

# RHYTHMS OF THE GOD-LIFE

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN 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.<sup>1</sup>

*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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

For instance, 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

sedition. 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"<sup>2</sup> 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,

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

four words, but then the fifth line is one word. Here is an example of a *Cinquain* from 1 Corinthians 2:3-16:

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*<sup>3</sup> - of emptying - 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.

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<sup>3</sup> *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.

<b>Book/Letter</b>	<b>Divine Name</b>
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

<b>Book/Letter</b>	<b>Divine Name</b>
Philippians	The Joy
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:

<b>Traditional Term</b>	<b>Fresh Expression</b>
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.

<b>Traditional Term</b>	<b>Fresh Expression</b>
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.

# John

The Gospel of John is a work of wondrous imagination. It uses symbolism to convey theological truths and is unconcerned about the traditional chronology of Jesus' ministry.<sup>4</sup> John differs from the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and beats its own God-rhythm. Why might that be?

As the last of the four canonical Gospels to be written, John summarizes emerging convictions about Jesus within the wider Christian community, most especially convictions about his divine nature. In these pages, I follow traditional English translations to place upon Jesus' lips the divine title "I AM."<sup>5</sup> However, to distinguish between Jesus' use of the divine name and when the name is referring to God, I call God "The I WILL BE," as both "I AM" and "I WILL BE" are adequate translations of the Hebrew word *Yahweh*.

In conveying Jesus' divine nature, the author leans into symbolism and dualisms to highlight spiritual truths: light vs. darkness, life vs. death, Moses vs. Jesus, using earthly symbols of water, wine, and bread, shepherding and gardening, wind and breath to describe Jesus' ministry and The I WILL BE's work in the world. According to the author, Jesus' ministry is both new creation and new exodus—not replacing what occurs in the Hebrew books of Genesis and Exodus but fulfilling their true purpose.

In the above paragraph, I make reference to "the author," presumably John (at least according to tradition). Many scholars argue the tradition is correct in ascribing authorship to John. However, there are some scholars who suggest the author, whom the Gospel names as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (compare 13:23–24 to 21:20–24), is not John but Lazarus! Why Lazarus?

The argument in favor of Lazarus connects with the questions about the Gospel's chronology mentioned in the first paragraph of this introduction. Readers have long puzzled over why the Synoptics focus on Jesus' ministry in

Galilee while John's locus of interest is Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and Bethany. One speculative yet satisfactory answer is that the author lived either in Bethany or Jerusalem but did not follow Jesus for the entirety of his three-year sojourn. Though devoted to Jesus, this "southern" author would have known about Jesus' Galilean ministry but primarily witnessed Jesus' visits to the Jerusalem festivals (e.g., Passover) and naturally focused on telling these stories. Further evidence for Lazarus as the author is found in 11:3, which says, "The one you love is sick."<sup>6</sup>

Whether John or Lazarus wrote the Gospel does not impact a reader's ability to find inspiration and insight from the text, but the question of Jesus' deep love for Lazarus leads to an additional characteristic of John's Gospel<sup>7</sup>: the deeply intimate nature of Jesus' relationship with his followers. Commentators have long called the believers in John "the beloved community" to honor the tenderness depicted. To honor this sense of intimacy and connection, I call the disciples "the Devoted" (rather than "disciplined followers" as I do in the Synoptics).

One last difference to note between John and the Synoptics is that John often, though not always, uses a unique syntax when discussing faith: Rather than simply "belief in" or "trust" (Greek: *pistis* or *pistis en*), John has people "believe into" (Greek: *pistis eis*). I hear in this syntax an invitation to dive deep into the living waters of life with Jesus. May it be so!

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<sup>4</sup> Commentators note that Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is placed at the beginning of his ministry rather than the end of it. While it is possible Jesus overturned tables in the Temple twice, it is unlikely, as the act was so egregious it was used as partial justification for his arrest. More likely is that the author feels free to "mix it up" for the sake of the narrative he wants to share.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Exodus 3:14.

<sup>6</sup> cf. also 11:5 and 36.

<sup>7</sup> In the absence of conclusive evidence, I affirm the traditional authorship and call it *the Gospel of John* or *John's Gospel*.

## John 1:1-5

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.

In the Verb is life—not just the physical kind but the God-life<sup>8</sup> that swept over the watery chaos and breathed spirit into the lungs of our first ancestors and everyone since. The God-life erupts from the Verb and is light to all humankind. The Verb's light shines into all darkness and darkness remains mystified—it can neither perceive nor comprehend the light and is overwhelmed by it.

*Was the primordial soup gray and drab or  
a rainbow bursting forth,  
straining against containment—  
a unicorn itching to gallop?*

*Did the Spirit's breath, like fire, burn when  
filling the lungs of Lucy Australopithecus?  
Was her first dawn more sublime  
upon being gifted God-consciousness?*

*Into the darkness the Verb speaks,  
creating shadows of incomprehension.  
On those who welcome the shadows,  
light permeates, infecting with soul-life.*

*Speak, O Verb, speak!  
Shine, O Light, shine!*

*God-life comes as God-life is welcomed.  
Darkness be damned.*

God, it's me. I memorized this passage thirty-five years ago; it is a part of me. And my understanding only scratches its surface, as if I had read it for the first time yesterday. O living Verb, I do not despair my ignorance but give myself over to your divine intention in my life. It is your work to deepen my contemplation, to strip away my need to possess it. This Word—your Word—is not mine to own but yours to speak. Speak what you would have me welcome. Speak how you will to form and transform me. Speak life and light into me. Speak, O living Verb, speak.

## John 1:6-13

There was a man born<sup>9</sup> for a divine purpose: to bear witness to the light, even if it cost him his life.<sup>10</sup> This man's name was John. John testified so that all people might entrust themselves to the light. John was not the light but was born to bear witness to the light that was coming into the world—the true light, the genuine article, the real deal. This light is the light to whom John gave witness.

This light was in the world, yet the world did not recognize him, could not see the radiance he shined into dark corners. Even his own people did not welcome him, would not embrace him. But to all people who welcome and embrace the light, to all who entrust themselves to the light, he gave special status: to be embraced, held forever, and be called children of The I WILL BE. This becoming-a-child happens not through heredity, nor through national citizenship or personal choice,<sup>11</sup> but by the intention and purpose of The I WILL BE.

*Some God-life is gifted to us from birth.  
Grandma cuddled the girl in her lap,  
Bible in one hand, love in the other.  
Eve by eve, the Story was told—  
prayers and hugs swirling together, becoming faith.*

*Sometimes God-life erupts in a particular moment.  
The mom stood, trembling fury within—*

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek word used is *zoe*, which is translated as “spiritual life” and contrasts with the Greek word *bios*, which is translated as “biological life.”

<sup>9</sup> The Greek word used is *ginomai*, which can be translated as “to come about, to happen, to become, to be born.”

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word used is *martirion*, which translates as “to witness, to testify” and from which we get the English word “martyr.” The paraphrase expresses both connotations.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek word *thelema* which refers to “an act of the will” is used twice in negation—not through flesh (*sarx*) and not through man (*andros*).

*This. Shall. Not. Stand.  
She spoke truth into being, inviting  
regret, confession, and transformation.*

*Some God-life happens to us personally.  
My muse was a surfer—  
his life was something of a wreck, but his  
passion for the Word broke through my defenses:  
Eternity became my now.*

*To those with ears to hear:  
Listen! Welcome! Receive!*

God, it's me. I thank you for the many witnesses you have placed in my life: witnesses to your grace, mercy, and peace; to your desire for justice and shalom; to your enduring, steadfast love that will not let me go. Allow me the privilege of being your witness to another—to friend or neighbor, to colleague or even rival, to “widow and orphan and foreigners” in my midst; all for the sake of your love and their wholeness. May eternity become their now.

### **John 1:14-18**

The Verb clothed himself with humanity—the God-life wrapped in the dust of the earth moved into the neighborhood.<sup>12</sup> And the Verb expressed the full radiance of The I WILL BE—the real deal, filled with loving-kindness. John testified about him, saying, “He was born after me but is indeed ancient, for he is the I AM.” We beheld him.

From the Verb's wholeness we are gifted loving-kindness that grows and expands and multiplies into completeness, so we, too, become our true selves, our version of the real deal, and also filled with loving-kindness. For Torah was spoken through Moses but becoming the

real deal, our true selves, and filled with loving-kindness is a gift that happens through Jesus the Anointed.

No one has ever seen The I WILL BE, but Jesus the Anointed is the one of a kind<sup>13</sup> who conveys Their character and reveals Their radiance, for Jesus lives in The I WILL BE's heart.

*This is God.<sup>14</sup>  
God is like this.*

*Not greater than Jesus in this humiliation.  
Not more glorious than Jesus in this surrender.  
Not more powerful than Jesus in this helplessness.  
Not more divine than Jesus in this humanity.*

*Walking dusty roads until his feet hurt.  
Embracing a leper.  
Freeing a woman from illness, fear, and patriarchy.  
Turning over tables for the sake of justice and prayer.*

*God is like this.  
This is God.*

God, it's me. I kneel in awe before your humility. I walk beside your compassion. I bow to your love. And though I shrink in the face of your Passion, I desire someday to stand—courageous and free, able to proclaim your Jubilee to prisoners and all in need of your liberation. I rejoice that you moved into my neighborhood. Please help me to be a good neighbor, to you and to all whom I will encounter this day.

### **John 1:19-28**

On the first day of the New Creation,<sup>15</sup> John witnessed to the Elite from Jerusalem, who sent clergy and elders to ask him, “Who are you?”

powerful than Jesus is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than Jesus is in this humanity.” *The Crucified God* (Fortress, 2015), 295.

<sup>15</sup> The Gospel enumerates a total of seven days, beginning with this verse and culminating in 2:1, “On the third day...” Commentators agree these seven days are John's way to proclaim symbolically that in Jesus is found a second creation narrative, a revision of the Genesis narratives.

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<sup>12</sup> I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge this phrase comes from Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (NavPress, 2021). It's just such a great line that I was compelled to borrow it from Pastor Peterson.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek word used is *monogenes*, literally meaning “one” (mono) “of a kind” (genus).

<sup>14</sup> cf. 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 than Jesus is in this self-surrender. God is not more

John, ever the straight shooter, was direct: “I am not the Anointed One.”

“Then are you Elijah?” they asked.

“Nope!” replied John.

“The truth-teller promised in Deuteronomy 18:15?”

“No again.”

“Then tell us who you are!” the clergy and elders said in exasperation. “We need to give a report to those who sent us to you. What do you say about yourself?”

John answered with the words of the truth-teller Isaiah from ages past,

I am the voice shouting in the desert,  
calling my people to walk the Way that  
The I WILL BE makes straight—  
from heart to horizon and horizon to heart.

The Intense were present, having also been sent by the Elite. They asked John, “If you are neither the Anointed One nor even the truth-teller promised in Deuteronomy, why do you baptize, for surely baptism is reserved for the Anointed One,<sup>16</sup> whom many call Messiah?”

John replied cryptically, “I merely baptize with water, a powerful symbol that foreshadows the One who comes and even now stands among us. I am not worthy to be his servant. Even his sandals I shall not untie lest the dust of his feet fall upon my hands and bring me honor.” All this happened in Bethany, near Jericho, on the eastern side of the Jordan River, from whence Joshua and the Israelites had entered the Promised Land centuries before, for John was symbolically reenacting the emergence of Israel as a nation—proclaiming Israel’s restoration under the Anointed One and the rule of Sovereign Love.<sup>17</sup>

*Who am I?*

*Inquisitors ask.*

*Politicians assume.*

*Social media announces.*

*Who am I?*

*Not merely my vocation.*

*Not only my associations.*

*Neither my history nor my beliefs fully define me.*

*Better to ask, “Whose am I?”*

*Child of the Covenant,*

*claimed before the beginning of time,*

*embraced after the end of all things.*

*Whose am I?*

*I am yours.*

*I am your servant,*

*your beloved.*

*God, it’s me. Grant unto me the gift of walking the way made straight in the desert (where I happen to live), where meandering can be deadly. Grant unto me the gift of joining the movement that seeks national restoration through your love, your justice, your mercy, your kin-dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Grant unto me the gift of knowing I am not worthy to untie your sandals, yet you call me “Friend.”*

### **John 1:29–51**

The next day, the second day of the New Creation, John saw Jesus approaching and exclaimed, “Look! See! Behold! The Lamb who will remove abuse, betrayal, and corruption from the world. This is the one of whom I said, ‘I am older, but he is more ancient and to be honored above me.’ I did not appreciate<sup>18</sup> him, but he is the reason I do what I do—baptize with water as a sign of his restoration of Israel and the rule of Sovereign love. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven to abide within him. Though I had not appreciated all that he was, The I WILL BE, who sent me for this work, told me that the one upon whom I see the Spirit descend and abide is Their Son.”

The next day, the third day of the New Creation, John was with two of his followers and once again going about his work. When John saw Jesus, he said, “There is

translations. The Greek word used is *eido*, which can mean “to know, remember, or appreciate.” I contend John knew his cousin but did not appreciate Jesus’ significance or role within the restoration of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> cf. Ezekiel 36:25.

<sup>17</sup> The Greek text only cites the location of John’s work. The symbolic significance of this location is given to provide interpretive commentary.

<sup>18</sup> Some readers are confused about why John would say he did not know Jesus, his cousin, as presented in most English

the Lamb again—look over there!” Immediately, the two who followed John knew what to do: They followed Jesus.

Turning toward the two following him, Jesus asked them a question, “What do you seek? For whom are you searching?”

The two followers answered in concrete terms, “Teacher, we want to know where you are staying so we can hang out with you.”

Jesus invited them, “Come, that you may begin to perceive the Spirit’s work among you.” The two followed Jesus to where he was staying<sup>19</sup> and began their journey of abiding with him. (It was about 4:00 p.m.)

One of the two followers was Andrew, Simon’s brother. Andrew’s first response was to find Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah, the Anointed One.” Andrew immediately brought his brother to Jesus.

When Jesus saw Simon, he said, “You are Simon, son of John. But I will call you Peter” (which can be translated as “Rocky”).

The next day, the fourth day of the New Creation, Jesus decided to journey to Galilee. He found Philip (who, like Peter and Andrew, came from the fishing village of Bethsaida) and told him, “Follow me,” and Philip followed Jesus. Philip then went to his brother, Nathanael, and told him, “We have found the one about whom Moses spoke and the truth-tellers pointed. His name is Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

“Galilee?” asked Nathanael. “What good can come out of that hick place? That’s really the boondocks!”

As Nathanael approached, Jesus said of him, “Here comes a true, blue Israelite who speaks his mind regardless of the consequences.”

“How do you know anything about me?” asked Nathanael.

Jesus answered, “Before Philip talked to you about me, I had already seen you, reclining in prayer at home, under your fig tree.<sup>20</sup> I not only saw you, Nathanael, I see you, the real you, your true self.”

“Oh my!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Truly you are The I WILL BE’s beloved and Israel’s Sovereign!”

“You say this because I saw you, but trust this, Nathanael: Not only do I see you, the real you, your true

self, but you will see me. As you gaze upon me, you will perceive Jacob’s ladder,<sup>21</sup> upon which the celestial messengers ascended and descended—bringing heaven to earth and earth into heaven. You will witness these same messengers ministering to the Son of Humanity.”

*What’s in a name?*

*Depends upon the name!*

*Despot, bigot, manipulator—  
not much in those names, except a  
litany of woe.*

*Many names form the mosaic of who I am:  
husband, father, son,  
pastor, preacher, poet,  
leader and servant, friend and neighbor,  
saint and scoundrel, knight and knave.*

*The names of Jesus also form a mosaic:  
The Verb, The I WILL BE,  
the Light, the True Light,  
the Son, the Lamb, the Chosen,  
Rabbi, Teacher, Messiah, Anointed One,  
Sovereign over Israel, Son of Humanity.*

*No single name*

*describes or defines Jesus.*

*But taken together, Jesus’ titles  
evoke a harmony of praise  
even a scoundrel-saint and knight-knave  
delights to sing.*

God, it’s me. Your New Creation invites me—no, summons me—to follow Jesus. With head and heart and hands I will follow. With body and spirit and soul I will follow. In life and in death and in life beyond death I will follow. Your summons is a delight—water sating the deer.<sup>22</sup> I eagerly await the vision of heaven coming to earth and earth being sealed in heaven. In whatever way the vision may come—inward or outward, through mystic vision or in solidarity with the

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout this passage and throughout the Gospel, John plays with the Greek word *meno*, which can be translated as “to stay, remain, or abide.” The followers merely want to know a location where Jesus is staying, but Jesus invites them to abide with him and abide in him (cf. for example, John 4 and John 15).

<sup>20</sup> cf. 1 Kings 4:25, Micah 4:4, and Zechariah 3:10, where the fig tree is a metaphor for one’s home.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Genesis 28:12-13.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Psalm 42:1.

poor and oppressed, I submit to your summons. Here I am, send me!<sup>23</sup>

## John 2:1-12

Three days later, on the seventh day of the new creation, Jesus and his mother, Mary, attended a wedding in Cana. Jesus' Devoted also attended. Now, Jewish weddings of the day were grand celebrations lasting a full week! The marriage of the bride and groom symbolized the love and union between The I WILL BE and Israel, and the wine served at the wedding symbolized new life in Israel.<sup>24</sup>

The wine at this wedding ran out.

When the wine ran out, Mary said to Jesus, "They have no more wine."

"Mom," replied Jesus, "the lack of wine is not yet any of our business. The hour for me to fulfill my purpose is not yet here." (Jesus was referring to the *kairos*<sup>25</sup> for him to be unveiled as the Anointed.)

Mary turned to the servants and said, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six clay jars of about 30 gallons each, a total of 180 gallons! These jars were used for ceremonial washing to make one religiously "clean" and considered "pure."

Jesus instructed the servants to fill the jars, all 180 gallons, and they filled them to the brim. "Now, draw deep<sup>26</sup> from a jar and bring it to the banquet master." The servants did as Jesus instructed them.

When the banquet master tasted the water that had been turned into wine, he realized it was the best wine of the entire week of feasting. Yet the master did not know where the wine had come from (though the servants knew). The master went to the groom and said, "People usually serve the best wine first and then, after everyone is tipsy, they bring out the lesser quality wine, yet you have saved the best for last!"

This act in Cana of Galilee was the first sign Jesus performed. The sign unveiled a glimpse of Jesus' glory and pointed to his purpose: to bring The I WILL BE's new creation into the world. Beholding Jesus' glory, his Devoted believed into him.<sup>27</sup>

After the wedding in Cana, Jesus walked to Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and the Devoted. Jesus abided in Capernaum for several days.

*Three words: "belief," "faith," and "trust,"  
all come from the same root: pistis,<sup>28</sup>  
each living in a different place:*

*Pistis--belief accomplished with the mind.*

*Pistis--faith opened in the heart.*

*Pistis--trust invited for the soul.*

*Can pistis be scribbled on a chalkboard?*

*Saturated with emotion?*

*How does it shape, form, and transform me?*

*Where is my pistis rooted?*

*From whence is it generated?*

*To where does it journey?*

God, it's me. Like your Devoted, I pray that I will believe into you, too. In my preaching, may I leap into bold proclamation. In my prayer, may I sink into silence and contemplation. In my action, may I get my hands dirty for the sake of the poor and oppressed. In my advocacy, may I risk aspersions on my character. Grant unto me a belief/faith/trust, a *pistis* repulsed by passivity and replaced with the life anew and life abundant you promised to all who abide in you.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Isaiah 6:8.

<sup>24</sup> These two sentences are not in the Greek text but are added to provide interpretive context for the symbols John used.

<sup>25</sup> Greek has two words for "time." *Chronos* refers to chronological or linear time, while *kairos* refers to a key moment or pivotal moment.

<sup>26</sup> The Greek word used is *antlesate*, which means "to draw," so traditional English translations are correct to translate as "Draw out," or "Take from." However, *antlesate* usually refers to a deep

well (e.g., Jacob's Well where Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, cf. John 4). John, here, begins his development of yet another symbolic theme.

<sup>27</sup> As noted in the introduction, John's grammatical construction is odd: *pisteno eis* rather than *pisteno en*—literally translated as "believe into" rather than "believe in."

<sup>28</sup> This one Greek word can be translated as "belief, faith, or trust."

## John 2:13-25

As Passover approached, Jesus walked south from Capernaum, then up into the hills to Jerusalem. In the courtyards outside the Temple, Jesus found merchants selling sheep, cattle, and doves, as well as exchanging coins. The Elite of the Temple required that all pilgrims use only coins minted by the Temple for religious payments and offer in sacrifice only animals bearing the stamp of approval from the Temple's Department of Agriculture. The authorities abused their monopoly; it was a racket that Jesus would not abide.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus fashioned a whip from the rushes<sup>30</sup> in the vicinity and began to force out from the Temple area those selling animals and the moneychangers, even overturning the display tables that marketed their wares. Jesus shouted at them, "Out! Out from this spot! My Abba's home shall not be a shopping mall!" His Devoted remembered the truth-teller's words: "A passion for The I WILL BE's abode shall be an all-consuming desire."<sup>31</sup>

The Elite confronted Jesus, saying, "How dare you do this? By whose authority do you cleanse this Temple?"

Jesus answered, "Destroy this shrine and in the three days I will give it back its life."

The Elite, apoplectic, replied, "Herod took 46 years to build this Temple, and you're going to rebuild it in three days?" (Jesus, of course, referred to the Temple that is his person—the holy place in which the presence of The I WILL BE is experienced. Only after Jesus was raised from the dead did his Devoted remember that he had said this, and they trusted<sup>32</sup> the Scriptures and his word.)

While Jesus was in Jerusalem, many people beheld his signs<sup>33</sup> and believed into him. But Jesus did not entrust himself into their hands, for he understood the human heart, that the dividing line between light and darkness traveled through it.

*The sign in the photo proclaimed in block letters:  
"HAISTEN'S MATTRESS AND AWNING."  
Alabama state troopers, roaring lions, rushed  
to pounce, to harm, to expose the human heart.*

*In the foreground,  
a man knelt, hands on his head,  
a baton-swinging state trooper standing over him,  
blunt hatred raining (or is it reigning?).*

*"Get in good trouble, necessary trouble,"  
said the kneeling man years later  
from the hallowed halls of our nation's Capitol,  
"and help redeem the soul of America."<sup>34</sup>*

*Turning tables to tell the Good News.*

God, it's me. I'm not a big fan of turning over communion tables. I generally try to avoid spilling the Welch's and getting too many crumbs on the table when I break the loaf (I want to keep the worship committee folk happy, not to mention those who clean the carpet). I cannot imagine the destruction, the chaos, the retribution that would come. Yet, such worries are trivial compared to the "good trouble" of prophetic protest that calls the powerful to account. True "good trouble" gives voice to the cause of the oppressed and acts to right historic wrongs. I confess: More than I dread the worship committee do I fear retribution for getting into "good trouble." O YOU WHO WILL BE, as St. Francis prayed, "Make me an instrument of your peace." May I preach the Gospel always and, when necessary, use actions.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This sentence and the previous sentence are not in the Greek text but added to provide context for Jesus' actions.

<sup>30</sup> A rush is any of several flowering plants distinguished by cylindrical stalks or hollow, stemlike leaves.

<sup>31</sup> cf. Psalm 69:9.

