowship” and conveys a deep sense of spiritual and social kinship. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. There are several, nuanced interpretations of this verse but two are primary. One primary interpretation assumes a rather linear progression that downplays the significance of the word “like”: (A) see Jesus, (B) be Jesus. The paraphrase conveys the other primary interpretation and emphasizes the significance of the word like: (A) just as Jesus was his best, truest self as a human, so (B) we will become the best version of our self (our true self) as The Love created us to be. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. The heresy John confronts is called “Docetism,” after the Greek word *doceo*, which means “to seem.” The Docetists taught that Jesus only seemed to take on human form but remained only and exclusively divine. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. This phrase is not in the Greek text but is taken from the Apostolic Fathers and Mothers and is attributed to Origen as well as Gregory of Nazinius. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. c.f. Jurgen Moltmann, “This is God, and God is like this. God is not greater than Jesus is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious that Jesus is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than Jesus is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than Jesus is in this humanity.” The Crucified God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 295. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. c.f. Isaiah 58:3-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. In the Hebrew Bible, the question is repeatedly asked, “Who can stand?” This question reaches its climax in the last chapter of the Hebrew Bible when Malachi asks of the Day of the Lord, “Who can stand when he appears?” (Malachi 3:2) The Book of Revelation takes up this theme when at the end of chapter 6 the question is asked again regarding who can stand when the wrath of the Lamb comes. (Revelation 6:17) Then, in a powerful turn of events, Revelation 7 opens a window into heaven, and John sees four angels and then a multitude standing before the Lord. (Revelation 7:1, 9). [↑](#endnote-ref-74)