<sup>32</sup> The Greek construction of this sentence is *epistuen te graphē*, which translates as "believe the Scripture." I note that John here changes the way he uses the verbal form of *pistis* by excluding the word *eis* ("into"). Whereas people in John's Gospel believe into Jesus, the Devoted here merely believe the Scripture and words he spoke. John places primacy on the living relationship with the person of Jesus.

<sup>33</sup> Modern Christians often refer to "signs" as miraculous spiritual phenomenon. However, while the Greek word *semeia* is plural, the only sign mentioned in this passage is Jesus' economic advocacy for Jerusalem's pilgrims, suggesting a broader understanding of "sign" is needed in today's Church.

<sup>34</sup> Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis, July 17, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> This prayer reverses Francis' conventional wisdom, "Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary, use words." I seek to highlight the life-giving, Gospel-proclaiming connection to "Good Trouble" type of actions such as are found in this passage.

## John 3:1-15

One of the Intense was named Nicodemus, who also was a member of the Elite. Nicodemus crept in to visit Jesus at night—in the darkness, he sought the light. Nicodemus greeted Jesus with flattery, “Rabbi, we appreciate that you are one of The I WILL BE’s teachers, for no one could craft the signs you create without Their presence with and within them.”

Jesus answered this flattery with an invitation for Nicodemus to wonder. “No one perceives The I WILL BE’s kin-dom until they are born anew—only new creation discerns the God-life.”

Nicodemus responded, “By what power?<sup>36</sup> Can one re-enter their mother’s womb?”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Nicodemus, humans are born of the dust of the earth and live by the *nephesh*<sup>37</sup> breathed into them by the Spirit. Flesh procreates and Spirit regenerates, and the God-life is lived as flesh and spirit dance together the God-rhythms of new creation. Don’t be surprised that I say, ‘You must be born anew. The wind blows where it will, and you don’t know where it comes from or to where it goes, only that you hear and feel it. In the same way, the Spirit births the God-life: Whoever is born anew perceives it though you cannot see it.’”

Nicodemus replied, “Again, by what power? It is as if you are speaking in riddles! I ask a simple question, and you reply with calculus. I inquire about a single point, and you direct me to the full horizon. I cannot grasp what you say, so I cannot accept what I hear. I refuse to welcome what I do not comprehend.”

“You who teach about sacred things do not understand this?” Jesus asked. “I tell you the truth: We speak about what has been unveiled for us—that which we have seen and heard and experienced in the light. What I place in your hand you do not clasp. What I whisper in your ear you refuse to hear. No one has seen beyond the veil that hides heaven from earth except the One who descended from above, even the Son of Humanity.

“And he who descended will ascend. Just as Moses lifted the bronze serpent<sup>38</sup> in the desert for the Israelites to

gaze upon so that they would be healed, it is the divine necessity for the Son of Humanity to be lifted up. The Israelites set their eyes upon the symbol of their brokenness and were made whole. What is shattered is restored not by being ignored but through honesty, transparency, and acceptance of the God-life received as a gift.”

*“Doctor, lawyer, engineer.”*

*Grandpa told me these three professions were acceptable for a Munroe.*

*I was raised by an engineer:*

*Wanting to know how things work is in my blood, whether the body, the law, or a car’s engine.*

*And then...*

*The Wind blew.*

*The Breath exhaled.*

*The Spirit gave me new life.*

*What I do not know I open myself to discern.*

*When I cannot see, I wait until I perceive.*

*When I cannot hear, I welcome silence as a friend.*

*Thus the God-rhythms are danced*

*and God-life is born anew,*

*again and again and again—until kin-dom come.*

Lord of New Life, make me an instrument of second birth. Where there is mystery, let me wonder; where there is ambiguity, let me explore; where stillness waits, let me yearn for the Wind. O Divine Master, may I not so much seek to avoid death as to welcome new life, to know all things as to be known by you, to comprehend all the answers as to be willing to ask any question. For it is in seeking that we are found, it is in asking that answers are given, it is in knocking that the door to life anew is opened to us by the Breath of your Spirit.

who wants to know the mechanics of salvation, while Jesus speaks as a poet.

<sup>37</sup> *Nephesh* is the Hebrew word for “soul” and also can refer to “breath.”

<sup>38</sup> cf. Numbers 21:18.

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<sup>36</sup> In both of his responses to Jesus, Nicodemus uses the Greek word *dynatai*, a cognate of *dunamis*, usually translated as “power,” and from which we get the English words “dynamic” and “dynamite.” Nicodemus here shows himself to be an engineer

## John 3:16–21

Jesus said, “The Son of Humanity will be lifted up. What can we infer<sup>39</sup> from this? That The I WILL BE loves all creation, the entire cosmos. So, They offered up the one and only who conveys Their character and reveals Their radiance. In doing so, all who believe into the Son will be protected from destruction and made whole and complete, prepared for the God-life that cannot be destroyed but endures forever.<sup>40</sup>”

“Let’s be clear: The I WILL BE did not send the Son into the world to judge, punish, or condemn but to heal, preserve, and rescue the entire cosmos for new creation through the Son. Whoever believes into the Son is rescued from all powers and principalities that seek only to destroy. Whoever refuses to entrust themselves to the Son must stand against these powers with their own courage and strength and confront the principalities with their own insight and cunning. It’s not a fair fight. They who trust their own reputation rather than entrust themselves to the One and Only’s character lost the battle with the powers and principalities.

“And so, this is what they decide for themselves: The Light came into the world, and they preferred darkness. Their demise is inevitable, for even their best deeds are fractured with the brokenness of this world. All who esteem their own deeds more than the Light end up avoiding the Light so that what they do won’t be exposed. But those who seek to dance the God-rhythms seek out the Light so that what they do can be revealed as dancing the God-rhythms of the God-life—accomplished through the *dunamis* of the Spirit and the loving-kindness of the Son, for all good is a gift from The I WILL BE.”

*As a kid, I saw the guy who wore a rainbow wig.  
He sat behind the goal line at football games,  
where a national audience would see his sign:  
“John 3:16.”*

*The sent one, incarnate—  
God “con carne,” God made flesh—  
had become a disembodied message,  
the original Madison Ave. Jesus.*

*As an adult, I see that guy now wears a suit.  
He’s adorned with immaculate hair and white teeth,  
shaking hands and giving money to politicians,  
Madison Ave. Jesus all grown up.*

*Nary a table is touched, much less turned over.  
God’s character and radiance hidden,  
powers and principalities embraced.  
Is this why Jesus was sent into the world?*

*Is there not a better Way?*

*God, it’s me. While your Church whispers of your love,  
the world hears us roar our judgment. In the halls of  
power, we roar. In hospital rooms, we roar. In the  
privacy of others’ bedrooms, we roar. Yet we remain  
silent in the face of mass starvation, naked aggression,  
and punitive systems of our own design. O I WILL BE,  
forgive us our petty judgments, our thirst for  
punishment, our pronouncements that condemn. Help us  
believe into Jesus, not merely in the shallows but also  
in the depths. Help us immerse into him who sends us  
to heal, preserve, and rescue all the cosmos. May new  
creation come as a gift given from your hand.*

## John 3:22–36

After his night encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus went into the desert, toward the Jordan River. He journeyed to a place southeast of the Sea of Galilee and northeast of Jerusalem. He went to baptize. John also was baptizing near the place, in Aenon near Salim, where the water of the Jordan River was plentiful. (People were still coming to John to be baptized, as he had not yet been thrown into prison.)

In the midst of a dispute between John’s disciples and one of the Intense about the difference between baptism and ceremonial washing, John’s disciples noticed Jesus was also baptizing. John’s disciples ran to their master and said, “Rabbi, the one you baptized is now baptizing also and is becoming more popular than you!”

<sup>39</sup> The Greek word *gar* is used and can connote cause, explanation, or an inference. Most translations translate *gar* as causation. I wondered how the verse might convey a different nuance if paraphrased as an inference.

<sup>40</sup> Scholars are divided as to where Jesus’ quote ends (verse 16 or 21) and the author’s commentary begins (verse 17 or 22). I have paraphrased this section as a continuation of Jesus’ speaking but am quite comfortable interpreting 17–21 as the author’s commentary on Jesus’ seminal truth of John 3:16.

John replied, “One cannot reach into heaven to claim a gift for themselves. Rather, one must welcome the gift bestowed from above. Did you yourselves not hear me say, ‘I am not the Anointed but am sent ahead to prepare the Way’? I am like the best man at a wedding: The Bride is not for me but for my friend, and when he hears her voice and sees her face, he rejoices. In that moment, I am well-pleased, for my purpose is fulfilled.

“I must diminish so that he may grasp the full measure of his calling for which he was sent into this world. The one from above is supreme, while the one created of ashes and dust belongs below, tilling the land, planting seeds, waiting, ready to welcome the harvest of God-life that comes from above and is received as a gift.

“The one from above bears witness to what he has seen and heard—the fullness of the God-life. No one yet welcomes his testimony, but soon a remnant of our brothers and sisters, and ultimately the Nations, will receive it and rejoice. Their rejoicing is like one who certifies a message is true by placing their signet ring into wax. Yes, those who welcome his testimony, who receive and embrace it, certify that The I WILL BE sent him. His words and the Divine Spirit he gives bear witness together that The I WILL BE loves the Son with an unending love, and all who believe into him will be prepared to live the God-life forever. Those who are apathetic<sup>41</sup> about the Son will also be apathetic about the God-life; their default choice being to abide in isolation, distant from the divine presence.”

*I confess: It is difficult for me to “diminish.”*

*So used to being on the top of the pyramid,  
I neglect my calling to help others ascend.*

*So accustomed to white male privilege,  
I willfully ignore the truth: I like power and higher pay.*

*So blind am I to what everyone else sees,  
deaf to the laments of those forced into servitude.*

*I choose to be served rather than serve.  
I confess: This seems like reasonable behavior.*

*May neither ignorance nor apathy  
prevent my descent into servanthood.*

*May I discover heaven  
when I drop to my knees to wash another’s feet.<sup>42</sup>*

*May I rediscover the Way of Jesus,  
where first are last and last are first.*

*O YOU WHO WILL BE, save me from myself!*

God, it’s me. May I decrease so that Jesus might increase. May I diminish that Jesus might shine. May my expectations get the attitude adjustment I occasionally seek and, inevitably, always need. May the biblical words I proclaim influence the way I see the world—and myself in it—in ways that lead me to action. May Jesus (and those whom you call me to serve) increase as I decrease.

#### **John 4:1-26**

When Jesus learned the Intense had become aware that he was baptizing more followers than John and teaching them to dance the God-rhythms (though it was his Devoted who were performing the baptisms), he decided to return to Galilee.

Now, the most direct route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria. However, the preferred route was to take the eastern road through the desert to avoid traveling through Samaria. Most Jews considered the Samaritans impure, holding a centuries-long grudge. When Assyria invaded and destroyed Samaria eight centuries before Jesus lived, the men who were not killed in battle were either forced into slavery in Assyria or impaled on spikes as a warning to other nations of the consequences of opposing the empire. Further, Assyrian men populated the land and forced the Samaritan women into marriage, so their children were considered of impure blood. Though the Assyrian men adopted the religion of their new homeland, they only recognized the five books of Moses, not the truth-tellers or wisdom writings, so even their

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<sup>41</sup> Many English translations create a couplet in 3:36 that reads, “Whoever believes...whoever rejects.” The Greek word used for “rejects” is *apatheio*, from which we derive the English word

“apathy.” The sense of 3:36 is not outright hostility nor repudiation of the divine, but a lack of caring.

<sup>42</sup> Fun fact: I write this poem on Maundy Thursday of 2024.

religion was considered impure.<sup>43</sup> Yet it was the divine intention<sup>44</sup> for Jesus to journey through Samaria.

Jesus arrived in Sychar around noon, near the land Jacob had given his son Joseph, which was also where Jacob had dug a well. While his Devoted went into the village to buy food, Jesus, weary from his journey, went to Jacob's well and sat on the wall. A woman<sup>45</sup> arrived at the well soon after to draw water. She was alone, rather than with other women from the village. The village women ordinarily gathered together in the morning to share their daily chores. It was noon when the woman arrived at the well, alone, in the heat of the day. Jesus asked her for a drink.

The woman responded, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan. What is more, you are a man, and I am a woman. Jews do not talk to Samaritans, and women do not talk to men who are not their family. How can you ask me for a drink?"

Jesus answered, "If you understood the gracious character of The I WILL BE and the person who sits before you, you would be the one asking, and he<sup>46</sup> would give you living water."

"Sir,"<sup>47</sup> the woman replied, "the well is deep and your arms not nearly long enough to reach the water! Without rope and a bucket, how will you give me this living water? Who do you think you are anyway? Do you think you are greater than our father Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it himself—not only Jacob but his sons and livestock too?"

Jesus replied, "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again. But all who drink the water that I offer will never thirst, for the water I give springs up within them to water the God-life that prepares one to live the rule of Sovereign love."

The woman replied, "Sir, give me this water that makes me never thirsty! Then I won't have to drag myself to the well alone in the heat of the day."

"Go fetch your husband and return," Jesus commanded her.

"I don't have a husband," she replied.

"You are correct," said Jesus. "Indeed, five men have discarded you, written you a certificate of divorce,<sup>48</sup> and so the man you live with now is not your husband."

"Sir, I see that you are a truth-teller. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain—Abraham built an altar here,<sup>49</sup> and Joshua himself reaffirmed the covenant here.<sup>50</sup> Yet, you Jews say one can only worship in Jerusalem."

"You worship what you do not fully comprehend, but we worship what has been unveiled to us. To be made whole and complete is a gift that begins with us Jews. Yet I tell you the truth, the hour draws near when people will worship not just in this place but in all places. Those who dance the God-rhythms are found wherever the Spirit breathes afresh on humankind. And The I WILL BE searches for those who will dance not merely in ritual but in the rhythms that lead to the God-life of justice and joy."

The woman said, "I know the Anointed One, whom we call Messiah, will come to explain everything to us."

Jesus replied, "The one who speaks to you is the One you seek."

*I notice*

*people seek "living water" in odd places:*

*Can social media Sirens really quench thirst?*

*So often, work and worry cause drought,*

*cracked earth beneath cloudless skies,*

*desert creatures huddling in crevices.*

*Hobbies encourage me:*

*a good hike opens my spirit,*

*good jazz tickles my heart.*

*Yet the longing returns—*

*to love with an unquenchable love—*

*presence, purpose, and passion a subterranean spring.*

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<sup>43</sup> Only the last sentence in this paragraph is in the Greek text. The rest of the paragraph provides interpretive context for how unusual Jesus' choice of traveling through Samaria would have been to a first-century reader.

<sup>44</sup> The Greek word used is a variant of *dei* that connotes divine necessity.

<sup>45</sup> The woman is unnamed in the Greek text, but Church tradition calls her Photina.

<sup>46</sup> The Greek is unclear if the pronoun refers to Jesus or The I WILL BE.

<sup>47</sup> In this passage, the names by which Jesus is referenced escalate: John has the woman refer to Jesus as "sir," "truth-teller," "the Anointed," and the townsfolk refer to him as "Savior of the world."

<sup>48</sup> In first-century culture, only men could initiate (compel) a divorce. Rather than understand the Samaritan woman as being "loose," Jesus' observation suggests he recognizes that she has suffered the trauma of abandonment multiple times.

<sup>49</sup> cf. Genesis 12:7.

<sup>50</sup> cf. Joshua 24:25.

*I discover in The I WILL BE living water—  
an ever-renewing spring, brisk and clear,  
that shines light and invites life.*

*I must drink from this well,  
when Sirens call,  
and never forget that I am a thirsty man.*

O Living Water, make me an instrument of renewal. Where there are parched lips let me give the cup of renewal, where there is a parched soul let me offer the cup of salvation, where there is a dry heart let me worship in Spirit, where there is an arid mind let me worship in truth, where others walk through the desert let me show them the well. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to sate my own hunger as to feast on your Word, to quench my own thirst as to drink from your Spirit, to be resigned to my “what is” as to be ready for your “what will be.” For it is in being found by Jesus that we are made new, it is in being loved by him that we are made whole, it is in sharing Jesus with others that they find for themselves the truth that leads to eternal life.

#### **John 4:27-30**

Just as Jesus told the woman that he was the Anointed, his Devoted arrived from the village. They wondered why he was talking to a woman—and a Samaritan one at that, but no one asked him, “Why are you chatting up a woman?” or “What on earth possessed you to start a conversation with her?”

The woman left her water jug behind and rushed back into the village to tell the people that she might have found the Anointed. “He told me everything I have ever done! Come, see for yourselves. Could he be the Anointed for whom we wait?” The people were curious enough to want to see and hear for themselves what Jesus had to say that they went to the well to encounter him.

*Two encounters filled with wonder.*

*One tinged with judgment,  
undertones of sarcasm,  
the Devoted declaring standards for purity.*

*One excited,  
enthusiasm evoking curiosity,  
seekers willing to listen beyond the messenger.*

*How do I wonder as I wander?*

God, it’s me. Open my heart to suspend judgment so that I may wonder: about the love I see in unexpected places, from surprising people, encountering unforeseen circumstances. Open my mind to release “oughts” and “shoulds” that I may imagine new ways to dance the God-rhythms, new practices that open me to the God-life, new encounters that lead to new creation. Open my spirit that I may encounter you, the Anointed, and so drink from the well of your living water.

#### **John 4:31-38**

While the woman was telling folks in the village about Jesus, his Devoted said to him, “Rabbi, eat something” (for they had brought him food).

Jesus replied, “I have food you cannot appreciate.” Confused, the Devoted whispered among themselves. Had someone brought him food? But Jesus continued, “My food is to fulfill the desires of The I WILL BE. The great ends for which I have been sent must be made whole and complete before I will be sated.

“You yourselves say, ‘We have four months to the harvest—it’s time to relax!’ But I tell you the harvest is bright and brilliant and beckons to be made whole and complete. Its realization brings rejoicing to both the one who sows and the one who reaps, with God-life as the reward. For the reaper and sower dance together, as it is said, and together bring new creation. I sent you to gather the fruit from seeds others have planted. You harvest their labor for both rejoicing and reward.”

*The alarm whispered as dawn glimmered.  
My body, slow to wake, rolled over begrudgingly  
but did not hit snooze.*

*My mind, quicker to awaken,  
began to wonder, imagine, and delight  
at the possibilities the new day would bring.*

*Breakfast was served.*

God, it's me. Give me a passion for people, delighting at the prospect of loving and serving, fueled by the possibility of making an impact for the God-life. And when others love and serve me, when their influence and impact deepen my dance of the God-rhythms, may I rejoice and play my part in the meal you provide them. May we all dine together to fulfill your purpose, for the Feast you provide is not to be missed!

#### **John 4:39-42**

Many Samaritans believed into Jesus because of what the woman shared about him, "He looked into my heart of hearts and knew both my true self and my false self and everything I had ever done." So, when the Samaritans went to him, they asked him to abide with them, to make their home his home. Jesus abided with them for two entire days, and even more of the Samaritans entrusted themselves to Jesus. They said to the woman, "Now we trust this Jesus not only because of the words we heard you speak but what we heard from him ourselves. Truly, this man is the Healer and Rescuer of the entire cosmos!"<sup>51</sup>

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide!*<sup>52</sup>  
*In the dusk of each day.*  
*In the winter of my life.*

*Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away.*  
*Even while the joys you give increase.*  
*Even though spurious glories cease.*

*Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea.*  
*Through accident and illness.*  
*Through prayers of petition and praise.*

*Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.*  
*My deepest need you see.*  
*My greatest joy is Thee.*

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<sup>51</sup> The Greek word used is *kosmou*, which can refer to the world, the universe, or the created order.

<sup>52</sup> The first line of each stanza is taken from the hymn "Abide with Me." The first stanza uses the first line of "Abide with Me"'s first stanza, the second stanza uses the second line of the "Abide with Me"'s second stanza, and so forth to the fourth line of the fourth stanza.

<sup>53</sup> It is unclear based on the Greek word if the officer's title refers to a Jewish or Roman official because the word *basilikos* is used

God, it's me. I long to live in the abode you prepare for me. Until then, I long for you to live in the abode I prepare for you, so that, in life or in death, in body and in soul, with heart and with mind, I may abide with you and you abide with me. O come, Jesus, abide with me! O come, Healer of the World, abide with all people. O come, Rescuer of the Cosmos, abide in, with, and through all creation.

#### **John 4:43-54**

After abiding in Samaria for two days, Jesus left for Galilee. Now, Jesus himself had said a truth-teller is not respected by those with whom they grew up. Yet, the Galileans welcomed Jesus because they had also been pilgrims to Jerusalem. There they had witnessed Jesus cleansing the Temple and casting out religious profiteers who extorted the people. To the Galileans, Jesus was a hero.

Jesus journeyed again to Cana, where he had transformed water into wine. An important man of substantial rank who worked for King Herod Antipas<sup>53</sup> heard that Jesus was in town. This man of substantial rank sought Jesus out and knelt before him. He assumed his privilege<sup>54</sup> to plead for the life of his son, who was near death.

Jesus said, "Blinded by bright lights, you cannot see the contours of the Spirit's craft. Your ears fill with the beat of your own melodies, you cannot hear the whisper of the Spirit's God-rhythms. One who cannot trust cannot live the God-life!"

"Please, sir," the important man said as he groveled before Jesus, "my son, sir, my son! Please heal my boy!"

"Go," Jesus said, "your son will live."

The man trusted Jesus' word and left. As he returned home, the man's servants met him along the way to tell him the good news: "Your son lives!" When the

only once in the New Testament. However, the Jewish historian Josephus commonly used *basilikos* to refer to the Jewish officials who served the king.

<sup>54</sup> The Greek word used is *erota*, which means "to ask" or "to ask earnestly" and carries the connotation that the one asking makes a request from a special position; ergo, what we today call "privilege."

father inquired about the time when his son had begun to feel better, his servants said, “The fever left him around 1:00 yesterday afternoon.” The father realized Jesus’ word had enacted this the same moment Jesus had spoken to him. The father and his whole household believed into Jesus. This was the second sign that pointed to Jesus’ person and purpose.

*After midnight,  
the caller ID told us it was our son’s roommate.  
Dread descended,  
a rucksack filled with rocks.*

*My mind swirled, desperate  
even as brain fog,  
like the socked-in Golden Gate,  
concealed all reason.*

*Heart aflame,  
fear sparking nerves to fire,  
mind a cacophony of thoughts  
I searched for words to pray:*

*Jesus!  
Jesus, O Jesus!  
Jesus, O Jesus! Please!  
Save my son.*

God, it’s me. I can relate to the man of substantial rank. My “rank” (the job that pays me to lead others) was meaningless in the moment of my greatest need. At the end of the day (and its beginning), I am a father who cares and loves, grateful that you respond in love to all in need, not according to our rank but in relationship. I pray I will approach you not only in my moments of obvious need but according to my deepest need: to fill the “God-shaped” void in my heart—not what you can do, but who you are; not what I can get, but what I can give; not my gain but your glory.

## John 5:1–9a

A while later, Jesus journeyed up to Jerusalem for another of the Jewish festivals. In Jerusalem, near the entrance to the city that is known as the Sheep Gate,<sup>55</sup> there is a pool named Bethesda, which in Aramaic means “House of Mercy.” The pool is surrounded by five columns, symbolizing the five books of Moses. Many people with disabilities lay around this pool, for it was said that the first one to enter it when the water stirred would be healed.<sup>56</sup> Those with disabilities included the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed, who were forbidden to enter the Temple<sup>57</sup> yet tolerated at the pool.

One man who lay near the pool considered himself an in-valid<sup>58</sup>—not valid, not worthy, not enough—and others agreed. The “not valid” man had laid beside Bethesda for thirty-eight years! Jesus looked at the man and saw him as one created in the divine image. When Jesus learned the man’s story, he asked him, “Do you want to be made whole?”

The man complained about his circumstances: “Sir, I try to be made whole, but every time the water stirs someone beats me to it. It’s not my fault! Others are faster than I am, and no one is willing to help me.”

Jesus said to the man, “Arise!<sup>59</sup> Live into your full humanity. Stand, grab your mat, and walk into the God-life.” Immediately, the man was made whole. He stood, grabbed his mat, and walked away from Jesus.

*In the mirror, he saw through the eyes of others,  
accepting as fact a distorted vision and caricature,  
as if being placed in a box was valid.*

*I saw him yesterday:  
on the street corner near the freeway,  
wearing filthy clothes.*

*I met him today:  
waiting in line at the bank for seven whole minutes  
before getting to talk to the teller.*

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<sup>55</sup> cf. Nehemiah 3:1.

<sup>56</sup> This prepositional phrase is not in most English translations but is included in a limited number of Greek manuscripts.

<sup>57</sup> cf. Leviticus 21:18.

<sup>58</sup> The NIV tragically describes the man as an “invalid,” while other translations use “a man who was sick/ill/with an infirmity.”

My use of “in-valid” is intentionally provocative to protest the implicit able-ism often brought to an interpretation of this text, this man, and of many with similar disabilities.

<sup>59</sup> The Greek word used is *egeiro*, which can mean “to get up” but is also a common verb to describe resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:4, et. al.).

*I'll talk with him tomorrow:  
look him in the eyes and shake his hand or  
call him by name and speak kindness into his life.*

*He cannot imagine  
one who sees the divine image beneath the surface  
calling him by a new name*

*born of the Gospel, borne upon the Gospel,  
claiming the divine image: deemed  
valid.*

God, it's me. You give me worth beyond any value I achieve on my own: I am your beloved. Beyond physical or mental capability, beyond social or economic status, beyond all human measures, your divine image resides within me. May I reject cultures' caricatures and angry political projections. Help me, you WHO WILL BE, to see myself as beloved in your mirror and no other.

#### **John 5:9b-15**

The day on which the formerly “not valid” man was made whole was the Sabbath. Appalled, the Intense and the Scrupulous said to the man, “How dare you carry your mat on the Sabbath! That is forbidden by Torah.”<sup>60</sup>

The man refused any responsibility for his actions, saying, “The man who made me whole told me to do it.” When the Intense and the Scrupulous demanded the name of the one who made him whole, the man admitted he had not gotten a name but had allowed the stranger to slip away without learning who had restored his life.

Later, Jesus found the man in the Temple from which, as an “in-valid,” he had been barred by Torah for thirty-eight years. Jesus said to him, “You are whole, so dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life. Don't allow the divine light within you to diminish nor the divine image within you to be tarnished.” The man immediately went to the Intense and the Scrupulous and tattled to them that it Jesus had made him whole.

*Fear gripped his heart—  
to be discovered a fraud,  
guilty by association,  
held to account.*

*Fear loosed his lips—  
to direct blame elsewhere,  
slander and slur,  
casting aspersions anywhere but here.*

*Fear threatened his capability—  
to do justice,  
love kindness,  
walk humbly with The I WILL BE.*

*Fear  
closed his mind,  
imprisoned his heart,  
dimmed his soul.*

God, it's me. When fear grips my heart, I am its servant. What I want to do, I do not. What I do not want to do, I do.<sup>61</sup> Fear leads me to hide my true self amidst the debris field of accusation, blame, and the desire to avoid culpability. O YOU WHO WILL BE, save me from my fears! Teach me to trust more and more day by day. May my baby steps while holding your hand lead me, eventually, to walk the Way of Jesus.

#### **John 5:16-30**

Because Jesus had made the “not valid” man whole and complete on the Sabbath day, the Intense and the Scrupulous began to pursue Jesus that they might persecute him. Jesus did not react defensively but merely spoke his truth: “My *Abba*, The I WILL BE, creates and is creating, always forming and transforming all creation toward its true destination: justice and joy, the wholeness of *shalom*. I do this same work.” These words only inflamed the Intense and the Scrupulous to become even more reactive against Jesus, for they understood him to say that he was equal with The I WILL BE.

Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth: The Son mirrors The I WILL BE. What he sees Them do, he repeats. What he hears, he speaks. The passion that enflames Their heart, burns within the Son. The purpose to which They point, the Son pursues. Yes, and this is just the beginning of the Story that will evoke awe and wonder. As The I WILL BE raises the dead, so the Son will give life and find joy in giving it. The I WILL BE has no need

<sup>60</sup> cf. Jeremiah 17:21, Nehemiah 13:15, among many.

<sup>61</sup> cf. Romans 7:15.

to judge, for judgment has been entrusted to the Son, who honors Them. All honor will be given to *Abba* who will share it with the Son, whom The I WILL BE sent into the world.

“I tell you the truth: anyone who hears my Word and trusts The I WILL BE who sent me is already living the God-life. Rest assured you are prepared to dance the God-rhythms now and into eternity. My words are true: Even the dead will hear the Son’s voice and live. The I WILL BE is Life—the universal song at the heart of the cosmos—and the Son sings both melody and harmony. All who hear this music will dance the God-rhythms into eternity, for the Son has been given authority to sing this song everywhere, to everyone and everything. The Son is the full measure<sup>62</sup> of all justice and joy, the love that leads to life.

“Why are you surprised? This is no surprise, for the *kairos* is near! When *kairos* and *chronos* embrace, even the dead will hear the Son sing and all will rise—the good to love, laugh, and leap into the God-life and the evil to fall into destruction. I cannot do any of this on my own, but only through the authority The I WILL BE entrusts to me. As I see, I do. As I hear, I speak. My purpose and passion are to please The I WILL BE.”

*If love is the universal song  
at the heart of creation,  
how shall I sing?  
I shall sing songs of praise,  
in gratitude for your love.*

*If life is the gift  
The I WILL BE desires to give to all,  
how shall I live?  
I shall live in ways that honor The I WILL BE,  
gracious toward all whom I encounter.*

*If Jesus is the full measure  
of all that pleases The I WILL BE,  
whom shall I embrace?  
Jesus, O Jesus,  
I embrace as I have been embraced.*

*God, it’s me. All authority is yours, O YOU WHO WILL BE, and you share it with Jesus—not with me. Help me to live with a servant’s mind and heart and spirit, accepting that caring for others is a gift, a privilege, and a joy. Help me welcome the opportunity to care for all in your Name. I am yours to command, O Compassion, and it is a pleasure to serve.*

### **John 5:31-47**

Jesus continued to describe his authority to the Intense and the Scrupulous, saying, “If I claim to be someone special—Big Man on Campus—it means nothing, for Torah requires two witnesses,<sup>63</sup> and I cannot bear witness to myself. But there is another who vouches for me, whose testimony cheers me on and affirms my work. You know this witness: John the Baptizer.

“You yourselves sent people to listen to John, who pointed to me and my work. Now, John is merely human, and I do not count human testimony as the most reliable kind; I mention John only so that you may be made whole and complete, for John was The I WILL BE’s lamp that burned brightly and shined light for all to see. For a time, you rejoiced in John’s words.

“But now, I have testimony that is even greater than John’s testimony: my work. What The I WILL BE has given me to do bears witness that I have been sent by Them. What I am doing and how I am doing it testify that I have been sent from above.

“My *Abba*, The I WILL BE, has testified about me, not that you would know that. This testimony is found in the Scriptures and requires that you abide in the Word and allow the Word to abide in you. You cannot entrust yourselves to my *Abba* if you do not abide in the Word. So, even though you search the Word, you do not hear my *Abba*’s testimony because you do not trust the words written nor welcome the One who has been sent.

“You search the Scriptures because you trust that in them you will find the God-life. This is correct! Yet, you do not see the light nor receive life because you cannot perceive that I am the One who has been sent. You refuse to dance the God-rhythms or live the God-life!

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<sup>62</sup> The Greek text uses the word *krisis*, which translates as “to judge, decide, assess, or discern.” I am playing with the concept by setting these various definitions in the context of Jesus, who is

the measure against which “the judgment” is evaluated, made, and enacted.

<sup>63</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15.

“I do not accept human honor and adulation, and I perceive you do not have *agape*<sup>64</sup> for The I WILL BE in you. I have come in their character and integrity—being vouched for by Them—yet you reject what you see in me. You then freely welcome others who self-gloss, bragging about themselves! How can you trust what comes from someone else but reject what comes from The I WILL BE? And let’s be clear: I’m not your accuser—that would be Moses! Moses accuses you because he wrote about me in Torah. If you cannot trust what Moses wrote, how can you trust what I say?”

*Standoff on the Edmund Pettus Bridge*

*“Law breakers” vs. law enforcement.*

*Change vs. status quo.*

*Justice vs. oppression.*

*Kneeling in prayer vs. barking hate.*

*Linking arms vs. lifting batons.*

*Suffering servants vs. “civil” servants.*

*“All authority is ministerial and declarative.”<sup>65</sup>*

*Moral authority is deeper than legal authority.*

*To whom does The I WILL BE bear witness?*

God, it’s me. You call me to serve others as you have served: with integrity, fidelity, and compassion; seeking to fulfill the royal law of love. May what I have seen in you be enacted by me. May what I have heard from you speak through me. May I reject all authority based on race, wealth, or gender but instead seek influence through how faithfully I serve and how steadfastly I speak the truth. May I reject authority that seeks to create, honor, or hold on to my status but instead submit to you, Sovereign over all creation.

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<sup>64</sup> The Greek word *agape* is one of seven Greek words for “love” and conveys a perfect love offered regardless of merit—love from the lover for love’s sake.

<sup>65</sup> This quote is taken from Presbyterian Church (USA) polity. It refers to the Presbyterian understanding that influence in the Church depends upon the integrity with which one acts as servant and the persuasiveness of one’s speech.

<sup>66</sup> Only John’s Gospel mentions the kind of bread, barley, which was known as a cheap, common bread. However, given John’s

## John 6:1-15

Later, Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Jewish name (called the Sea of Tiberias by the Romans). Large crowds hounded Jesus, for they saw what he did for the broken. Jesus went up a mountain with his Devoted and sat down in the custom of a rabbi to teach. But the crowds hunted him down.

The Jewish festival of Passover was near, and Jesus saw the throng of people approaching. He said to Philip, “Where should we buy bread for all these people?” (Jesus said this to test Philip.)

Philip exclaimed, “Six months’ salary is not enough to buy even a morsel for each person!”

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, piped up, “Well, this boy here has five barley<sup>66</sup> loaves and two fish, but that’ll hardly make a dint in the hunger for a crowd this size.”

Jesus told the Devoted, “Tell everyone to sit down.” Now there was much green grass in the area, as the truth-teller Isaiah had said would be the case when Messiah, the Anointed One, came,

The desert and parched land rejoice!

The wilderness bursts into bloom!<sup>67</sup>

The crowd sat upon the green grass—5,000 men as well as even more women and children. Jesus took the five loaves, gave thanks to The I WILL BE, and handed the loaves to the gathered people. In the same way, Jesus gave the people the fish. All ate, and all were satisfied. Jesus then said to his Devoted, “Gather up the leftovers for nothing should be lost.” The Devoted gathered what remained of the five barley loaves, symbolic of the five books of Moses: twelve baskets full, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>68</sup>

The people recognized the meaning of all that Jesus had just done through the *dunamis* of his spoken word. With wonder and awe, the people proclaimed, “He

love of symbolism, readers might wonder if the reference to barley loaves has greater significance. One possible referent is in Judges 7:13, where Gideon sees in a dream a barley loaf rolling into the Midianites’ camp to defeat their enemy.

<sup>67</sup> cf. Isaiah 35:1–2. The Greek text does not quote Isaiah, but the idea that Messiah would bring green grass to the desert was a common messianic expectation in the first century.

<sup>68</sup> The symbolic meanings of five and twelve are not explicit in the Greek text but added for interpretive purposes.

is the truth-teller who was to come into the cosmos,<sup>69</sup> the one about whom Moses spoke,

The I WILL BE will raise up a truth-teller from among the people. This truth-teller will be like me, and you will listen to this one.”<sup>70</sup>

Jesus realized the crowd was whipping itself into a frenzy. He knew they would likely seize him to try to crown him a king, so he withdrew up the mountain, like Moses leaving the people and going up on Mt. Sinai to enter into the divine presence.<sup>71</sup>

*I know something about the desert—  
its varied hues of brown clay speckled with the  
drab green of the saguaro and palo verde.*

*I imbibe this dusty landscape,  
quenching my thirst upon its subtle beauty  
even while my lips remain parched.*

*Suddenly the desert transforms—  
stern and frightening,  
violence erupts from above.*

*The stillness that follows invites possibilities,  
the air swollen with moisture, as  
cool wicks my skin.*

*Dawn blossoms with light  
unveiling green and pink and purple  
like a blanket laid down for a picnic.*

*I shall feast this day.*

God, it's me. In gratitude for your fullness, I give you my emptiness. In your abundance, I find I am sufficient. Though broken, I receive wholeness from you. Though made of the dust of the earth, I rejoice that you provide the grain of the field and fruit of the vine. O YOU WHO WILL BE, let me become all that you intend for me to be.

## John 6:16-34

Evening came. Jesus' Devoted walked back to the water. They got into the boat and set off back for Capernaum, though Jesus had yet to join them. The sea roused from its slumber, and a fierce wind began to blow. After about three or four miles of strenuous rowing, the Devoted saw Jesus drawing near to them, walking upon the water. The Devoted were terrified, for they did not understand what was happening. Jesus said to them, "I AM that I AM. Be not afraid, friends, be not afraid." Then, the Devoted understood and allowed him to enter the boat. The boat soon arrived in Capernaum.

The next day the crowd that had remained in Tiberias, on the eastern side of the Sea, saw the boat was gone. They knew Jesus had not boarded the boat with his Devoted, who had left without him. Some sailed to where they had eaten bread after Jesus gave thanks for it, for they were searching for Jesus. When they did not find him there, they sailed to Capernaum to search for him there.

When the crowds discovered that Jesus was already in Capernaum (and as they had not seen him leave Tiberias), they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you search for me not because you beheld a wonder that points to The I WILL BE but because you fed your natural desires. Your belly, not your heart, guides you. Do not strive for what decays but for what endures into eternity, the God-life the Son of Humanity will gift to you. The I WILL BE has placed Their stamp of approval upon the Son, as surety that the God-life given in him leads to new creation."

The people asked in response, "What is good and what does the Sovereign require of us?"

Jesus answered, "What is good and is required is this: believe into the One who has been sent."

The crowd understood that Jesus referred to himself, so they challenged him, "Prove it! Show us something snazzy. Do a little song and dance. Our ancestors saw Moses perform tricks for them. He gave them manna in the desert, food to satisfy their hunger; as the Scriptures say, 'He gave them bread to eat.'"<sup>72</sup>

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, it wasn't Moses who fed our ancestors but my *Abba*. The bread

<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to note that Moses' promise speaks of one who comes to Israel, and here John has the crowd enlarge the scope of the truth-teller's audience.

<sup>70</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 18:15.

<sup>71</sup> This last phrase is not in the Greek text but added for interpretive context, as John continues to draw links between Moses and Jesus in this passage (and the next).

<sup>72</sup> cf. Exodus 16:4, Nehemiah 9:15, Psalm 78:24-25.

from above feeds more than the body—also the soul. The bread from above gifts the God-life to all the *cosmos*.”

The people shouted, “Give us this bread!”

*Searching for something more,  
my attention distracted by cheap novels and Netflix,  
my head eventually hits the pillow.*

*Sleep plays hide-and-seek,  
mostly evading my feeble searching,  
as my wife coos like a dove beside me.*

*I descend into REM,  
a new life opens to me—  
dreams searching for what can be.*

*The next morning, Sunday,  
I do something long neglected:  
search for a church to attend.*

*What an odd sensation to sit in the pew—  
familiar and strange.  
Questions search for wonder and hope.*

*A notion flits about at the edge of my mind,  
speaking in whispers to my heart:  
Is this what I have been searching for?*

God, it's me. I have followed Jesus for decades, and my searching isn't over. It's not that I need someone else but that I need to open myself to new vistas for my soul. I know my Savior; I just do not yet know him fully. I have yet to open myself to all the challenges of mind and heart, soul and spirit to which he calls me. New challenges await. Jesus, you are the One I've been searching for. Teach me anew my true name.

## John 6:35–59

In response to the crowd calling, “Always give us this bread,” Jesus said, “The bread of the God-life I AM.<sup>73</sup> I sate hunger and quench thirst for all who come into relationship with me. I have spoken the truth to you, and you have seen me, yet you do not trust me. Everyone and every kind whom my *Abba* gives to me I welcome and will always embrace, for I have come down from above to fulfill The I WILL BE's set resolve. Not my own plans but the purpose of the One who sent me is my only passion. And this is the purpose of the One who sent me: that I will embrace all who are entrusted to me, not losing anyone, and then raise them into God-life eternal on the Day the rule of Sovereign love is fulfilled.”

Like their ancestors in the desert who complained about manna,<sup>74</sup> those who heard Jesus complained and grumbled about his words, murmuring amongst themselves, “Isn't this Jesus, Joseph's son? We know his parents. How can he say that he came down from heaven?”

Jesus replied, “Stop complaining! No one comes to me of their own will unless they are first drawn to me, wooed<sup>75</sup> by love to discover their true self—whole and complete. All these I will restore to their true self on the Day and breathe God-life eternal into them. The truth-tellers write, ‘All will be mentored by The I WILL BE,’ and what they see leads them to me. No one has seen The I WILL BE except the one who comes from above. I tell you the truth, all who trust prepares for the God-life to come.

“The bread of the God-life I AM. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert and died. Yet here stands before you the bread of life that anyone can eat and not die. I am the bread of the God-life that has come down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live into eternity. This bread is my very person, which I offer up for the life of all the *cosmos*.”

The crowds, appalled by Jesus' words, began to argue among themselves, saying, “Is he suggesting cannibalism? How can we eat his person?”

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<sup>73</sup> I am not channeling my inner Yoda nor Dr. Seuss by putting the verb last. Rather, I am highlighting that Jesus claims the divine name (Hebrew: YHWH, Greek: *Eigo emi*) that translates as “I AM.” This is the first of seven “I AM” statements Jesus makes in the Gospel: the Bread of Life; I AM (without description); the Gate; the Good Shepherd; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and the Vine.

<sup>74</sup> cf. Exodus 15:24 and Numbers 14:2 among many.

<sup>75</sup> The Greek word used is *helkyse*, which is usually translated as “draw, drag, or persuade” but one of its more obscure definitions is “unsheathe.” I considered the paraphrase, “...no one comes to me until their true self is unsheathed by the love that will not let them go.”

Jesus continued to challenge them with concrete images that pointed to the deeper meaning he sought to convey,<sup>76</sup> saying, “I tell you the truth, you must welcome within you the Son of Humanity—consume his flesh and imbibe his blood. Then you will receive the God-life. My flesh and blood consecrate the God-life within you and prepare you for the life to come. My person—my body and blood—creates all reality that endures. To take me into yourself is the way to welcome me into your home. By my abiding with you, you abide in me. This is the meaning of<sup>77</sup> the bread that came down from above. Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and died, but whoever feeds on the bread of the God-life will live into eternity.” All this Jesus taught in the gathering place in Capernaum.

*The sacred in the ordinary—  
earth and heaven commingling, collaborating  
to discover new creation.*

*Snap of matzah,  
sweetness of Hawaiian,  
aroma of fresh-baked black bread,*

*each a reminder of a common humanity  
shared around the globe,  
shared with the One whose love forms creation.*

*To “eat this bread” is no mere meal but  
memory and foreshadowing,  
present confluence of transformative hope.*

*“Take and eat.”  
“Don’t be shy!”  
Jesus with and within me, within you, within us.*

God, it’s me. Your sacrament is both a holy mystery and a whisper hinting at deepest truth: The distinction between “sacred” and “ordinary” breaks down, for you are in the ordinary. Where you are, there is sacred ground. In my waking and in my sleeping, sacred ground. In my walking and in my stillness, sacred ground. In my

worship and in my work, sacred ground. In light and in darkness, in life and in death, in body and in soul—all of it sacred. O YOU WHO WILL BE, show me the glimpses of heaven that surround me day by day and so teach my heart to rejoice.

### **John 6:60-70**

On hearing Jesus’ words, many who had been following him said, “This is a difficult teaching and hard to accept.”

Jesus, aware of the grumbling and murmuring, said, “Do my words scandalize you? What if I showed you a vision beyond the veil separating earth and heaven? Would you feel differently about what I said if mystic visions transcendent enveloped you? You misunderstand. My words are empowered by the Divine Spirit. Spirit speaks to spirit, influencing the heart, opening eyes and ears to receive the God-life. Do not ask for direct experience but for the Spirit to open you to believe into me.” (Jesus knew who would refuse to entrust themselves to him and who would betray him.) “This is why I said that The I WILL BE must woo you and draw you into relationship if you are to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life.”

Many who had been following Jesus turned away from him. So, Jesus turned to his Devoted and said, “Do you also desire to leave?”

Simon Peter answered, “Sovereign, to whom shall we go? You have the words of the God-life! We have come to believe into you, to trust that you are The Compassion’s chosen, the Anointed One.”

Jesus responded, “Did I not choose you all, though one of you works with the Accuser?” (Jesus said this because he knew Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, would later betray him.)

*Do some “fall away” or do they just leave?  
Is trusting a “smorgasbord” or “take-it-or-leave-it”?  
Why do people quit on Jesus?*

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<sup>76</sup> This phrase is added as interpretive context. I acknowledge humbly and with respect for my Roman Catholic friends that the phrase highlights Jesus’ use of symbolism and differs from the lens through which my brothers and sisters read this passage. For Roman Catholics, this passage forms the foundation of their doctrine of transubstantiation.

<sup>77</sup> The Greek text translates as “This is the bread that...” It appears that Jesus’ reference to bread in this verse is not a reference to self, which is why I add the phrase “the meaning of” to the paraphrase.

*“Pastor, the church band is too loud.”*  
*“Pastor, now is no time to go into debt.”*  
*“Pastor, I’m leaving” (if anything is said at all).*

*I wonder, when I get to heaven,  
will I be responsible for all my parishioners  
who just quit on Jesus?*

*I wonder, what will they say when Jesus asks them,  
“Why did you quit your praise?”*  
*Will their answer be, “My pastor offended me”?*

*I have encountered seasons of doubt lasting years,  
struggled long and hard with ethical demands  
until the Way of Jesus made sense again.*

*I have wrestled with the Church,  
but never with Jesus, never with Jesus.  
Who else has the words of the God-life?*

Jesus, thank you for wooing me—first my mind and then my heart, then my ethics, and then my relationships. I thank you for continuing to woo me, drawing me deeper into relationship with yourself. Jesus, I don’t need mystic visions transcendent (though one would be kind of cool and make for a great story to tell my friends)—only you. So, please, continue your wooing until that day I see you face to face and know as I am known.<sup>78</sup>

### **John 7:1-13**

After feeding and teaching the crowds, Jesus journeyed around Galilee. He avoided the region of Judea, and especially Jerusalem, for the Elite, Scrupulous, and Intense wanted to kill him. However, the Festival of Tabernacles drew near, which both celebrated The I WILL BE’s provision for Israel while they wandered in the desert and looked forward to the provision of the Anointed One. Jesus’ own brothers goaded him to travel to Jerusalem to attend the Festival. (They did not yet believe into him.)<sup>79</sup> The brothers said, “What are you doing still up here in Galilee? You need to go to Judea so that your

adoring fans can take in the show. No one who wants to become famous performs in secret. If you’re going to be a big shot, show yourself to the people.”

Jesus replied, “My *kairos* has not yet arrived. You can go any time you want, for the whole world doesn’t hate you, but I am hated for telling the truth: The world is broken and each person in it is tinged with sin—no one escapes the stench of death in this life. You go on to the Festival without me. It’s not my *kairos* to unveil myself to the world.” And Jesus lingered in Galilee for a time.

Though he told his brothers he would stay in Galilee, after they left Jesus went to the Festival in secret, not publicly. The Elite, Scrupulous, and Intense were on the watch for him, asking where he could be.

Among the people, opinions about Jesus were mixed, though everyone was careful to keep their voices low for fear of the religious leaders. Some thought Jesus was a good man. Others disagreed, saying, “No, he deceives the people.”

*Doubted by family?*  
*Been there, done that, bought the t-shirt.*

*Distrusted by some people?*  
*Yeah, that, too.*

*Everyone has an opinion: Some want  
to be hand fed and others resist leadership.*

*Ministry is difficult,  
harder than just living the God-life.*

*I am not called to be popular,  
but to show up, speak up, and do my job—*

*the will of the One who sent me.  
Bring it on.*

God, it’s me. I am strangely heartened to remember that Jesus was challenged by authorities, family, and the general public. I find it comforting to be reminded that ministry is not a popularity contest—never has been, never will be. Sure, I like to be liked. But more

<sup>78</sup> cf. 1 John 3:1-2.

<sup>79</sup> English translations have this sentence in verse five, but I include it before the brothers’ quote to highlight the sarcastic nature of the brothers’ words to their elder brother.

than being liked, let me be committed to doing your work—to love with an everlasting love, to speak the truth in love as you give me wisdom to discern it, to act in ways that invite those whom I encounter to open their hearts and minds to your kin-dom.

### John 7:14-24

In the middle of the Festival, the people were, symbolically, traversing the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land; that is, the people were, symbolically, learning the ways of following The I WILL BE after letting go of the ways of Egypt and Empire. Jesus began to teach in the Temple courtyard. The people marveled at his words and wondered, “How did this man learn so much wisdom without formal education at the feet of a rabbi?”

Jesus replied, “My teaching does not originate with me but with the One who sent me. Whoever desires to fulfill the desire of The I WILL BE will perceive that my teaching originates from Them and discover my teaching leads them to dance the God-rhythms as partners in the God-life. Whoever talks a big game and gloats about all they have learned on their own shines like a dim bulb—what they know about the meaning of life illuminates only a closet. But whoever seeks and searches and eagerly desires to convey whatever the One who sends light, life, and love into the world shines like the brilliance of the sun to all whom they meet. In the seeker and searcher no shadows reside. Moses gave you Torah and no one keeps it, yet you hunt me like a wounded animal.”

“You’re crazy!” the people replied. “Who is hunting you? Who seeks to do you harm? Are you possessed?”

Jesus said, “I did a miracle, and you were all amazed, but then you decided that I broke Moses’ law, and you turned against me. Moses gave circumcision, so you circumcise a boy even on the Sabbath, if he is eight days old. But I make a grown man whole on the Sabbath, and you freak out! Stop dissecting the outward appearance of things and start to see and to celebrate what leads to right relationships.”

*I squat in the shade of three large rocks.  
The sun is high and desert heat drains  
energy, intelligence, imagination, and love  
from my bones—  
I could give a damn about what comes next.*

*The air-conditioned life I once knew  
disappeared the moment I decided  
to leave car and comfort behind.  
Now, with face becoming a dangerous shade of red,  
I realize the only way out is forward.*

*Pausing, I take stock of where I am.  
I begin to observe my surroundings,  
seeing them for the first time.  
I notice a hint of green in the distance,  
speckled amidst twelve shades of brown.*

*A whisper brushes against my heart:  
“All shall be well and all shall be well,  
and all manner of things shall be well.”<sup>80</sup>  
I remain in the shade of the three rocks—  
tasting hope for the first time in days.*

*Night descends,  
and I arise to search for the pillar of fire<sup>81</sup>  
that will lead me through this place  
to the promised peace of justice and joy,  
to the promise of new creation.*

*But first I must learn to see anew—  
to release past narratives,  
to recognize the whisper that sends,  
to distinguish between the inward and outward,  
to learn the Voice in whom God-life resides.*

God, it’s me. As I get older, I begin to believe that I near my journey’s end, and, therefore, I’ve got the God-life all figured out. Well, it may be true that, as I age, I get closer to my physical death, yet I am far, far from my journey’s end. You are my journey’s end. I have come from You and will return to You, and I have so much more to learn so that I might live as the new creation You intend for me to be. In the midst of these desert wanderings I call my early sixties, help me to

<sup>80</sup> Julian of Norwich, *The Revelations of Divine Love*.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Exodus 13:21–22.

seek and keep on seeking, to knock and keep on knocking, to ask and keep on asking<sup>82</sup> that the rule of Your Sovereign love might become the rule of my living.

### John 7:25–36

After hearing Jesus teach in the Temple courtyard, people asked, “Isn’t this the guy our leaders want to destroy? Yet here he is speaking publicly. Do you think they have come to the conclusion that he is the Anointed One? But then, how can this be? We know where this man is from but we aren’t supposed to know where the Anointed One is from!”

This speculation riled Jesus, who shrieked<sup>83</sup> at the people, “You see<sup>84</sup> me and where I am from, so you think you know me. But I have not come for myself. No! I am sent by One who is true, whom you cannot see and do not appreciate. But I both appreciate and know, for I have seen the One who sent me.”

Some in the crowd tried to arrest Jesus but could not for his *kairos* had not yet arrived. Others in the crowd believed into Jesus and said, “When the Anointed One arrives, he will not do more marvels than this man!”

When the Intense and the Elite heard the crowd whisper these things about Jesus, they sent officers to seize him. Jesus responded by telling the people, “I am with you for just a little longer, then I return to the One who sent me. You will look but not find me. Where I go you cannot follow.”

The Intense and the Elite were confused. They said to one another, “Does he plan to flee to Greek lands where he knows we will not follow him? What does he mean that we will look but not find him and where he goes we cannot come?” And confusion reigned among them.

*Seeing  
with eyes  
but much more  
with heart, spirit, soul—  
believing*

God, it’s me. I know “seeing is believing,” but Jesus also said, “Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe” (John 20:29). Grant unto me the gift of trusting my intuition, to know something is good and just and true when it makes my heart sing; to trust my imagination that invites me to trust what I cannot see. When I look, may I find you. Grant, also, the courage to follow wherever you go—to neighbors and strangers, to friend and foe, to just and unjust alike. And wherever I encounter them, may they meet you through me.

### John 7:37–52

The Festival of the Booths celebrated the people’s wandering in the desert. As part of the Festival, the people remembered that The I WILL BE provided water from a rock so the people would not thirst—when Moses struck the rock, the water came out.<sup>85</sup> On each day of the Festival, a priest would draw water from the Pool of Siloam (which in Hebrew means “the Pool of Sent”) and pour the water out on the altar in the Temple, to represent the gift of the Divine Spirit.<sup>86</sup> On the last day, Jesus stood up and called out for all to hear,<sup>87</sup> “Let all who thirst come to me, and I will quench your thirst. Whoever believes into me will have the waters of life flow within and through them, just as the Scriptures teach.”<sup>88</sup> (Jesus was talking about the Divine Spirit that those who believed into him would receive as a gift from above after he ascended into glory.)

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<sup>82</sup> cf. Matthew 7:7–8, where the Greek verb tense indicates a “perpetual present.”

<sup>83</sup> The Greek word used is *ekraxen*, which means “to call out or shriek.” There appears to be a sudden shift from Jesus merely teaching the people to his “*ekraxen*-ing” at them; thus, I use the less common “shriek” rather than “call out” to convey his heightened emotion.

<sup>84</sup> Variations on the Greek word *oida* are used three times in this paragraph. *Oida* can be translated as “to know, remember, or appreciate” and is predicated linguistically on the connotation of

“to see physically with one’s eyes.” The paraphrase plays with the juxtapositions between seeing, perceiving, and knowing.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Numbers 20:11.

<sup>86</sup> The previous sentences are not in the Greek text but provide interpretive context for the circumstance of Jesus’ words that follow.

<sup>87</sup> The text does not indicate when Jesus stood, yet I cannot help but suspect his timing was intentional and that he stood to speak as the priest gathered the water from Siloam.

<sup>88</sup> This appears to be a compendium quote rather than a direct quote. The many possibilities include Isaiah 44:3, 55:1, and 58:11.

Some who heard Jesus thought he must be a truth-teller. Others thought he must be the Anointed One, but these also wondered about the Scriptures that said the Anointed One would be born of David's family and come from Bethlehem.<sup>89</sup> "Isn't he from Galilee?" they asked. So, there again was confusion about who Jesus might be. Indeed, still others wanted to arrest Jesus, but nobody laid a hand on him.

When the officers sent by the Intense and the Elite to seize Jesus returned without him, their masters asked, "Why didn't you arrest him?"

The officers replied, "Have you seen this guy? He's amazing! No one talks like him."

"Has he deceived you, too? Have you been led astray?" The Intense harangued them, "None of the Intense or the Elite believe into him, only this uneducated gang of hooligans that knows nothing about Torah. They are doomed!"

Then Nicodemus, who had approached Jesus in darkness, spoke, "Does Torah convict without a trial, without even a hearing? How can we determine guilt or innocence if we do not listen to what he says?"

Nicodemus' colleagues turned on him, snarling, "You're from Galilee, check for yourself! No truth-teller has ever come from Galilee."

*Twelve jurors sit in a box,  
escorted in and out of the courtroom,  
sequestered away from media voices,  
listening only to those who bear witness.*

*Day by day they sit,  
day by day they listen, until  
it is time to deliberate, discern, decide:  
guilty or not guilty.*

*I am a juror (and so are you),  
called to listen to ancient words.  
I am a witness, too (and so are you),  
peering into eternity unfolding.*

*What is your verdict?*

*What say you about this Jesus from Galilee?*

*Truth-teller and Anointed or Rascal and Rogue?*

*He is listening to what you say.*

*God, it's me. I thirst for living water that washes away the smudge of a broken world. I thirst for your living water that cleanses the stench of my brokenness. I sip gently at first and then gulp greedily from this well from which your living water flows, for it is life—renewing my spirit, restoring balance, re-energizing me for the work of living as Your new creation and my true self. Ahhhh, that's so refreshing!*

### **John 7:53–8:11<sup>90</sup>**

Each went to his own home and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives that overlooked Jerusalem across a narrow valley. Early the next morning Jesus walked across the valley and into the Temple courtyard, where people gathered around him. Jesus sat down, assuming the position of a rabbi, and began to teach the people.

The Intense and the Scrupulous dragged a woman before Jesus and forced her to stand before the entire crowd. With fingers pointing, they said to Jesus, "This woman was caught in the very act of adultery!" (Somehow the man was not caught as well.) "Torah declares that she should be put to death!<sup>91</sup> What do you say?" (The Intense and the Scrupulous sought to trick Jesus because if he agreed with Torah, they could accuse him before the Roman authorities who prohibited capital punishment among conquered peoples. If he disagreed with Torah, they could accuse Jesus before the people as a false teacher.) But Jesus foiled their plans by leaning forward to write in the dust with his finger.<sup>92</sup> Everyone's eyes looked down at the ground (averting their gaze away from the woman) as they sought to see what Jesus wrote.

The Intense and the Scrupulous continued to badger Jesus with questions. Eventually, Jesus rose up

<sup>89</sup> cf. Micah 5:2.

<sup>90</sup> This passage is a later insertion into the text, which becomes obvious when reading 7:52 and then jumping to 8:12, the continuation of the narrative begun in chapter 7.

<sup>91</sup> cf. Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22.

<sup>92</sup> The text does not say what Jesus wrote, though physical actions such as this were a common form of teaching in the Near East.

Some scholars suggest he wrote a commandment, but which one? I observe that The I WILL BE inscribed the commandments onto the tablets with Their finger (Exodus 29:12); however, a far more dominant theme in the Hebrew Scriptures is that the priest is commanded to dip his finger in the blood of a sacrificed animal and spread the blood upon the horns of the altar to convey forgiveness (Exodus 31:18 and Leviticus 4:6 among many).

(though he remained seated) and rolled away<sup>93</sup> their accusations, tossing this challenge to his interrogators, “Let the one without sin throw the first stone.” And then Jesus bent back toward the ground and continued to write in the dust.

When his interrogators heard Jesus, they departed, one by one, beginning with the oldest and most mature of them. Eventually, even the youngest and most impetuous slinked off. Finally, only the woman stood<sup>94</sup> before Jesus. He straightened himself, raising his eyes to the woman’s eyes, and asked, “Has no one judged you worthy of death?”

“No one, my Sovereign,” she replied.

“Then let all talk of a death sentence be rolled away, for neither do I condemn you. Journey forward and leave your brokenness in the past.”

*Still,  
wounded dignity her companion,  
a capital verdict forthcoming, was her heart  
consumed by fear or  
resigned to fate?*

*Angry,  
impassioned self-righteousness their fuel,  
cascading into a crescendo of fury, would they be  
stilled in their deceit or  
denied their pound of flesh?*

*Jesus,  
hearing whispers silent to others’ ears,  
pensive and pondering,  
conviction never wavering,  
mercy his only choice.*

*God, it’s me. Make me able, O YOU WHO WILL BE,  
make me able to stand before you, for your redeeming  
love is upon me; your transforming mercy embraces me.  
I stand before you as new creation, living toward my  
true self, seeking to become that which you have made  
me to be: a witness to your love, a light shining your  
peace to all the world, beginning with those I  
encounter this day.*

### **John 8:12-30<sup>95</sup>**

Jesus continued, “I AM the light of the world—the illumination of every heart and all goodness that exists in creation. Those who follow me don’t stagger about like a drunken sailor but journey ever forward toward the God-life.”

The Intense objected, “So says you and who else? Just saying this doesn’t make it real. Where’s your proof. Do you have someone to testify on your behalf?”

Jesus replied, “Even if I am my only witness, my witness is wholeness and truth, plain for all to see. I know where I come from and where I am going. You have no clue about my origins or my destiny. You decide about people based on your eyes and your stomachs—how people please you is the judgment by which you find them worthy or unworthy. I look at no one in this way, but if I were to play judge and jury, my verdict would be true, for I see all people through the eyes of my *Abba*, The I WILL BE, who sent me. Even in Torah it is written there must be two witnesses<sup>96</sup> for testimony to be valid—I am one and my *Abba* makes two.”

“Who’s your daddy?” asked the Intense. “We don’t see anyone else here!”

Jesus answered, “You do not appreciate<sup>97</sup> me and so cannot perceive my *Abba*.” Jesus said this while in the

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<sup>93</sup> Variants of the Greek word *anakupto* are used twice in this passage. *Anakupto* can mean “to straighten up,” which is how it is translated in many English versions. “To straighten up” highlights the physicality of Jesus’ actions: He was bent over writing and straightened himself. This is surely an appropriate translation. However, *anakupto* can also be translated as “to arise” or “to roll away,” which convey a resurrection allusion. I choose to lean into these latter connotations in the paraphrase.

<sup>94</sup> The Greek word introduced in 8:3, *stetantes*, means “to stand.” This is the same verb used in Revelation 7:9 where, following the great battle between God and the powers, he sees a great multitude standing before the throne. This is the culmination of

the question asked at the end of the Hebrew Scriptures, “Who can endure the Day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?” (Malachi 3:2). The answer provided throughout the New Testament is that all those who are clothed with Jesus stand in that Day. That this woman is the only one standing before Jesus is not coincidental but consequential to the passage’s meaning.

<sup>95</sup> This passage is a continuation of the narrative in chapter 7, situationally, thematically, and linguistically.

<sup>96</sup> cf. Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15.

<sup>97</sup> Three times in these two sentences the Greek text uses variations of the word *eido*, which can be translated as “to know” but also “to appreciate” or “to perceive.” I believe the paraphrase

Women's Courtyard, which anyone could traverse. He said this near the thirteen large, brass basins into which people placed their offerings. This was a well-trafficked, public area, yet no one arrested Jesus because his *kairos* had not yet arrived.

Jesus continued to confront the Intense, saying, "I'm not going to be here forever, and now is your opportunity to learn about the God-life. If you cannot perceive the presence and path of my *Abba*, there is no way for you to dance the God-rhythms, and you won't be able to join me in where I am going."

The Intense did not understand what Jesus was talking about and asked each other, "Where is he going? Why can't we join him? Is he going to kill himself?"

Jesus said, "You embrace broken ways, I liberate from them. You slither through the grass, I soar through the skies. You are of the dust, I am of the light. This is why I said there is no way for you to dance the God-rhythms. As you dwell in your brokenness so you will die in it."

"Who are you?!" exclaimed the Intense.

"I'm the same guy I've always been from the beginning. I have much work to do—things to say about you and decide about you. But trust this: I speak what I have heard from my *Abba*."

The Intense still had no clue what Jesus meant by what he was saying, so Jesus continued, "When the Son of Humanity is lifted up, you will recognize who I am, that I am one who does nothing on my own. Everything I do, everything I teach, I learned from my *Abba*, The I WILL BE who sent me. This is the joy that we share together." Many of those standing in the Temple courtyard who heard Jesus believed into him.

*Would I have believed into Jesus?*

*Would I have listened intently and thought,*

*"Yeah, this guy seems sane"?*

*Only with the eyes of my heart do I perceive,*

*Only with "ears to hear" can I listen and wonder,*

*"What might become of me if I follow Him?"*

---

suggest a more nuanced description of the way the God-life works. Rather than the axiom, "know Jesus = know The I WILL BE," my spiritual experience suggests the axiom, "appreciate Jesus = perceive The I WILL BE." Your experience may differ from my own, which I respect.

<sup>98</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added to provide context to the people's statement. For the Israelites, the *desire* for

*Light illumines both trees and truth,*

*yet also creates shadows of doubt.*

*"What shall I do with Jesus?"*

God, it's me. I feel a kinship with the Intense. I have often wondered about those who make bold claims; sometimes I scoff when the claims are outrageous. And I am mindful: Jesus' claim was outrageous, shocking, even offensive to good and faithful folk of the day—"I AM the Light of the world." Who does he think he is? And as I ask this question, I am mindful again that the question to ask is really, "Who do I think he is?"

### **John 8:31-44**

Jesus said to those who believed into him, "If you immerse yourselves into my Word and follow me, you will begin to perceive what is true and whole and complete—this truth is freedom and liberates all who embrace it."

Those seeking to trust him replied, "We are children of the patriarchs—Abraham and Sarah are our grands—we have never been slaves to anyone. How can your truth liberate us?" (They said this even though it was a demonstrably false statement, as the empires of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome could attest.)<sup>98</sup>

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth: the one who wallows in mud is not clean. Neither is the one who must obey a master truly free. You live and move and have your being amidst a broken world; how can you avoid brokenness? Indeed, the brokenness also lives and moves and has its being within you; how can you be truly free until you are healed and made whole and embrace the rule of Sovereign love?"

"The one forced to serve the master is not a part of the family; only the children are embraced as family forever. So, if you are a part of the Son, if the Son grants you liberty, if the Son calls you brother or sister, only then are you really free. I am aware that your DNA descends from Abraham and Sarah, but you do not live as they lived,

freedom was more projection than reality and expressed itself in the cultural three-legged stool of nationalism, militarism, and messianism. Thus, they are intrigued by Jesus because of his potential to fit into their understanding of what "real" Israel must be. They resist, however, any acknowledgement of their actual political and spiritual bondage.

in freedom and obedience. Example #1: You want to kill me! Thus do I know that my Word does not live and move and have its being within you. I speak what I have seen while in my *Abba's* presence, The I WILL BE. You speak what you have learned from your *abba*."

"Abraham is our *abba*," they exclaimed.

"If you were Abraham's children, you would live as Abraham lived—trusting The I WILL BE through obedience. But that is not actually what you are doing is it? Actually, you are trying to kill me, a man who told you the truth about The I WILL BE, a truth that I heard with my own ears. That's never how Abraham rolled. No, you are living the ways of your *abba*."

"The only *abba* we have is The I WILL BE!" they protested. "We are children of Abraham!"

Jesus replied, "If The I WILL BE truly was your *Abba*, you would love me with *agape*, for I have not come here on my own whim but was sent by Their will. You do not perceive this because you refuse the *dunamis* offered as a gift—the power to hear and listen, to wonder and ponder, to receive my Word within you. You have given yourselves over to the Accuser, who delivers you into brokenness. The Accuser has been a murderer from the very beginning, always refusing to dance the God-rhythms, always rejecting the God-life. The Accuser's native tongue is deceit, which holds captive your minds, and you do its bidding. Indeed, the Accuser holds the everywhere-for-all-time patent on deceit!"

**Warning:** The poem that follows depicts the deceit implicit in the cycle of domestic abuse.

*Alice's breath caught in her chest when  
he entered, his face  
clouded.*

*She flinched at his tone--  
the instruction, the warning;  
she'd better behave.*

*What is "correct behavior" when  
up is down and down is up and  
rational sense impossible?*

*Alice was surprised  
to receive her friend Maria's invitation for coffee--  
and wasn't sure she'd be allowed to go.*

*But she took a breath and went.*

*"How are you?" asked Maria.*

*"I'm concerned about you."*

*"I'm fine. I just fell," mumbled Alice.*

*"I'm sorry. It won't happen again."*

*Maria received these lies with mercy.*

*"I want you to know I have been where you are,"*

*Maria said in a calming tone. "I know people  
who can support you and help you be safe."*

*Alice's heart quickened, her breathing shallow.*

*Her foot began to tap, yet she felt her heart whisper,  
"Here is someone I can trust."*

*Inch by inch, Alice began the long journey toward  
receiving the gift of her belovedness. Exhaling,  
Alice began to trust that she is adored from above.*

*Alice eventually unfolded, like a lilac in spring,  
learning the sun is up,  
reclaiming the soil beneath her feet.*

*Her journey continues even now--  
year to year and day by day,  
moment by moment, and breath by breath.*

*Truth had set and is setting her free.*

*Truth will continue and continue to set her free.*

God, it's me. Make me an instrument of truth-telling, of speaking gentle truths, healing truths, loving and encouraging truths. May the words of my mouth follow the movements of your Spirit, that those overshadowed by deceit might discover the ray of light that shines from your love. And may you send to me those with the courage and grace to speak truth into my life, to illumine my path back to you when I have strayed, to invite me anew to dance your God-rhythms. May I know the truth, and may it set me free.

### **John 8:45-59**

The conflict between Jesus and the people escalated, and Jesus said, "Because I speak truth into its

becoming<sup>99</sup> you do not trust me. You can neither point to anything I have said nor anything I have done that shows I lead others away from the God-life. All that I say leads them toward wholeness and healing and *shalom*, yet you do not trust me. As you embrace the words of The I WILL BE you are enfolded into Their *agape*, but you have closed your ears and so are released to walk your own way.”

Then the people accused Jesus, “Are we not correct in saying you are a tortured soul who comes from a dirty, disgusting people?”<sup>100</sup>

Jesus replied, “I have no fellowship with unholy spirits; neither do I harbor twisted thoughts. I honor The I WILL BE even as you dishonor me. I seek not my own acclaim, but there is One who demands it and will decide whether you avoid the bitter taste of death.”

The people began to shout, “Now we’re certain you are a tortured soul in league with the Accuser and its minions! Even Abraham died, and the truth-tellers’ bones are packed away, yet you say we can avoid the taste of death? What rubbish! You are a lunatic! Who do you think you are?!”

Jesus answered, “If I self-promote and say how great I am, it means nothing. The One whose stamp of approval is placed upon me is The I WILL BE, of whom you claim ownership. You neither perceive Their presence nor recognize Their ways, but I live in continual fellowship with Them. If I said I didn’t know my *Abba*, The I WILL BE, I’d be a liar just like you. Yet I cannot say this because I remember and delight in every moment we have ever spent together, even before the beginning of time. This is why I guard my *Abba’s* Word that creates wholeness and healing and *shalom*. Abraham, your so-called daddy, saw me and delighted in knowing that I would bring justice and joy.”

The people were enraged, “How old do you think you are?! So, you’ve seen Abraham? You’ve talked to Abraham? You’re not even fifty years old!”

Jesus paused, and looking at the people said, “Before Abraham was born, I AM THAT I AM.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Greek and Hebrew cultural understandings of “truth” differ. For Greek culture, following Aristotle and the philosophers, truth is an abstraction, a search for the ideal, the perfection of an Idea. For Hebrew culture, truth is the incarnation of living the Way set forth in Torah—doing The I WILL BE’s intention. This verse is an instance in which I highlight the way that Jesus is understood best by accepting his Hebraic usage of “truth.”

Now beyond enraged, the people picked up stones in obedience to the command from Leviticus,

Death to the blasphemer!  
Pick up your stone!  
Warm up your arm!  
Prepare to inflict your rage!<sup>102</sup>

They planned to throw the stones at Jesus for claiming that he and The I WILL BE were one and the same, but Jesus walked through the crowd and out of the Temple courtyard.

*Brawling in the courtyard like schoolboys,  
fisticuffs not (yet) flying,  
but plenty of trash-talking.*

*Mean Girling in the hallway,  
name calling as a way of life—  
toward what end?*

*Even Jesus gets drawn in—  
emotions rising and, with them, voices,  
until violence breaks out!*

*Because Jesus claims—  
hmmm, what does he claim?  
Oneness, unity—“He in Thee, Thee in He.”*

**I AM THAT I AM**  
**I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE**  
*This is God, and God is like this.*<sup>103</sup>

God, it’s me. Jesus invites me into embrace—will I welcome him? Yes! I welcome Jesus. He commands me to hear and heed his Word—will I receive it with my head and heart? Yes! I receive the Word of Jesus with all my being, as in him the sacred is with me, through him I discover the divine is with us, for him I proclaim You are with all.

<sup>100</sup> The actual accusation is that Jesus is a demon-possessed Samaritan. The conflict has escalated beyond any reason.

<sup>101</sup> In the Greek text, Jesus uses the abbreviated form, *eigo emi*. I use the full divine name (cf. Exodus 3:14) to highlight that Jesus is claiming deity, as the response to his words indicates.

<sup>102</sup> cf. Leviticus 24:16.

<sup>103</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, previous reference.

## John 9:1-7

Leaving the Temple courtyards, Jesus passed by<sup>104</sup> a man who was blind from birth. As one who was blind, the man could behold neither Jesus' glory nor majesty. He could comprehend neither the generative energy nor the true identity of the one who had moved into the neighborhood.

Upon seeing the blind man, Jesus' Devoted asked a question filled with assumptions common in that day, "Whose brokenness led this man into blindness: his or his parents?" (The Devoted assumed the common wisdom of the day that The I WILL BE punished sin by inflicting illness.)

Jesus answered, "The entire creation is broken and in need of renewal and restoration. Blame neither this man nor his parents for his condition but see that his blindness is an opportunity to display The I WILL BE's *dunamis*. Daylight brings the opportunity to usher in new creation; the night comes when darkness prevails. As long as I am in the world, I AM the Light of the World."

Upon claiming oneness with The I WILL BE, Jesus spat on the ground to make mud, took the mud and applied it to the man's eyes as if it were the dust of the new creation. Then Jesus sent the man to the Pool of Siloam (which means the "Pool of Sent") saying, "Wash and be washed." When the man returned, he was restored, whole and complete, and seeing.

*Sunlight dances amidst the pines,  
gentle breeze swaying green branches  
against the blue-hued sky dotted with white.*

*I am almost convinced shade does not exist.  
Looking closer, I see the dark patches  
intermingling with the pines' roots.*

*Light and dark inform my daily breath,  
whether I walk or work or worship, and so  
this dance of shadows mirrors creation.*

*I sense being invited into an awareness of  
suffering and trauma and tragedy, yet also  
the permanence of love that embraces all.*

*To what and to whom shall I give heed?*

God, it's me. Lord of Light, make me an instrument of illumination. Where there is blindness, let me seek your vision; where there is vision, let me see clearly; where there is confusion, let me wait upon you; where there is darkness, let me shine your light; where others reject you, let me rejoice in you. O Divine Light, may I not so much gaze upon the glitz of the culture as to stare upon the character of the Christ; to listen to much chatter as to heed his lone voice; to be led by others as to be sent by you. For it is in seeing the person of Jesus that we are called; it is in hearing the voice of Jesus that we are commissioned; it is in embracing the heart of Jesus that we come to eternal life.

## John 9:8-34

The blind man's neighbors leapt to their feet upon seeing him, like a crowded theater<sup>105</sup> erupting in applause. "Isn't this the beggar we've watched grow up these many years? Isn't he blind? How can it be that he sees?"

Some in the crowd claimed it wasn't the same guy whom they had seen for years begging on the street, just someone who looked like him. But the man answered, "It's me. I'm the one."

These same people asked, "How did this happen? How were your eyes opened?"

The man answered, "The guy who is called Jesus anointed me. With the dust of the earth and his own spit he crafted new eyes through which I see. He sent me to wash in the Pool of Siloam. I washed and received my sight."

The people wanted to know how such a sign could occur, for the man had been born blind. When they asked the man where Jesus was so that they could inquire of him how new creation could erupt in their midst, the man told them he had no idea about Jesus' whereabouts, so the

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<sup>104</sup> That Jesus "passed by" may be an allusion to Exodus 33:22, where Moses stood in the cleft of a rock while The I WILL BE passed by; if correct, the allusion is, admittedly, subtle. The sentences that follow are not in the Greek text but added to offer interpretive nuance if the allusion is intentional.

<sup>105</sup> The Greek word used is a cognate of *theatro*, from which we get the English word "theater." There is a sense of spectacle about this passage that I seek to convey in the paraphrase.

crowd dragged the man to the Intense. (Now the day this all occurred was a Sabbath day, when no one was allowed to “work.”)

The Intense grilled the man about the same things: How could it be that he received sight when he had been blind from birth? The man answered the Intense the way he had answered the crowd: Jesus had anointed him with the dust of the earth and spit from his mouth and then the man had washed his blindness away in the Pool of Siloam.

The Intense were infuriated. Some of the Intense argued, “This Jesus is no servant of The I WILL BE, for he works on the Sabbath.” Others wondered how this could be true, for no one had ever even heard about someone who could perform such a sign. And there was a schism among the Intense.

Not knowing what to believe among themselves, the Intense turned to the man who had been blind, saying, “It was your eyes that were opened—what do you think?”

The man answered, “Jesus is a truth-teller.”

The Intense did not like his answer and so began to speculate that maybe the man had not been blind from birth. They dragged his parents before them and asked his parents, “Is this your son whom you allege was born blind? How then can he see?”

The man’s parents were afraid of the Intense and wanted no part in these proceedings, for the Intense had threatened anyone who supported Jesus with expulsion from the synagogue. The parents responded, “Yes, that’s our son, and, yes, he was born blind. As to what happened, ask him yourself. He is of legal age.”

Becoming more frustrated, the Intense demanded that the man honor The I WILL BE by telling the truth, for “we know this man is broken and leads others to follow him into brokenness.”

The man told them the truth, saying, “Whether Jesus is broken or not, I do not know. What I know for certain, what is as plain as the eyes on my face, is that I was blind and now I see.”

“What did he do to you?!” the Intense shouted. “How did he open your eyes?!”

Now becoming a bit cheeky in his responses, the man replied, “I have already told you what happened, so why do you want to hear it again and again? Do you also want to become Jesus’ Devoted and follow him?”

The Intense launched a broadside of insults at the man, saying, “You are his follower! We follow Moses! We know The I WILL BE spoke to Moses, but as for this Jesus, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

“What a marvel,” the man countered, “your ignorance is quite the spectacle. You don’t even know where Jesus is from, yet HE OPENED MY EYES! Let me tell you what I know: The I WILL BE does not lend an ear to broken desires but listens attentively to those who honor Them in worship and work. Never before has anyone heard of one who could open the eyes of someone born blind—never-ever! If Jesus did not come from The I WILL BE, then he would not have such *dunamis*.”

Disgusted by the man’s words, the Intense reviled and insulted him, saying, “You were filth from the start and still are.” Then they had the man thrown out.

*I wonder...*

*How did the Germans blindly follow Hitler?*

*Why do some parents not vax their kids?*

*How hard is it to understand, “Love your neighbor?”*

*Why do some Christians hate their enemies?*

*How can I not see Jesus in the “least of these”?*

*Why am I sometimes blind to Jesus’ work and will?*

*I wonder...*

*Why do they not see?*

*Why do we not see?*

*Why do I not see?*

*I wonder...*

God, it’s me. I really don’t want to be like the Intense whose willful ignorance prevented them from seeing your work and your will in the person of Jesus. I confess, sometimes I miss seeing Jesus before me in another, beside me in my work, above me in my worship. Forgive and renew me, O YOU WHO WILL BE. Give me new eyes with which to see Jesus—at all times, in all places, among all people.

### **John 9:35-41**

Jesus heard that the formerly blind man had been banished from the synagogue—lost to his community of faith—so Jesus went searching for the man and found him.

“Do you believe into the Son of Humanity?” Jesus asked him.

“Sir,” replied the man, “tell me where to find him that I may believe into him.”

“The one who found you is speaking to you and is he.”

“My Sovereign, I trust!” said the man, who then worshipped Jesus.

“I came into the world to bring wholeness from brokenness and peace from enmity,” said Jesus, “to decrease hatred that causes stumbling and inspire concord that teaches one to dance the God-rhythms. Those who are blind will see in the rule of Sovereign love, while those who see amidst the kingdoms of this world become blind.”

“Are you saying that we are blind?” asked several of the Intense who heard Jesus.

Jesus replied, “Cloudy eyes are not condemned for not seeing clearly. Only eyes that discern the colors of the rainbow are held accountable for not perceiving the light from darkness. Anyone who sees the light yet abides in darkness remains responsible for their actions.”

*How long must explanations gestate before  
understanding births empathy and  
compassion gives its borning cry?*

*“You just can’t see my point of view, can you?”  
Exasperated, I shut my eyes and say,  
“Let me try again to explain it.”*

*Students scurry down hallways, chattering with friends,  
ignoring words penned by Moses.  
Will school walls not hold the Beatitudes?<sup>106</sup>*

*Where are the great thoughts from around the globe?  
The Dharma<sup>107</sup> and Five Pillars<sup>108</sup> and Five Precepts?<sup>109</sup>  
Is there not room for these, too, upon school walls?*

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<sup>106</sup> cf. Matthew 5:1–9.

<sup>107</sup> The Dharma of Hinduism is the power that upholds the universe; its values include such things as absence of conceit, absence of hypocrisy, speaking the truth, and compassion for all things.

<sup>108</sup> The Five Pillars of Islam are profession of faith, prayer five times a day, almsgiving, fasting during Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca.

*God, it’s me. Forgive me those times I see the Truth but do not perceive the Right; even more for the times I perceive the Right and choose complacency or stubbornness—my own desires taking primacy of place—rather than your Light, Life, and Love. Open the eyes of my heart and teach me to see all that you would have me see—both within and without, body and soul, in this life and the next.*

## John 10:1-10

Jesus said to his followers, “I tell you the truth: Those who sneak into the sheep’s pen, crawling through the mud to slink under the fence,<sup>110</sup> are not the sheep’s protectors but thieves—in the sheep pen for no good purpose. The one who serves the sheep strides through the main gate—openly embracing the role of protector. Guardians at the gate open their doors for this protector, and the sheep flock to the voice they hear calling to them. The sheep intuit that the voice comes from one who knows them each by name. The sheep discern this voice is trustworthy and true and they can safely follow wherever it leads. The sheep will not trust a stranger’s voice for they sense “stranger danger” and understand not to follow any voice but the one that knows them each by name.”

Jesus’ followers missed the meaning behind his metaphor—sheep and a gate, thieves and a protector did not compute for them—so, Jesus tried again. “Listen closely while I speak truth to you another way: I AM the Gate through whom the sheep enter sacred ground to discover the God-life. I am the One through whom they are made whole and complete, their true selves. Anyone who claims to be the one from whom the sheep receive the gift of the God-life deceives themselves and those who listen to them. My sheep don’t listen to them, for my lambs listen to my voice spoken into their minds and whispered into their hearts, stirring their spirits and inviting their souls to dance the rhythms of the God-life. They discern that I am the Gate through whom the God-life is discovered. Thieves

<sup>109</sup> The Five Precepts of Buddhism are not killing, not stealing, not misusing sex, not engaging in false speech, and not using intoxicants.

<sup>110</sup> The Greek word used is *anabainon*, which has the connotation of “going over” the gate rather than walking through the entrance. I wanted to convey a graphic depiction of “sneaking in,” yet, because I live in Arizona, I wanted to avoid using “climbing over the fence” because of its political—and, I feel, racist—overtones.

and deceivers come only to steal and destroy, with brokenness their path and devastation their purpose. I have come to bring new creation: the God-life as far as the mind can imagine and as near as the heart can embrace, healing the spirit and making whole the soul.”

*The Psalmist wrote,  
“Be still and know that I am God.”  
Is this a prescription wherein, if followed,  
I discover certainty—an easy-breezy spirituality?*

*I hear in these words an invitation  
to loosen my stranglehold  
on that which chains me to my fears.  
And so, into stillness I immerse myself.*

*Stillness unveils the path I must traverse.  
I see the uneven ground  
whose treachery would cause me to stumble,  
whose detours lead me astray.*

*I journey forward,  
the dawn slowly unveiling,  
illuminating sacred ground of  
green pastures and still waters.*

*In the stillness silence descends.  
I hear the Voice without sound  
that makes my heart tremble,  
as it speaks words that cannot be translated.*

*I trust and welcome this silent Voice  
that infuses me with hope and brings courage.  
I know all will be well, and  
I will be made whole.*

God, it’s me. Help me to slow down, for in stillness your Spirit waits. There, in the stillness, your Spirit waits for me to join with you in holy communion. In the stillness, I hear your Voice calling to me, calling me into joy and assurance and wonder. In the stillness I hear your Voice sending me into the world, sending me for justice and mercy and peace. As I slow myself, literally slow down—my legs, my breathing, my thoughts—I

learn to slow down figuratively and spiritually. Then I can begin to listen as you speak. O YOU WHO WILL BE, teach me the gift of stillness that I may learn the lessons of listening!

### **John 10:11-21**

Jesus continued, “I AM the Protector of the sheep, and I am good. As the Good Protector, I willingly sacrifice my life to protect the lives of my sheep; indeed, my dying is the source of the God-life in their lives. It is my honor to give life to my sheep.

“This work cannot be outsourced to paid staff or even a part-time volunteer, for when danger arrives the hired staff flee. Hired staff is no match for a pack of wolves on the prowl, for the hired hand only has an interest in protecting the sheep whereas I have a commitment. I know my sheep by name, and they trust me—my sheep sense my love and experience my care as a personal gift. Just as The I WILL BE knows me by name and I experience The I WILL BE as a living presence within me, so I know my sheep and they experience my presence as the God-life within them, which is why I gladly give myself to them and for them. It’s an easy choice for me to make to protect and preserve each one of my little lambs.

“I have other sheep in different sheep pens—from every tribe and clan, all nations and languages, each race and all races—they all belong to me. I will bring them under my care, for I am their protector, too. These other sheep will listen to my voice, even if they do not hear it now, even if they cannot understand it yet. I am confident that these sheep will respond to my love, my care, and my protection.

“The I WILL BE loves this about me: I freely lay down my very life—all my power, all my privilege, even my person. I received permission to lay it down and have authority to take it up; it’s my choice to make. And I choose to love so that all may dance the rhythms of the God-life. This is my purpose, the consummation<sup>111</sup> of my life on this earth.”

The Israelites who heard Jesus were divided about his message. Some argued that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic and wondered why anyone listened to him. Others

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<sup>111</sup> The Greek word used is *entole*, which is often translated as “command.” Its root word is *telos*, meaning “purpose” or “end”

(as in the Great Ends of the Church), with the prefix *en* intensifying *telos*.

argued that Jesus was the Lord's<sup>112</sup> instrument; after all, who else can give sight to the blind?

*The "other," often feared, usually caricatured,  
enemy in my imagination and dreams,  
beloved of the One whom I call Sovereign.*

*"Othering" has become a verb—  
dehumanizing entire categories of people  
for whom Jesus, my Savior, gave his life.*

*What shall I make of these "others"  
who neither look nor speak nor act like me,  
yet are also called into the God-life?*

*Where do these "others" come from?  
By what right, by whose decree are they permitted  
to share the blessings I receive as a gift?*

*Spirit whispers to my heart:  
"Do you not know? Can you not see?  
You, Friend, are the 'other.'  
The one for whom Christ died."*

God, it's me. I thank you that I am a child of your naming, a sinner of your redeeming, a sheep of your pasture. I pray that I would desire for all what I have received as a gift, neither of my doing nor of my deserving. May the same showers of grace, mercy, and peace with which I have been cleansed rain down upon all whom I encounter this day. Help me to release myself from the duty to play the kingdom's gatekeeper, while resting assured that the job is taken by One far wiser and more discerning than I.

## John 10:22-42

As the Feast of Dedication<sup>113</sup> approached, Jesus walked in the Temple courts. Some of the Israelites couldn't wait any longer—they had to know if Jesus was the Anointed One or not! And, as the Feast of Dedication celebrated Israel's restoration of independence from the Gentile king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, it seemed a most appropriate time to ask if Jesus would lead a rebellion against Rome as Judas Maccabeus had led a rebellion against Greece.<sup>114</sup> The air was rife with intrigue and expectancy—sparked by messianic fervor and nationalistic fever.

Some of the Israelites surrounded Jesus to ask him, "Are you the Anointed One? If you are, just say so."

Jesus responded, "I have already said who I am and told you my purpose. Yet you do not trust what I say nor what you see even though I display the character of my *Abba*, The I WILL BE. You don't trust me because you are not one of my sheep. My sheep walk with me wherever I go in order to hear my voice, to never miss a word. And what they hear, they do, that we may journey forward together into the fullness of the God-life.

"I give the God-life as a gift to my sheep, without condition and without end. Raiding armies who seek to snatch them out of my hand are no match for me because my *Abba*, The I WILL BE, also holds them; even the mightiest army is no match for my *Abba*. We are together in this work of guarding sheep and guiding them into the God-life. In fact, I and The I WILL BE are a unity."<sup>115</sup>

Those who heard Jesus' words picked up stones to hurl at him,<sup>116</sup> believing he was deserving of death for claiming oneness with The I WILL BE.

Jesus said to the people, "I have done many good works among you, which you witnessed with your own eyes. For what works do you inflict capital punishment?"

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<sup>112</sup> I break my own rule about not using conventionally religious language in order to allude to C. S. Lewis' argument that either Jesus was a liar or lunatic or, as he claimed in many instances, Lord of all.

<sup>113</sup> In 167 B.C.E. Antiochus had triggered the Maccabean rebellion through his desecration of the Temple by sacrificing a pig, an unclean animal, on the altar. The Feast that commemorated the Maccabean victory over the Greek armies is called the Feast of Dedication in John's Gospel and Hanukkah today but was also known as the Feast of Renovation or Feast of Restoration in first-

century Israel. It was a religious celebration with decidedly political overtones given its connection with restored independence for the nation.

<sup>114</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for context.

<sup>115</sup> Jesus' words may allude to the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one...." The emphasis on the Greek word *heis*, translated as "one," is unity and primacy, which suggests an allusion to the *Shema*.

<sup>116</sup> cf. Leviticus 24:14 for the law that proscribes stoning as punishment for blasphemy. The people's actions suggest how they interpreted Jesus' words alluding to the *Shema*.

“Not for your works but for your words,” they replied, “because you speak falsely of The I WILL BE when you claim oneness of purpose and person with Them, even though you are just a man.”

Jesus reminded them of the Psalm that taught that we are all “little gods,”<sup>117</sup> referring to those who do The I WILL BE’s purpose. “If the I WILL BE elevates the work of the servants of the Word—and the Word cannot be broken—how much more will They venerate the work of the One whom They sent into the world to fulfill and complete the work? How can you quibble about what they spoke plainly? Why complain when it is so clear that I belong to my *Abba* and my *Abba* is at work through me?”

“If you cannot listen to my words then look at my works. They bear the sacred character of The I WILL BE. Why, then, is it so difficult to trust into me, to experience unity with me and, therefore, with The I WILL BE? Let what you see me do lead you to trust that I am in The I WILL BE and The I WILL BE is in me—our unity—whole and complete—being one.”

Hearing these words, the people once again tried to arrest Jesus, who slipped through their hands.<sup>118</sup> Jesus journeyed into the desert, to the Jordan River where John first baptized. There Jesus abided for a time, and many people came to him. The people said, “John never performed good works, but he proclaimed words that are just and true—John pointed to this Jesus.” Many believed into Jesus while he was in the desert.

*Fervor burns, becoming a fever—  
nationalistic spirit rising, political salvation aspiring:  
The people call out, “Save us! Save us!”*

<sup>117</sup> Psalm 82:6.

<sup>118</sup> Note the irony that Jesus’ sheep can never be snatched away, while Jesus evades the people’s hands.

<sup>119</sup> cf. the wordplay in Jeremiah 29:5–8, where the prophet contrasts The I WILL BE’s call for justice and peace (Hebrew *shalom*, often translated in English as “prosperity,”) with the false prophet’s deceptive dreams (Hebrew *chalom*).

<sup>120</sup> Elizabeth Schrader, a professor at Villanova University, has proven that a copyist changed the Greek from M-a-r-i-a to M-a-r-th-a by smudging the iota and adding a theta in the oldest known copy of the Gospel of John: Papyrus 66 (see below).



*Who is this Messiah?  
Do we know him?*

*Words are cheap—anyone can say anything,  
multiple lies becoming a mountain  
ascending to unseen heights.*

*Who is this Messiah?  
Can we trust her?*

*Works proclaim their own narrative—  
laying a foundation of shalom or chalom,<sup>119</sup>  
securing a just liberty or ensuring a large portfolio.*

*The One who is Messiah  
can be trusted.*

God, it’s me. When I look at Jesus, I see you. When I listen to Jesus, your voice speaks. That you are in Jesus and Jesus is in you is not only my faith, but the foundation for all that I trust in the God-life. I celebrate your character, compassion, and humility as I see them in Jesus. I wonder at your winsome wisdom as I hear it in Jesus. Praise be to you, O YOU WHO WILL BE! May I be one with you as you are one with Jesus! May I join you, the Triune fellowship, in the dance of everlasting love!

### John 11:1-7<sup>120</sup>

A certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary *Magdala*, known as Mary the Tower,<sup>121</sup> who

The assumption is that the copyist sought to harmonize John 11 and Luke 10, which does discuss two sisters named Mary and Martha. However, Martha is not actually present in John 11 given the evidence found in Papyrus 66! There is only Mary. Throughout John 11, I will reference Schrader’s research, which is summarized in “All the Marys,” a sermon by Diana Butler Bass, Wild Goose Festival, July 17, 2022. The manuscript of Schrader’s Master’s thesis can be found at <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b8fc64e3-e73b-4d1f-983c-ee9370b9b893/content>, referenced 11/28/24.

<sup>121</sup> According to Schrader’s research, the name “Mary Magdalene” does not refer to a village on the Sea of Galilee, which became associated with Mary in later centuries (and is now a tourist attraction). Rather, *Magdala* is the Aramaic word for “tower” and

was Lazarus' sister,<sup>122</sup> the one who anointed Jesus with her hair and with perfume to prepare him for his burial. Mary sent word to Jesus: "The one you love is sick." Jesus responded, "This sickness will not end in death but be an instrument of the God-life. The radiance and reflection of The I WILL BE will be seen through it." Now, Jesus loved both Mary and Lazarus, yet abided where he was for two more days! On the third day,<sup>123</sup> Jesus said to his Devoted, "Let's go on to Judea, to the village of Bethany."

*What are we to think?*

*Forty-seven hours, 32 minutes, 11 seconds—  
the length of time Lazarus was dead,  
for he had already died before messengers said,  
"The one you love is ill."*

*Suffering and death become, in Lazarus,  
mystery encountered, questions asked, like,  
"Why the hell did you wait, Jesus?"  
What were you thinking, Anointed One?*

*Yet glimmer of hope emerges,  
light piercing the fissures of my soul,  
emerging beyond the dark shadows,  
borne upon the wind of Easter whisper.*

*I know not what to think, yet dare to imagine.*

God, it's me. I have learned that hope is neither place nor thing but active verb—neither emotional state nor spiritual vessel but embrace of resilience and courage that accepts the call to love and keep loving, to trust and keep trusting. Hope propels me forward. In hope I journey toward what I cannot see and do not know yet dare to imagine. In hope I walk—day by day and

step by step—ever deeper into the darkness, even into death, trusting that only the path through the darkness will lead me to the light of the rising Son.

### John 11:8-16

Upon hearing Jesus' pronouncement that they would return to Judea, his Devoted protested, "Teacher, Judea is where they want to convict you of a capital offense and see you punished with death. Why return there?"

Jesus answered, "When it's time to do good, do it. When daylight comes, get up and do what needs to be done. There are twelve hours of daylight for doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly. Walking in the dark leads to stumbling, falling, and broken limbs. Why wait for darkness when the light of the world still shines upon you?"

After talking about light and darkness, Jesus told his Devoted, "Look, Lazarus has fallen asleep and needs to be awakened."

The Devoted, looking for any excuse they could find to avoid returning to the dangers in Judea, argued, "If Lazarus is asleep, he'll wake up on his own!" (They still hadn't caught on that Jesus was using "asleep" as a metaphor and that Lazarus was actually dead.)

Jesus spoke to them in clear, plain, and direct words, "Lazarus is dead. It's good that we were not in Bethany, for now you can learn to trust more deeply than you currently do. Come on, let's get going."

Thomas the Twin, ever the realist and assuming arrest and death awaited them all, yet resigned to their fate, said, "You heard him, folks, let's go with him to Bethany that we might die together!"

*I hear it spit out with venom: "Woke!" Those  
who spew hate toward least and last,  
who denigrate my love,  
who degrade those whom I love.*

<sup>122</sup> According to Papyrus 66, the Greek literally translates as "Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, at the village of Mary and his sister, Mary." This is an awkward sentence in both Greek and English that I have attempted to clarify. I can imagine why a copyist would want to change "Maria" to "Martha"; however, the paraphrase reads similarly to Codex Alexandrinus (circa fifth century), which translates as, "There was a certain sick man, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary his sister."

<sup>123</sup> The "third day" is not specifically mentioned in the Greek but is implied, given the chronology presented. The Gospel presents Jesus' actions as a symbolic allusion to resurrection.

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*Magdalene* may be a nickname, combining the Aramaic *Magdala* (tower) and the Greek *Elene* (Helen), to create an Aramaic/Greek nickname. Jesus gave nicknames to Peter (Rock), Thomas (Twin), and James and John (Sons of Thunder), so the practice was customary. Further, the nickname given to James and John, *Boanerges* in the ancient languages, similarly combines Aramaic and Greek. Thus, John 11 functions as the Johannine counterpoint to Peter's confession of Jesus in the Synoptics (e.g., Matthew 16:16–19)—Peter the Rock and Mary the Tower are the two pillars upon which the early Church was built.

*These others do not understand that  
what they spew as slur I receive as accolade,  
what repulses them I claim as a badge of honor,  
what (and who) they reject, I embrace.*

*I am Lazarus—  
needing to wake up (or, should I say, “Get woke!?”),  
needing to walk in the light, not in darkness,  
needing the Light of the World to avoid stumbling.*

*Let’s get woke together, you and me,  
even if our trust is not yet deep enough,  
even if arrest and death await us,  
even if we cannot (yet) imagine what life will come.*  
God, it’s me. I love Thomas and, at times, aspire to be like him: bold, saying what he thinks, unafraid of consequences. Thomas is not always right, but he is always certain. And yet, I like that I am not Thomas: careful, thinking before speaking, aware that there are consequences to behavior and speech. Spirit of Truth, guide me between the shoals of too much boldness and too much carefulness. Help me to know when to speak and when to refrain from speaking; when to act and how to act with wisdom; always trusting that I walk in the light for I walk with you, the Light of the World.

### **John 11:17-27**

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus was dead, having already spent four days in the tomb. In Jewish culture, a spirit was believed to hover near the body for three days and depart from the body on the fourth day.<sup>124</sup>

Now, Bethany was about two miles away from Jerusalem, and many Jews came to support Mary at the loss of her brother. When Mary<sup>125</sup> heard that Jesus had arrived, she met him. Mary said to Jesus, “Sovereign, my brother would still be alive if you had been here, and even now I perceive that The I WILL BE will grant you all that you ask.”

Jesus replied, “Your brother will rise.”

Mary responded, “Yes, I trust this to be true in the general resurrection at the end of times, when all Jews are raised to life in the kin-dom of The I WILL BE.”

Jesus said, “I AM the Resurrection. I AM the God-life, and all who trust into me will dance the God-rhythms even amidst the music of death. All who live through trusting into me will never depart from the God-life. Do you trust this?”

Mary Magdala<sup>126</sup> answered by proclaiming her trust, announcing as if from a high tower the foundation upon which she lived and moved and had her being, saying, “Indeed I do, O Sovereign, for you are the Anointed One, The I WILL BE’s seed planted into the earth to bear fruit throughout the cosmos.”

*August sun beating down upon us all,  
mourners beneath a mortuary’s canopy,  
me in black robe, announcing,  
“The Lord is my shepherd.”*

*Tears stream down the cheeks of his widow  
as beads form upon my brow,  
continuing ancient rite, its familiar words  
falling softly upon our ears (and hearts).*

*“Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,”  
in somber timbre I intone,  
“in sure and certain hope of resurrection...,”  
my voice becoming lighter, as if releasing sorrow.*

*Still the sorrow remains,  
yet Death’s measure has been taken—  
You are not as fierce as you pretend to be,  
for those in whom the Word calls out*

*again and again and again,  
as long and as often as is necessary,  
for ancient rite to become living hope:  
my strength and my high tower.*

God, it’s me. Give me Mary’s strength; grant unto me the assurance found in her unflinching confession. May

<sup>124</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added to provide context.

<sup>125</sup> This is one of the verses where English Bibles mention Martha who, in English translations, goes to meet Jesus while Mary stays at home. However, Tertullian (circa 200 C.E.) wrote, “Mary,

confessing him, Jesus, to be the Son of God.” Egeria (circa fourth century C.E.) wrote in her diary about visiting the place “where Mary, the sister of Lazarus, ran out to meet the Lord.”

<sup>126</sup> cf. Psalm 61:3 and 122:7 for how a tower serves as a metaphor for The I WILL BE’s strength, comfort, and security.

I build my life upon her hope in you, who defeat ancient foe, who overcome mortal fears, who cause to rise in me an unwavering commitment to love all whom I encounter. Transform my sorrow into joy and my mourning into dancing by sharing Mary's hope. Transform me into an instrument of your peace as her hope becomes my trust. May I build my life into a high tower from which to proclaim your praise in all that I do and say (and how I do it and say it).

### John 11:28-37<sup>127</sup>

After Mary confessed Jesus' Sovereignty, she walked toward the tomb. Those within the house lamenting Lazarus' death, seeing she was going toward the tomb, followed her. Jesus, seeing Mary's grief and the crowd's lament, groaned, his bile rising.<sup>128</sup> He asked the crowd, "Where have you laid Lazarus?"

"Come and see, sir," they replied.

Tears fell upon Jesus' cheeks.<sup>129</sup>

When the crowds saw Jesus' tears, they said, "Look how he loved Lazarus." Though some in the crowd questioned Jesus, saying to each other, "This guy gave sight to a blind man! Surely, he could have kept Lazarus from dying."

*Mortality lay heavy upon my chest  
as I drove down the freeway into afternoon traffic—  
COVID my companion.*

*Sepsis had struck me before in my life, twice,  
leading to an avalanche of organ failure, once,  
then, once, to collapsing outside a doctor's office.*

*I felt sepsis' fingers intertwining with my own,  
like a lover seeking me, inviting me, luring me  
to walk a path to which I gave no consent.*

*No rage against "going quietly into that good night"  
but overwhelmed with sadness and worry:  
What had I left undone, and who would do it?*

*Even through my brain fog I was grateful  
the doctor started antibiotics before the tests:  
Some things are just obvious to trained eyes.*

*What is not obvious is why "Jesus wept."*

*Sad over Lazarus, his friend?*

*Sad over the crowd's ignorance about death?*

*Sad over his knowledge that Death was his companion?*

*Not COVID, but a Roman cross.*

*Not immediately, but inevitably.*

*Not yet, but soon, his hour would come.*

*Lazarus' life would light the spark.*

God, it's me. I thank you that in body and in soul, in life and in death and in life beyond death, I belong to you, my faithful Savior, who freely paid the cost to redeem me from Death's cold grip. I fear not Death, nor my death, even as I am in no hurry to encounter it. Yet I know there will come a day of encounter, and I trust it will be a blessed encounter, for it will lead me into your waiting arms, like a lover seeking me, inviting me, luring me to walk a path to which I give my full-hearted consent.

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<sup>127</sup> The paraphrase is written without 11:28-30. Among various Greek manuscripts, multiple discrepancies are found between the singular and plural in noun-verb constructions that lead scholars to surmise copyist revisions. Schrader posits, though cannot definitely prove, that 11:28-30 may have been added by a later copyist to account for the presence of both Martha and Mary in a version of John 11 (e.g., Martha's going out and coming in between conversations with Jesus and Mary). A version of John 11 without 11:28-30 would be similar to the Q document (for those familiar with scholarship on New Testament origins): an evident and compelling argument for the common material in

Matthew and Luke, yet without a physical manuscript to prove its existence. (Schrader, personal conversation, December 18, 2024.)

<sup>128</sup> The key Greek words used in this phrase are *embrimaomai* and *tarraso*. *Embrimaomai* is usually translated as "deeply moved" but also means "groaned" and conveys the connotation of "snorted in disgust." *Tarraso* translates as "to disturb, trouble, or agitate." Clearly, Jesus isn't merely sad; there is a deeper emotional edge to his response.

<sup>129</sup> The Greek word used is *dakruo* which means "silently or quietly shed tears" and is distinguished in Israelite culture from *klaiō* which refers to the loud wailing of lament common in Middle Eastern culture.

## John 11:38-44

Jesus, sighing deeply, exhaling a long, slow breath, stepped toward the tomb,<sup>130</sup> whose large, imposing stone lay across its entrance—Goliath in granite. “Remove it,” he commanded.

Mary protested, “Sovereign, the smell! His corpse has been rotting for four days!”

Jesus turned to Mary, saying, “Did I not tell you to trust? Prepare to see the reflection of **The I WILL BE.**” Some standing nearby removed the stone from the tomb.

Jesus lifted his eyes to the heavens and prayed, “*Abba*, I am awash in gratitude that you listen to my voice. Even whispers in the darkness are as thunder to you. I know this. I trust this. I appreciate this, and I speak it aloud so that all who hear my voice may believe into you.” Jesus then summoned Lazarus in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus stepped from the tomb, from darkness into light, from death into life. Yet he was still wrapped head to toe in cloth; remnants of the grave clung to him, even though he was, now, no longer lifeless. “Take off the grave clothes,” Jesus ordered, “all of them.”

*We now know...*

*exactly,  
precisely, and  
completely,*

*What is needed...*

*now,  
back then, and  
in the future,*

*To receive new life:*

*be a good corpse,  
just like Lazarus, and  
let Jesus do the rest.*

Lord of the Resurrection, make me an instrument of eternity. Where there is the fear of death, let me discover my trust; where there is dying, let me offer hope; where there is death, let me proclaim life. O Divine Master, let me not so much seek to become another me as to embrace that I am named and beloved; to yearn for longevity as to live into eternity; to avoid death as to be promised resurrection. For it is in confessing my brokenness that I begin the journey of becoming; it is in confessing my sin that I am gifted with salvation; it is in taking off my grave clothes that I walk into the God-life.

## John 11:45-55

Many in the crowd who witnessed Lazarus return to life believed into Jesus, though some scurried to the Intense to tattle on him. Then the chieftains and the Intense scurried to the Elite to complain, “What’s the plan? If we do nothing, everyone will believe into him, for his work points to the God-life. Soon, the Romans will notice, and that will be the end of our standing among the people. Indeed, the entire nation will slip through our fingers, for the Romans will perceive that this man wants to overturn all human authority. They will never tolerate that but put down all rebellious chatter with a vengeance.”

Caiaphas, the chief priest that year, stood up and thundered, “Idiots! Do you not realize that sparing a single person isn’t worth our losing the nation?” (Caiaphas said this because he thought he was saving the nation. In reality, he was prophesying that Jesus would give his life for the nation, and not only the nation but all people who seek to dance the God-rhythms of the God-life, to gather into one family those whom the powerful and privileged had scattered.) From that moment, the Elite sought to murder Jesus.

Because of the plot to murder Jesus, he stopped walking about publicly and instead departed for Ephraim,

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<sup>130</sup> Schrader observes that if Martha’s name is removed from the text, readers wouldn’t connect this passage to Luke 10 but to John 20:11–17. Schrader cites Deidre Good, “Both [Marys] weep over a dead man at a tomb; both are consoled (11:31, 33; 20:11, 15); both accrue followers (11:32, 45; 20:18); both experience resurrection (11:43, 45; 20:16).” Further, “Mary of Bethany is also associated with Jesus’s burial (12:7), as is Mary Magdalene (20:1).” Finally, Schrader highlights the verbal connections between John

11 and John 20, as both share the following word usage: “Mary,” (11:2, 20:16); “crying,” (11:31, 11:33, 20:11); “where have you laid him” / “where you have laid him,” (11:34, 20:15); “tomb,” (11:38, 20:11); “stone,” (11:38, 20:1); “handkerchief,” (11:44, 20:7); and “my brother” / “my brothers,” (11:21, 20:17). All these connections between the chapters become germane as evidence of Mary’s primacy in proclaiming Jesus—Mary the Tower.

in the hill country northeast of Jerusalem. Now, the feast of Passover was near, when the Jewish people celebrated their liberty from slavery in Egypt. The people left the countryside and went up to Jerusalem to participate in the rituals that would make them ceremonially clean. The people chattered amongst themselves, “Do you think Jesus will show up to the feast? Does he dare?” The people were looking for Jesus and waiting for him, yet so were the Elite and the Intense, who had given orders that anyone spotting Jesus should report to them his whereabouts, for they wanted to arrest him.

*Truer words have never been spoken,  
intention never so missed the mark.  
Malice became miracle in  
the Anointed One’s purpose.*

*Caiaphas would have  
Jesus give his life to save the nation.  
Jesus would  
give his life to save Caiaphas.*

*To speak truth and be so in error:  
Caiaphas’ legacy.  
One must die that all may live:  
Jesus’ legacy.*

God, it’s me. I am struck by Caiaphas’ words—both their intention and impact. I believe that Caiaphas thought he was doing the right thing—protecting his people and preserving the nation’s values. Yet his words gave permission for others to give vent to their murderous rage, and Jesus’ execution was the result. As I meditate upon Caiaphas’ example, I am compelled to wonder: When does the impact of my words or deeds betray my intent? O YOU WHO WILL BE, help me to notice when the impact of what I say or do soils the intentions I bring to my work. May I never hide behind the excuse, “I didn’t mean for that to happen,” when

brokenness or betrayal (or murderous rage) are the result.

## John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover meal that celebrated The I WILL BE’s liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, Jesus attended a meal on his way to Jerusalem in the town of Bethany, in Lazarus’ home, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Mary<sup>131</sup> served and Lazarus attended along with Jesus’ Devoted.

While Jesus reclined at the table (chairs were not used in ancient meals and tables were low to the ground),<sup>132</sup> Mary took twelve ounces of expensive perfume and poured it upon Jesus’ feet, wiping it into his skin with her hair—an unusually sensuous act and, according to the custom of the times, a scandalous one, for women were taught to cover their heads in front of men who were not in their own family. The house was saturated with the fragrance of her love.

One of the Devoted, Judas Iscariot—the Betrayer—demanded of Jesus, “This perfume was worth nearly a year’s wages! Why wasn’t it sold and given to the poor?” (Judas didn’t actually care about the poor, but as the group’s treasurer, he kept the purse and wanted the money for his own use.)

“Leave her be,” replied Jesus. “Mary was ordained to guard this perfume so that she could anoint my body for burial.” Then Jesus cited the first phrase of Deuteronomy 15:11, “The poor surround you always.” He did so knowing his Devoted would remember the rest of the verse, too: “...therefore, open your heart and your hands to friend and neighbor and stranger, to all who are in need.”<sup>133</sup>

Meanwhile, upon learning that Jesus had returned to Bethany and to Lazarus’ home, many people flocked to the house to catch a glimpse of Jesus (and to see Lazarus also). They wanted to be a part of the buzz that had followed Jesus wherever he went after raising Lazarus from the dead. The Elite saw this and decided they would murder Lazarus too because, on account of him, many were believing into Jesus.

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<sup>131</sup> Papyrus 66 once again raises an interpretive question: “Was it Mary, Martha, or both who made the supper?” According to Schrader, while the Greek text indicates “she and Martha served,” the Greek word for served, *epoiesen*, is singular rather than plural, an unusual grammatical error for P66. Four other ancient Greek

manuscripts list “served” in singular form and “Origen’s *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannis* also states that Mary served.”

<sup>132</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for context.

<sup>133</sup> The recitation of the remainder of Deuteronomy 15:11 is not in the Greek text but added for context.

*I try to imagine how I would have reacted  
watching a woman unveil her dark mane:  
long locks massaging perfume into feet,  
the aroma filling the home,  
foreshadowing loss yet proclaiming hope—  
and love that transcends time.*

*I imagine my wife or my daughter,  
kneeling beside a colleague, Chanel #5 in hand—  
my mind reels at the audacity of such a scene.*

*Would I have understood the moment as sacred,  
the table at which I reclined as holy ground?*

*Would culture have dictated my reaction:  
Shock! Scandal! Judgment!*

*Would I have felt  
justified to further oppress those without power?*

*A woman's tender act,  
a disciple's shouted outrage—  
only one endures.*

God, it's me. Give me a boldness beyond my Presbyterian ethos—may my heart melt and “the frozen chosen” break open to learn how to love with abandon. O my! Whom am I kidding? So let me try again. God, it's me. Give me just a bit less timidity so that I may give voice to my love and embody my devotion to you. It's going to be difficult for me, I know, for I am so used to “being in my head.” Yet, Mary's example inspires me. So, show me one way, one step, one act of devotion that will get me out of my head and into my heart—all for you and because of your love.

## **John 12:12-19**

The next day Jerusalem buzzed with the news that Jesus was coming, and a crowd left Jerusalem to go out to

meet Jesus. (It was the common, social custom of the day for crowds to go meet “great men,” like conquering generals or Caesars, and escort them into town.)<sup>134</sup> The crowds hearkened back to their history, remembering the victory of Judas Maccabeus over the Greeks; their remembrance fueling hope that Jesus' entry foreshadowed liberation for the nation. As the crowds that accompanied Judas Maccabeus waved palm branches,<sup>135</sup> so did the crowd that accompanied Jesus. They rejoiced, using the words of the Psalmist:

Huzzah! Huzzah!  
Praise! Praise!  
Blessed be the Anointed of The I WILL BE!  
Sovereign of Israel is he!<sup>136</sup>

Alluding to the divine will, Jesus sat on a donkey for this royal processional. His Devoted did not immediately understand what he was doing, but later remembered the words of the truth-teller Zechariah,

On a donkey comes the Anointed!  
On a foal: young and spirited for the new day.  
In humility does Israel's Sovereign ride!<sup>137</sup>

The crowd was giddy, with many chattering to anyone who would listen about how they were there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Indeed, Jesus' act had both energized the crowd (which is why they had come out to greet him as “a great man”) and ignited the storm, for the Intense noticed all that was happening. Murmuring amongst themselves, the Intense grumbled, “This just won't do. Everyone's lost their minds! The whole world follows him.”

*I don't trust crowds.  
Red, white, and blue balloons  
fall from the rafters,  
and this means...  
What exactly?*

there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel.” cf. also, Revelation 7:9.

<sup>134</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for context.

<sup>135</sup> cf. 1 Maccabeus 13:51, “And entered into it the three and twentieth day of the second month in the hundred seventy and first year, with thanksgiving, and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs: because

<sup>136</sup> cf. Psalm 118:25–26.

<sup>137</sup> cf. Zechariah 9:9.

*Are my balloons  
better than your balloons?  
Do I love my country more than  
you love your country...?  
Isn't it our shared country?*

*A muscular Jesus,  
tall, slim, and handsome,  
spouting "U-S-A" while wearing a tailored suit,  
makes me nervous...  
and cringe.*

*Amidst adulation,  
Jesus chose humility.  
Foregoing a mighty steed,  
Jesus chose a donkey...  
and a youthful one at that.*

God, it's me. I pray that I may live this day the absolute reverse of the Intense. May I see Jesus and focus not on the adulation but the humility, not on what everyone else is doing but on what I am called to do. May I say to myself and others, "This is right, just, and good. I finally understand. I will follow him."

### **John 12:20-26**

Some Greeks had come to Jerusalem to worship. They were in the outer courtyard (because Gentiles could not enter the area reserved for Jews<sup>138</sup>). They stopped Philip, who was from Bethsaida, the site of many signs and wonders, and asked him, "Can we get an audience with Jesus? We would see him and talk about all these things he has said and done." Philip scampered off to tell his brother Andrew, and the two brothers went to tell Jesus about the Greeks' request. Jesus responded, not to the request but from the deep well of his own foreboding: "My hour has come. The *kairos* of my unveiling is at hand when I shall reflect the depth and breadth of The I WILL BE's love.

"I tell you the truth: a seed is but a seed until it is planted—only its death brings forth the life within it; only its burial brings forth its fruit. Whoever loves the soul<sup>139</sup> shaped by this broken world will lose it. And whoever hates

the soul shaped by this broken world walks the path of discovering the God-life found in the world to come: the true self—where one's soul is made whole and complete.

"Will you follow me? Then serve me. Serve and follow, and you will find your purpose—the place that when you see it for the very first time you know you are finally home. The I WILL BE will honor all those who serve and follow and find their true home in me."

*Ego suffers many deaths,  
cuts and bruises from words and slights.  
Both neglect and intent assault  
the beloved that lives within us all.*

*Avoiding words and phrases and sentences—  
hell, even paragraphs and monographs—  
that enumerate my spoiled and soiled condition  
does not silence the murmured words.*

*Hardening my bearing, I become  
impervious, unable to feel  
joy or disgust, and so I become  
scarecrow, tin man, and lion all wrapped into one.*

*Then comes Dorothy, or Jesus, or  
my colleague, my friend, my beloved—  
someone who breaks through my veneer to invite  
an honesty so painful I resist its talons.*

*But when truth's talons grasp,  
resistance is futile,  
like a raptor cleaving flesh from bone, so is  
soul revealed.*

*Raw soul, tender to the touch, quivers—  
its unveiling dizzies and discombobulates until,  
slowly, intimately, inevitably  
others see my true self.*

*O that I could die again today—  
more quickly this time, and  
more thoroughly.  
I have service to perform and a Sovereign to follow.*

<sup>138</sup> A sign was posted in Greek and Latin between the outer and inner courtyards: "No alien must pass within the fence round the Temple and the court. If anyone be caught doing so, he must blame himself for the death that will follow."

<sup>139</sup> Throughout this passage the Greek text plays with various words, all of which can be translated as "life." They are *psyche* (spirit, soul, or life) and *zoe* (spiritual life) but, interestingly, not *bios*, the Greek word for biological life.

God, it's me. Give me the courage to become who I am—not in my ego, not my false self, not the me I want others to see and believe. Give me the audacity to become the me you see and have always seen—my true self, beautiful and beloved, called into service by Jesus. As I live ever deeper into the God-life, which is to say, “into your heart’s desire,” may my ego decrease that you may increase until you are all that any of us see and believe.

### John 12:27-37

Jesus continued to teach, “My soul aches, but what shall I say? ‘Abba, save me from this hour? Release me from my duty to fulfill my purpose on this earth?’ No, the hour has come—my hour—when I will glorify The I WILL BE.” And raising his eyes, Jesus prayed, “Abba, glorify your name!”

A voice thundered from above, “I have honored you and will honor you—the weight of this work shall not be too heavy for you to bear.” The people, astonished, wondered to one another what kind of voice they heard and why it said these words to Jesus.

In response to their astonishment, Jesus told the people, “The voice spoke to you, not to me. The crisis of this world comes when *kairos* and *chronos* collide. And when I am lifted up, heaven itself will be unveiled for all, and all will be drawn to the example of my love.” (In saying, “I am lifted up,” Jesus referred to the manner of his death.)

The people grappled with the meaning of Jesus’ words, saying, “We have read in the Torah that the Anointed One will abide forever in the age to come. How, then, can the Anointed be ‘lifted up’? Who is this Anointed whom you call the Son of Humanity?”

Jesus replied, “Soon the sun sets, so walk while the light shines upon you. Soon darkness falls, and the darkness will prey upon you, and you will stumble about, lost in the dark. But believe into the Light, and you will be children of the Light.”

After Jesus said these things, he walked away and was hidden from the people, who were left in the dark. And even though the people had seen wonders and heard wondrous things, they did not believe into Jesus.

*The thermometer rises above 100  
every day for 100 days—  
Summer heat withers the soul.*

*I stand behind the communion table,  
a smile pasted on my face—  
seeking to bring light and energy into our midst.*

*My congregation, marble statues,  
respond with all the enthusiasm of  
students at Saturday detention.*

*I wave away despair and swat at despondency,  
inviting all to the end-of-summer ice cream social,  
before proclaiming Good News in Jesus.*

*“Walk in the light,” I exhort.  
“Avoid the darkness,” I warn.  
“It should not be this hard,” I think.*

*“What is keeping my people from Jesus?” I wonder.*

God, it's me. I experience dry spells in ministry when I find it hard to preach, even to pray, a “dark night of the soul,” when I wonder if I can help Mr. Smith find purpose or encourage Mrs. Santos to step into leadership or, or, or.... O Spirit, help me to realize that ministry is difficult and even Jesus encountered those whose hearts were impervious to love. Give me the serenity to accept that all leaders confront those unwilling to trust the light of your love. When serving during the twilight, give me the courage to walk in the light wherever it is. When darkness comes, give me the wisdom to look upon Jesus, the Light of the World.

### John 12:38-50

That the people did not believe into Jesus fulfilled the words spoken by the truth-teller Isaiah:

Sovereign, who listens to your wisdom when it is spoken; who trusts your strength when they see it?<sup>140</sup>

Thus did the people lack the *dunamis* to trust, as Isaiah knew they would not:

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<sup>140</sup> cf. Isaiah 53:1.

Unable to see, they cannot perceive;  
unwilling to understand, they do not discern;  
unable to turn, they refuse to be made whole.<sup>141</sup>

Isaiah spoke these things perceiving the glory of the Anointed One, desiring to honor him. And though many in the crowd believed into Jesus, they said nothing because of their fear of the Intense—not wanting to be expelled from community and from worship. Their fear led them to choose human sentiments over divine insight.

Jesus, frustrated, cried out, “Whoever believes into me trusts the One who sent me. Whoever perceives the God-life through me walks into the God-light that shines upon all who desire to be made whole and complete. Make your bed in a home full of warm candles rather than sleeping on a damp blanket tossed on the floor of a dank cave.

“I say this not to judge you; I don’t condemn—not my job! My job, my purpose, is to heal and to make whole all the cosmos. There is a judge for those who disregard divine words and refuse wisdom: what I have said, the truth that I have shared. These are the things by which you will be measured when the wedding of heaven and earth is consummated.

“Don’t you perceive what is going on? I have only spoken what The I WILL BE has given me to speak. Not only the words but the way I speak obey the divine decree. I echo my *Abba*. My message and Their message are one and lead to the God-life, your true selves made whole and complete.”

*I get so frustrated...no...so angry,  
I am tempted to become bitter:  
Why don't my friends and family  
see the world as I do?*

*What are they seeing and hearing,  
What are they watching that  
leads them to think, to speak, to vote  
the way they do?*

*There is a plumbline by which I shall be measured—  
neither political correctness nor cancel culture,  
neither my echo chamber nor their echo chamber,  
words spoken from above, that reverberate within:*

*Blessed are the peacemakers.<sup>142</sup>  
Love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>143</sup>  
Forgive seventy times seven.<sup>144</sup>  
Proclaim Jubilee.<sup>145</sup>*

*God, it's me. Help me to see beyond belief to becoming,  
beyond thinking about to living the God-life. Help me  
notice the dissonance between what I profess to  
believe and how I practice my faith. May you be my  
plumbline—guiding my thoughts, correcting my actions,  
judging my intentions, forgiving my sin. Help me  
perceive, that I may see. Help me understand, that I  
may discern. Make me whole and complete as I turn to  
you.*

### **John 13:1-17**

The Passover feast loomed, and Jesus knew the hour quickly approached when he would pass over<sup>146</sup> from this world into his *Abba*'s hands. Jesus had always loved his Devoted; now he prepared to fulfill for them the full measure of his love. It was time for the evening meal, and the Accuser had already dropped a hint into the heart of Judas Iscariot that he should betray Jesus. Perceiving this, and remembering that his *Abba*, The I WILL BE, had entrusted all things into his hands and that he had come from above and would return to his heavenly home beside his *Abba*, Jesus rose from the comforts and privileges of being a guest to assume the responsibilities of being a servant. Discarding his outer cloak of honor to wrap himself in a simple cloth, Jesus poured water into a bowl, knelt before his friends, and began to wash their feet, the traditional duty of a servant.

Jesus knelt before Simon Peter, who said, “My Sovereign, you think you’re going to wash my feet? Never!”

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<sup>141</sup> cf. Isaiah 6:10.

<sup>142</sup> cf. Matthew 5:9.

<sup>143</sup> cf. Luke 10:27.

<sup>144</sup> cf. Matthew 18:22.

<sup>145</sup> cf. Luke 4:19.

<sup>146</sup> The Greek word used is *matabe*, whose closest Hebrew equivalent is *abar*, which means “pass over” or “pass through,” suggesting an intentional connection between Jesus’ actions and Passover’s meaning.

Jesus replied, “Peter, you don’t get it now, but you will understand later.”

Peter again said, “Never! I am to be your servant, not you mine.”

Jesus explained to him, “Peter, unless I am your servant, you are not in me and I am not in you. You must allow me to serve you.”

Peter then exclaimed, “If that’s the case, then wash me from head to toe and not just my feet!”

Jesus responded, “This is not a bath but a ritual cleansing. You need only let me wash your feet, allow me to be a servant to you, and you will be clean both inside and out. You are already clean, Peter, as are most of you.” (Jesus added these last words to show that he knew one of his own Devoted would betray him.) Then, when he had finished, he put his cloak back on and resumed his seat at the table.

Turning to his Devoted he asked them, “Do you perceive what I have just done for you? You call me Teacher and Sovereign, which are correct—that’s what and who I am. So, if I, your Sovereign and your Teacher, wash your feet, you must follow my example and wash each other’s feet, but not just feet: Follow my example and serve each other. I tell you the truth: The servant is not greater than the Sovereign and the sent one not greater than the one who sends. As you remember and do these things, you dance the God-rhythms and enter ever deeper into the God-life.”

*My wife claimed I was a terrible patient:*

*“You never let others care for you.”*

*She was right, of course—I HATED being doted on, not doing for myself, feeling weak and worthless.*

*And then I got sick.*

*A fortnight in a coma,  
a month in ICU,  
many months recovering—  
changes a guy.*

*Vicky was one of two ICU nurses who cared for me—  
had a front seat to God’s wonder.*

*Impressed by the church’s care for my family,  
she began to attend my church.*

*Eventually, I baptized her children.*

*Engaging her in baptismal covenant, I asked,  
“Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?”  
“Do you desire your children to be baptized?”  
“Will you raise them to follow his Way?”*

*And the thought flitted through my mind—  
I could not cease its presence once it arrived:  
“This woman has wiped my ass.”  
I now chuckle at Peter worrying about his feet.*

*Moving beyond my internal embarrassment,  
I poured water on each child—three in total—  
focusing on the task at hand:  
to proclaim the Gospel in words and symbols.*

*To be cared for was a humbling experience,  
and a transformational one.  
I learned that when I am weak Jesus is strong—  
receiving love is a gift to both self and others.*

*The one whom Jesus makes clean is clean indeed.*

God, it’s me. I thank you for my ICU nurses, Vicky and Erin, and for all who extended care during my illness. I seek to become like them in caring for others, in showing compassion, in showering others with your love. Help me to follow your example that, intention by intention and act by act, the image of Jesus may be formed within me.

### **John 13:18-30**

Jesus continued, “I know that not all of you dance the God-rhythms.” (He said this because he knew the one who would betray him and about whom the Psalmist had spoken:

Sharing bread with my brother;  
he takes it from my hand.  
He whom I embraced betrays me.<sup>147</sup>)

“Remember: I chose you. Typically a student seeks out a rabbi—chooses the rabbi under whom to study,

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<sup>147</sup> cf. Psalm 41:9.

learn, and grow closer to The I WILL BE. Not so with you all and me! I chose you. I sought you out. I desired you to be my students—not just to learn about the God-life but to learn its rhythms and its music, its challenges and its call, its beauty and its blessing.

“I tell you that one of you will betray me before it happens so that when it does you will not be afraid, your trust will not crumble, and you will remember that I AM THAT I AM.<sup>148</sup> I tell you the truth: When you welcome the one I send, you welcome me. When you welcome me, you welcome the One who sent me. Hospitality of the heart is contagious! And it cannot be quenched.

“I’ll be honest: It hurts that one of you will betray me.” Jesus’ words ignited an explosion of questions and bewilderment from the Devoted.

Peter motioned to the one whom Jesus loved, who was next to Jesus at the table, and asked quietly, “Ask which one of us he means.”

Leaning against Jesus, the one whom Jesus loved asked, “Rabbi, about whom do you refer?”

Jesus answered, “The one to whom I give bread, my very self, is he, even he who welcomed<sup>149</sup> me into their heart.” And Jesus immersed the bread and handed it to Judas Iscariot. Judas received the bread, and the Accuser entered into<sup>150</sup> him. Jesus, knowing what was about to happen, looked at him and said, “Be quick about it.”

Judas immediately left the table. The other Devoted were confused about what was happening. They experienced Jesus’ words as cryptic and did not comprehend them. They began to guess what Jesus meant, and some assumed Judas had gone to buy something for the Feast or give something to the poor (for he was the group’s treasurer and carried the common purse). Yet as soon as Judas left the table, night descended.

*Collusion—whisper tempts,  
motives intertwine  
ambitions merge*

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<sup>148</sup> This verse is not ordinarily considered one of Jesus’ “I AM” statements (e.g., I AM the Bread of Life). However, the Greek uses *eigo eimi* which is the traditional grammatical construction for Jesus’ I AM statements. I am not convinced the paraphrase correctly attributes divinity to Jesus in this verse; the interpretation is intended to be speculative and evocative.

<sup>149</sup> The same Greek word is used in this verse as in 13:20: *lambano*, which means “to receive, welcome, or show hospitality to.”

<sup>150</sup> The same grammatical construction is used here as is used throughout the Gospel when John refers to trust (or belief): *eis*.

*Immersion—shadow speaks  
spirit hardens  
soul turns*

*Night—heart closes  
duplicity ascends  
betrayal comes*

God, it’s me. Amidst the dark night of the soul, I feel a willingness to turn inward tugging at the edges of my spirit, a desire to preserve my false self. My false self, the one I show to the world, looks all “religified,” but amidst the dark night I know better. In the night, I see myself as I am: both broken and blessed, fractured and forgiven, a rascal (sometimes even a rogue) who is yet redeemed. O YOU WHO WILL BE, as night descends around me, may I seek the glimmer of your light. May that light lead me through all dark nights to the rising sun that is Jesus my Savior.

### John 13:31-38

Once Judas left, Jesus turned toward his Devoted and said, “Now is the *kairos*, the appointed hour for the Son of Humanity to be honored by The I WILL BE and to honor The I WILL BE. As honor is given, so honor will be received and a glorious chorus of praise it will be.

“My dear ones, the *chronos* is near when you will search for me but not find me, for where I go you cannot follow, even as I told the Elite. But as I go, I leave you with a new commandment: love<sup>151</sup> each other. Love as you have seen me love you. Love with all the fullness of joy the God-life can inspire. Love not as a reflection of each other’s goodness but as a gift to each other’s humanity. Love today and tomorrow and into all eternity. Whenever you love one another in this way, people will know that you belong to me and that I am in you.”

Just as the Devoted are invited to “belief into” Jesus, so Judas has Satan “enter into” him. In a similar vein, the word that indicates Jesus “dipped” the bread is *bapto*, which can be translated as *immersed* and is a cognate of *baptizo*, from which we get “baptism.” There is much depth and immersion language in this passage.

<sup>151</sup> In these two verses, the Greek text uses variations of *agape* four times. *Agape* refers to the unconditional love The I WILL BE has for all humankind.

Simon Peter asked, “Sovereign, where are you going? Please tell me, that at least I may follow you!”

Jesus replied, “Where I am going you cannot follow, at least not now, though later you will follow me.”

Peter responded with bravado, saying, “Why can’t I follow you now? I will set aside everything to follow you—my life itself if need be.”

Jesus replied, “Really, Peter? You will set aside everything, even your life? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows once you will deny me, disown me, and lie shamelessly about knowing me.”

*I have been Peter—so certain of my adequacy.*

*Privilege is my birthright.*

*I was born into it, raised to assume it.*

*Even lacking competence, I cling to confidence.*

*What could go wrong? I have good intentions.*

*It wounds the ego to learn I am like Peter in other ways—  
lacking self-awareness, assuming too much.*

*Patriarchy my inheritance,*

*as I wallow in its hubris.*

*If Jesus would just listen to me!*

*My journey of descent from Mt. Me-First,*

*the same as Peter’s, is the way of love—*

*setting aside self to discover the gift of one another,*

*to focus more on others for the sake of their blessing.*

*How I wish that damn rooster would shut up!*

God, it’s me. I thank you for daily reminders that I am not the center of the universe. Though I am beloved, I am not the center, which is as it should be. So please keep those reminders coming because when I forget this truth (which I sometimes do) my life spins out of control. Learning to love today and tomorrow and into eternity is not for the faint of heart, nor is it for someone who thinks they are the center of the

universe. Keep me grounded, Jesus, centered in you, and focused on your commandment to love one another.

### **John 14:1-7**

Jesus continued instructing and encouraging his Devoted: “Let not your hearts fill to the brim with anxiety. As you believe into The I WILL BE, so trust into me. My *Abba’s* home has many rooms, and I go to prepare a room for each of you, that you will be wherever I am—my home, your home, our home together, for we are family, and you are my siblings. Don’t fret, for you know the path and how to get where you are to be.”

Thomas interrupted, “Jesus, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the path?”

Jesus answered, “I AM the path—walk as you have seen me walk. I AM the truth—embrace my actions toward others and my attitudes toward the world.<sup>152</sup> I AM the God-life—draw close to me to discover the God-rhythms that lead you to my *Abba’s* home. I make it possible for you and for all to take this journey that will lead you to The I WILL BE. Indeed, you can only take this journey because of who I am and what I will do. As you recognize who I am and perceive what I do for you, you begin to perceive The I WILL BE’s hand in all that happens. This is the first and most important step of the journey.”

*Many things I do not know:*

*who built the roads I drive upon,*

*who printed the books I read,*

*how electricity gets to my house.*

*Yet with gratitude amidst my ignorance:*

*I drive my car to get to work,*

*enjoy reading before going to sleep,*

*turn on the lights when it gets dark.*

*I imagine there are many people like me:*

*who do not know “who” or “how” yet,*

*are grateful to be able to live more fully each day,*

*becoming their true self as best they can.*

and behavior that conform to divine design and create right relationships. When Jesus claims to be “the Truth,” he is not asserting a particular theological construct to believe but inviting an obedient lifestyle to follow.

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<sup>152</sup> Greek and Hebrew understandings of “truth” are famously different. Greek understandings (adopted by the Western tradition) follow Aristotle’s notion that there is an ideal form that can be conceptually (that is to say, rationally) understood with the mind. Hebraic understandings of the truth discern truth as actions

*Does Jesus' cross not count for those  
who walk in love without precisely knowing the way,  
who follow the truth without knowing all of it?  
How are these not my siblings in the God-life?*

*Knowing Jesus, I know his Abba.  
I choose to trust: Abba knows best.*

God, it's me. I confess that there are times when I want to know exactly and precisely who is "in" and who is "out." I confess that there are moments when I wish I could make the call about judgment. In these moments, I am supremely confident I would make all the correct calls. In such moments, I'm not all that concerned about grace, which makes the whole process that much easier—for me. Forgive me. Free me from all ego and pride that would place me above others. Free me to accept that everyone needs the gift of your love, and everyone can welcome it into their lives because of what Jesus did on the cross. I hope that it counts for "them" and "those people" in ways I may not comprehend, even as I welcome Jesus' love for me and mine. May the road he built be the way. May the book that tells his story point us all toward the truth. May the energy he infused into all creation light the world with his love, even for those for whom Jesus remains anonymous.

#### **John 14:8-14**

Having heard Jesus talk about his intimacy with his *Abba*, Philip interrupted, "Jesus, introduce us to your *Abba*! That will be enough for us."

Jesus, exasperated, replied, "Philip, how can you say that you want to meet my *Abba*? After all this time spent with me, don't you recognize who I am? If you perceive who I am then you will know my *Abba*, for my *Abba* and I are intertwined—our eyes behold the same vision, our lips sing the same songs, our hearts beat as one.

"I don't say these things on my own; it is my *Abba* speaking through me, acting through me, inviting all to dance the God-rhythms through me. The God-life you

have discovered in me originates with my *Abba*. Even if you don't trust these words I speak, trust the works I perform, for they also originate with my *Abba*.

"I tell you the truth, whoever believes into me will also perform many works: crafting communities of justice, inspiring outrageous acts of love, walking in the world finding joy in the wholeness of all (and not caring who gets credit). Yes, I tell you, believe into me and you will perform more of these works than I could ever hope to achieve: same quality, greater quantity. And I'll be there to help you. Whatever you need, if you need it to perform these works, I'll infuse you with it: courage and compassion, wisdom and discernment, patience and perseverance—I'll give it to you, and my *Abba* will be honored."

#### *Kaleidoscope<sup>153</sup>*

*Time, a kaleidoscope of light and memory,  
turns, round and round,  
memories merging and emerging,  
colliding and collapsing into narrative.*

*I am four and feel the joy  
playing football on the front lawn in Pekin, IL.  
How is it that I still remember the address?  
1812 Valencia Avenue.*

*I am thirteen, gliding in a Cessna he pilots,  
ruby strands of the Grand Canyon  
competing for my attention  
with the odor from my sibling's stomach contents.*

*My dad is being honored upon his retirement:  
Friend after moist-eyed friend takes me aside  
to speak of his integrity and  
his compassion when closing the plant.*

*Memories collide. I begin to lose myself:  
Was I present when, as a youth,  
he did the double back flip off the beach berm?*

*Was the German bar during the Korean war,  
the bar where he broke a bottle to defend himself,  
as dimly lit as I remember it?*

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<sup>153</sup> I wrote this prayer for my father's funeral. I hope the spirit of my memories of my own father evoke the essence of what Jesus said about being a mirror of his own.

*I inhabit the fear as he runs away, recalling wisdom: “Son,  
if you feel the need to have a weapon,  
you’re in the wrong place.”*

*Cancer, heart disease, lung disease...  
infections, neuropathy, all failed to be his kryptonite.  
But Time overtakes us all, eventually,  
as his broken femur attests.*

*Time, paused briefly by memory, resumes.  
Seconds pass and then hours:  
blessed morphine masking excruciating pain.  
Twilight turns inevitably into night.*

*And when night comes, the kaleidoscope remains:  
color and light merging and emerging,  
endless patterns of gratitude  
not even Time can take away.*

God, it’s me. I see him, sometimes, when I look in the mirror. I hear him when I speak or laugh or joke with a friend. My father is in me as I am like him. How much more is Jesus the image of his *Abba*? How much clearer the reflection! I see you and hear you, O YOU WHO WILL BE, for I have met your son. From what I know of you, Jesus has your heart, your passion, your mischievous and mysterious sense of humor that bends toward mercy. Someday, I look forward to meeting you in person. Until then, I’ll keep paying attention to Jesus because I’m enjoying the journey of getting to know you through him. Ta-ta for now!

### **John 14:15-20**

Jesus continued his instruction and encouragement, saying, “Express your *agape* love for me by living ever deeper into my commandments—walking the Way of love, immersing deeply into the Truth, discovering the God-life breath by breath. This is my command to you. Remember that you are not alone on this journey, for I have asked my *Abba* to send you a companion to walk beside you—before and behind and even within you. This companion, the Divine Spirit, will comfort and counsel you, be your guardian and guide. When other people, the Accuser, or even your own inner critic seek to judge you, the Spirit will whisper truths to you about the joy The I WILL BE finds in who you are becoming.

“The Spirit is your forever friend. The world will not welcome the Spirit, for it neither perceives nor values her, but you will make your home in the Spirit, and she will make her home in you. So, you will never be alone but a part of a large family—the kin-dom—in the rule of Sovereign love. I will be among you in the kin-dom, even though the world will not recognize my presence. I will be among you and because I live, so will you live; indeed, you will journey ever more deeply into the God-life, where it is discovered that my *Abba* is in me, and I am in my *Abba*.”

*I don’t remember when I met Jay,  
only that he was a kid in the honors classes,  
a band geek with a “boy next door” demeanor.  
A jock like me would never understand  
his appeal to the ladies.*

*I do remember coming to Jesus,  
going to the same youth group Jay attended.  
I, still in high school and still “a jock,” nevertheless,  
I was becoming Jay’s friend, and  
becoming less of a d\*\*k.*

*I heard the stories later about what he said—  
that my burgeoning faith was at risk,  
that the kids in the kin-dom needed to  
accept me, guide me, encourage me.*

*Our lives intertwined as young adults:  
a two-month backpack through Europe,  
standing for each other at our weddings,  
the birth of our children a year apart.*

*At some point in each life, we must take stock—  
not the State of the Union but  
the State of our faith, our family, our friendships.  
When “the three Fs” intertwine,  
the state of our soul is well.*

*Jay is not the only one who has walked beside me,  
nor the most powerful, nor the most important—  
that would be you, O Spirit, who drew near and  
has been my companion through joys and sorrows.  
Having a friend along is good in its own way.*

*Everyone needs a forever friend.*

God, it's me. I thank you that I am so abundantly blessed with friendships—men and women who have been present for a season or persisted throughout the seasons. I thank you that your Spirit is one of these enduring friends—whose guidance has lifted the fog, whose comfort has caused the clouds to part, whose presence is breath and heartbeat. May I learn of the Spirit's work as I ponder the gifts my friendships bring. May I grow as a friend as I ponder the ways the Spirit continues to draw me ever deeper into the God-life.

### John 14:21-31

Jesus continued his instruction and encouragement, saying, “The one who locks away my commandments in their heart, protects<sup>154</sup> them from attacks from enemies inside and out, and then proceeds to live the God-life through love, that one loves me and is loved by my *Abba*, The I WILL BE. Love reveals me, lifting the veil so that you can see the beatific vision: I in The I WILL BE and The I WILL BE in me, inviting you to join us as we dance the God-rhythms together. As you obey my commandments through love, I reveal myself to you.”

The other Judas (not Iscariot) asked, “Sovereign, why reveal yourself to us but not to the world?” (Judas still thought that Jesus' kin-dom was to be a military rule and that his “revealing himself” would happen when Jesus initiated rebellion against Roman oppression.)<sup>155</sup>

Jesus ignored Judas' question and continued his warning to the Devoted about the need to guard their hearts. He replied, “When you love me, you will also lock my word in your heart and protect it as a cherished and precious gift. Then The I WILL BE, who loves you, will come to you and together The I WILL BE and I will make our home in your heart. Those who don't love me don't worry about guarding my word in their hearts, nor can they comprehend that my words are not just my words but The

I WILL BE's message—the One who sent me into the world.

“I have said all these things while I still abide with you. And when I am gone, The I WILL BE will send you the Divine Spirit, who will be both your comfort and guide as well as an advocate to argue in your defense. The Spirit will teach you new insights and deeper understanding as well as help you embody my words.

“*Shalom*<sup>156</sup> I send with you as you journey forward; my *shalom* I give you as a gift—may you find in me the wholeness you seek and the presence of The I WILL BE. I do not give you a *Pax Romana*—peace enforced through might of the sword, a so-called “peace” that yet births oppression and division among nations. No, I give you a *Pax Christi*—peace that endures today and into all tomorrows, an actual peace that births justice and reconciliation and invites rejoicing. Therefore, I say to you: Be not anxious and be not afraid. The gift I give is eternal, for it originates from my deepest self and is the full expression of my character. Trust me in this.

“I see that you are agitated because I said that I am going away. You should be happy for me, for I return to The I WILL BE, who is grand and glorious! And I am telling you about it before it happens so that your trust will not be shattered when it happens. I can't say much more, for my hour has come and my time is short. But know this: The Accuser has no claim on me! No power over me! No ability to do anything but what is allowed. Know this also: I will do as I have always done—exactly what The I WILL BE commanded me, so the world will know how deep is my love. There will be no denying my love. Now, get up. It's time to go.”

*Last words:*

*Hard, precious, memorable.*

*They linger in the  
Mind, heart, soul.*

*Evoking sadness,  
inviting connection,*

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<sup>154</sup> The Greek word used is *teron*, which means “to guard or to protect.”

<sup>155</sup> This parenthetical phrase is not in the Greek text but added to provide the context with which to understand Judas' question.

<sup>156</sup> *Shalom* is the Hebrew word translated as “peace” and refers not merely to the absence of conflict but to the positive presence of

social, economic, and spiritual wellness in a community. The distinction between the world's *Pax Romana* (“Roman Peace”) and the *Pax Christi* (Peace of Christ) comes from my friends Shirin McArthur and Rachel Srubas.

*deepening love.*

*I still grieve Jesus' last words—  
echoing in the eternity of my heart.*

*I still need Jesus' peace—  
shalom now as I seek shalom forever.*

God, it's me. I have heard many "last words." Some were the last conversations I had with a colleague, friend, or family. Some were literally the last words of a parishioner who lay upon their deathbed. Last words are sacred ground. I recall a man named Dick from my church in Colorado. Dick called his children and grandchildren to him when he entered hospice. One by one, they spent time with their beloved—not even his precious wife Lil was allowed into the room! One by one, Dick spoke his last words to them. And all left the room blessed; all were changed forever. May I have the dignity to journey into eternity with such grace, O YOU WHO WILL BE.

### **John 15:1-10**

Jesus continued his instruction and encouragement, saying, "I AM the Vine, the connection that binds you to the source of life. The I WILL BE is the vineyard's gardener who nurtures the fruit so that it produces zesty living. For every branch that produces dull, withered fruit, The I WILL BE lifts it up and carries<sup>157</sup> its dullness away—no bland fruit will be harvested from my *Abba's* vineyard! Every branch that produces good fruit will yet be pruned so that it becomes the very best it can be!

"You have already been pruned by the word that I have spoken to you—my truth has set you free and will continue to deepen your liberation from your false self. So,

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<sup>157</sup> The Greek word used is *airo*, which literally means "to raise, lift up, bear, carry away" is often associated in Hebrew worship rituals to mean "to carry away one's sins." I note that in English translations, *airo* is often translated as "cut off," as if an entire person will be tossed aside for not measuring up; this definition is often associated with a later phrase "and thrown into the fire" (15:6). But what if the liturgical connotation should guide our translation? In the paraphrase, I suggest that there are portions of our behavior and attitudes that must be purged (thrown into a fire) but that the vineyard gardener's purpose is ultimately redemptive—to toss out what diminishes the human self and

make your home in me and allow me to make my home in your heart and mind and soul. Open yourself to me, for I AM the Vine, the connection to the source of life. Being with me will lead you to grow into your true self. Zest and spark will enhance your daily living.

"Remember this: Without me, you've got nothing. By this I mean you don't have a chance to live into your best truest self. You need me to become the "you" that The I WILL BE sees that you are. If I am not your true home, you will become listless<sup>158</sup> and lifeless—lethargy will be your liturgy, feebleness your faith, and reluctance your religion. Trust me: You don't want any of this—and, in fact, all that is lethargic, feeble, and reluctant in your spirit will be thrown into the refiner's fire.

"However, if you make your home in me and allow my words to make their home in you, your intentions will conform to The I WILL BE's designs, and you will only need to ask for Their will to become your truth. All this will reflect the radiance and beauty of The I WILL BE, and *agape* love will be the result! *Agape* is the fruit my *Abba* desires, and *agape* is the sign that you are my Devoted. So, as my *Abba*, The I WILL BE, loves me, so I love you; live in that love. And the best way to live in that love is to obey my commandments: loving neighbor and stranger like family and friend."

*Rolling hills undulate before me.  
On the veranda I sit,  
astonished by the dark, purple glass in my hand,  
expressing a hint of earthy flavor yet, also,  
splashes of blackberry and...is that cinnamon?  
I never imagined a vineyard in Arizona.*

*There are many things I never imagined:  
looking in the mirror and not recognizing myself,  
a creeping desire to turn inward,  
flashes of anger that will not abate,*

"prune" or continually encourage that which enhances the human self. This argument is strengthened both by the Biblical use of fire as purgative found in many passages (cf. Malachi 3:2) but also the play on words within this verse, as *airo* (lift up or carry away) is coupled with *kathairo* (prunes); their meaning appears intentionally connected.

<sup>158</sup> The play on words that follows is my attempt to describe the Greek word *exeranthē*, which translates as "dry up, parched" and seems to be the opposite of the vitality experienced by those who make their home in Jesus.

*the too-ready willingness to answer others  
using a pithy verb-pronoun combination.  
I resist this temptation to lose myself,  
knowing I need to be lifted up,  
my false self carried away.*

*I thrust myself into your arms,  
open myself to your pruning,  
offer my anger and arrogance to your shears.*

*I sip, the fruit lingering upon my tongue,  
becoming tamed not through fermented grapes  
but as I rest in you.*

*Not that your work in me is done,  
but it has begun and will continue until  
your agape hills undulate before me,  
and I walk ever deeper into love.*

God, it's me. Stay close beside me, O YOU WHO WILL BE. Make your home in my mind and heart and soul, O Jesus. Abide with me through the intimate touch of Divine Spirit that I may lose my false self, unsheathing the layers of arrogance, betrayal, and corruption. Abide with me that my true self, conceived, gestated, and born of your Spirit, may strengthen my ability to love friend and neighbor, enemy and stranger. Abide with me. Abide with me. Abide with me and I in thee.

### **John 15:11-17**

Jesus continued his instruction and encouragement, saying, "I give my commandments for your joy, not your obligation; to fill you with purpose and passion, not to deflate your spirit. When you follow the path I instruct you to walk, you journey deeper into The I WILL BE's *agape*—truly, that's a good place to be. I want my joy to fill you up—every corner of your mind, every beat of your heart, every breath of your spirit, for I want all of me to live in each of you and in all of you. And here's the key: Love others with *agape* just as I have loved you with *agape*. Don't love based on merit or reciprocity but because love is the core of the universe and the full identity of The I WILL BE. True love is transformational not transactional. You cannot go deeper or higher or farther

than *agape*. You cannot improve on *agape*. It's at its best when it lays down its life for your friends.

"You are my friends. I no longer call you servants, for you don't obey me because you have to, nor out of obligation. Servants do what they're told but aren't told the full plan; servants aren't privy to the Master's purpose. That's not you! You know my purpose, for I unveiled to you The I WILL BE's intention to renew all creation, beginning with each of you.

"You know that in our culture a follower chooses the rabbi, seeks the rabbi's permission to follow, to listen, and to learn. That's not you! You didn't choose me. I chose you. I recruited you, drafted you to be on my team, called you into my service so that together we would do The I WILL BE's work: planting seeds and nurturing them until it's time to harvest, then tasting the sweet fruit of *agape*. This is why I chose you, so that you can grow a harvest of *agape* large enough to share with all creation. It's a big job, I know, and you'll need The I WILL BE's help, so trust that as you rely upon Them you will receive far more than you request. Dependence upon The I WILL BE is true liberty. You may doubt yourselves but never doubt The I WILL BE. Rather, lean into love and lean on the One who makes you able to bear its sweet fruit: *agape!*"

*Childhood can be a humiliating experience.*

*I was ten, standing on the asphalt,  
praying I wouldn't be the last kid chosen at recess.*

*I was fifteen, trying to catch a girl's eye,  
hoping my clumsy flirtations would be accepted.*

*It didn't get better as an adult.  
Interviewing amidst eleven other applicants,  
would I have the right stuff?*

*Cocktails after work reminded me of that asphalt,  
as a not-so-subtle hierarchy formed.*

*And then everything shifted.  
"You didn't choose me."  
"I chose you."*

*"Love with agape."  
"Love for the joy of it all."  
I now live in love, with love, for love.*

have witnessed all my works and yet reject me. They confirm the words spoken by the Psalmist:<sup>159</sup>

Haters gonna hate!  
No reason, just cuz.

But when the Comforter comes—the Spirit sent from The I WILL BE to guide, console, and point to the truth—that One will bear witness to me. And you must also bear witness: Tell others what you have seen and heard and experienced, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

*The “authorities” gathered on the street at night,  
dressed in military-style riot gear,  
batons and tasers and guns at the ready.*

*Their target had spoken words  
with which the “important” disagreed,  
words calling for justice and mercy.*

*With a nod and a bang the door shattered,  
lights and shouting and weapons—OH MY!—  
and a young man roused from his bed.*

*“We will show you what comes of words we reject.”  
The man’s pregnant wife screamed in terror,  
while the man was disappeared.*

*What has become of justice?  
What will become of mercy?  
O Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer!*

God, it’s me. I confess: I like to be liked. I shrink from rejection. So, teach me how to stay true to your good, be a friend to your justice, a servant of your *agape* even in the face of criticism, opposition, and malice. Help me speak the truth in love, standing firm in nonviolent protest, reflecting to the outside world the heart of Jesus that lives inside me. As you are, Master, so may your servant be; facing my cross, may my soul rest in thee.

**John 16:1-15**

*For love I was born:  
neither meritocracy nor reciprocity.  
In love I am borne:  
not a servant but a friend.*

God, it’s me. Teach me to love—today and into all tomorrows. Teach me to love as you love—deeply and expansively. Teach me to love whom you love—both reprobate and righteous, both neighbor and stranger, both family and enemy (even when they are one and the same). Teach me joy in my loving, that my full humanity might be realized through my loving—breath by breath, choice by choice, in act and in attitude, with patience and with perseverance. Teach me that loving in this way may be difficult, even impossible (of my own ability). Yet teach me also that to love in this way is your way and leads me to my true home.

**John 15:18-27**

Having spoken to his Devoted about being chosen, Jesus shifted focus, warning them about being rejected by the world, saying, “If culture and creation reject you, recognize that they rejected me first. If you dance to the world’s rhythms, it will embrace you as a friend. But you dance the God-rhythms because I chose you and called you out of the world and into my kin-dom, the rule of Sovereign love.

“Remember what I told you: The servant is not greater than the Master. As malignant mobs pursue me so they will punish you for honoring my word. Those who guarded my word in their heart will hear and rejoice at what you say. The malignant mobs will mistreat you because they neither perceive the One who sent me nor appreciate the purpose for which I was sent. They don’t get it and never will, and they will mistreat you also. Such folk are guilty, for they have heard my call to *agape* and rejected it and me—and by extension rejected The I WILL BE, too. Their excuses for their behavior are a sieve pretending to be a cistern—no living water is sipped from their cup. They

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<sup>159</sup> cf. Psalm 35:19, 69:4, 109:3, 119:163.

Jesus continued to provide instruction and assurance to his Devoted, saying, “I have told you these things about us being rejected—both me and, later, you—so that you won’t be scandalized<sup>160</sup> when the s\*\*\* hits the fan. It’s coming, friends. Expect it and don’t be surprised. In fact, a time will come when people will toss you out of the gathering, even murder you, and think they are serving The I WILL BE. It’s because they do not perceive that I am in The I WILL BE and The I WILL BE is in me.

“The hour will come when these things happen, and you will remember my words from this night. I didn’t share these things earlier because I was with you, but now I am going away, returning to the One who sent me. I am going away, yet none of you asks me where—sorrow has stolen your curiosity. So, trust this, for my words are true: It’s better for you that I return to The I WILL BE, for then I will send you the Divine Spirit, the Comforter, who will guide you, console you, and point you toward the truth.

“When the Divine Spirit comes, They will expose<sup>161</sup> brokenness, shine light on right relationships, and enlighten all about discerning right from wrong. As for brokenness, the Spirit will expose the fractures caused when one cannot trust. As for right relationships, the Spirit will shine light on the intimacy found with The I WILL BE through me, for I return to my heavenly home, and to be united with me is to have communion with The I WILL BE. As for discerning right from wrong, the Spirit will encourage people to dance the God-rhythms, enlightening people on both the joys of the God-life and the abuse, betrayal, and corruption that come from the Accuser.

“Oh, I have so much more to tell you, but you’re not ready to hear it, nor to bear it. Fear not, friends, for when the Divine Spirit comes, They will speak to you all the truth that I have heard from The I WILL BE. The Spirit will reflect my radiance, received through my intimacy with The I WILL BE, and then reveal it to you. My words shall be the Spirit’s words, so that you will be prepared for what is to come. What The I WILL BE embraces belongs to me, and that which is mine the Spirit will share with you. This is why I tell you, friends: Fear not!”

*Reading the news inspires dread in me.  
I feel despair rising,  
a sense of helplessness metastasizing,  
until every inch of my soul feels consumed.*

*Is my soul measured in inches?  
I think not.*

*Into this dread spiral comes hope  
(though perhaps “hope” is too strong a word),  
comes assurance about these days, that  
others have tread this dread before—and survived.*

*Rather than measuring my soul in inches,  
I choose “horizon.”*

*Onto the horizon of hope I fix my attention.  
I listen not to chatter and cacophony but to  
Spirit wisdom, Spirit comfort, Spirit call—  
for God-rhythms await to be danced.*

*My soul extends to the horizon and beyond,  
into eternity discovered through the God-life.*

God, it’s me. I wonder if my readers will be offended that I put onto Jesus’ lips the phrase “s\*\*\* hits the fan.” I wonder if my readers are—indeed, if I am—more concerned about the letter “s” and three asterisks than about the brokenness in the world, about abusive relationships, about the betrayal of both friends and values, about the d\*\*\* rampant corruption that we witness every day! Oops, I did it again. Sorry (not sorry). O YOU WHO WILL BE, tame my tongue even as you calm my anxieties. Everything will be okay, right?

### **John 16:16-24**

righteousness? By choosing “expose,” explicitly linked to sin (in English translations) and implicitly linked to righteousness and judgment (in English translations), I seek to convey a more nuanced understanding of the Spirit’s work in the world.

<sup>160</sup> The Greek word is *scandalizo*.

<sup>161</sup> The Greek word used is *elegcho*, which can mean “to convict, correct, reprove, or expose.” Most English translations use “to convict,” which makes sense when connected with brokenness or sin. However, what, then, does it mean to convict of

Jesus continued to encourage and prepare his Devoted for what was to come, saying, “In just a moment you will not see me but then you will perceive me, for I will return to The I WILL BE.”

Jesus’ Devoted were baffled, saying, “Why is he talking about ‘just a moment’ and ‘not seeing but perceiving’ and ‘returning to The I WILL BE’? This is all so confusing!”

Jesus replied to them, “Why are you worrying about what you can and cannot see and my words that you do not understand? Just know this: What is to come will cause you to weep and wail; lament and loss will be your intimate companions. But be assured of this: Your lament will be transformed into joy.

“It’s like a woman in childbirth who suffers agony and anguish until she delivers new life into the world, and her child brings her delight. So will you soon sorrow when I am hidden from you, and when I am revealed again your sorrow will be transformed into joy that cannot be taken from you.

“You have not needed to ask me for anything because I have been with you. But when the day comes when I am hidden from you, you will need to ask. I tell you that you should ask and keep asking, trusting that you will receive all that you ask for that conforms to my character and will, my purposes and passions. When you ask in this way, you will receive your heart’s fulfillment, and your joy will be whole and complete.”

*The gray-haired woman needed help  
rising from the kneeler in the pew.  
Her granddaughter took her by the elbow,  
raising the woman onto the bench,  
offering a tissue to dab moistened eyes.*

*Silence lingered between them  
as they sat eleven rows back on the left,  
observing an absent anniversary,  
listening to the organist practice for Sunday.  
This had been “their pew” for fifty-four years.*

*Finishing his rehearsal, echoes of music lingering,  
the organist glanced toward them,  
uncertain whether to let them be or run them off.  
The granddaughter noticed his look,*

*gently nudging her grandma, “It’s time to go.”*

*Together they walked slowly, arm in arm,  
moving toward the door that led back  
into a world without joy,  
into loneliness and an empty house,  
into memories—for that was all that remained.*

*But memories did remain—  
rooted deep in the soil of love shared,  
an oak upon which children climb  
from generation to generation, until the  
hidden is revealed and what is not seen is perceived.*

God, it’s me. When I doubt, whisper truths in my ear that cause me to remember. When I despair, nudge me awake as if from a bad dream. Remind me of moments of clarity when it seemed like I could taste your love and was being touched by your compassion. May I not forget in the darkness what you have shown me in the light.

### **John 16:25-33**

Jesus continued to encourage his Devoted, saying, “I have told you slant<sup>162</sup> about what is to come. Parables and proverbs have been my palette, symbols and figures of speech my brushes. But the time is coming when I will speak to you bluntly. When that happens, you’ll stop having to go through me to talk to The I WILL BE; you’ll ask Them directly—just remember to ask for things that conform to my character and will, my purposes and passions. The I WILL BE appreciates that you cherish me and that you trust I was sent from above and will return to Them.”

Jesus’ Devoted gushed, “Now you are speaking without parables or proverbs. Now we see. Now we get it. Now we fully and completely trust that you were sent by The I WILL BE!”

Jesus chuckled, “Now? Now you trust? And yet soon you will scatter like scared sheep; indeed, the failure of your trust is but moments away. Fret not, friends. I am not alone, for The I WILL BE is always with me. Know this: I have told you these things not so that you will stand

something from a unique or idiosyncratic perspective in order to bring out nuances of meaning hidden by direct speech.

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<sup>162</sup> The term “slant” is taken from the poet Elizabeth Dickinson, *Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant*, to refer to speaking about

by my side in my hour of tribulation, which is mine alone to embrace and endure, but so that you will later embrace the *shalom* I give to you. Trouble comes; it lurks around the corner. Yet, so is courage given to those who trust that I have overcome all enemies—in body and in soul, in life and in death and in life beyond death.”<sup>163</sup>

*Moments of clarity are often “brutiful”—  
beauty and brutality strolling side by side our psyche,  
finally knowing what must but cannot be,  
ultimately descending into the abyss of majesty.*

*To stand upon the edge of the abyss,  
gazing upon brilliant hues of purple and orange,  
grappling with the darkness that lurks beneath,  
is to join poets and artists in heartache.*

*There, beside the abyss, are  
truth encountered and love embraced, and,  
in ways mysterious and magnificent,  
hearts broken open to the God-life.*

God, it’s me. I am tickled to hear your Devoted start to get it, to understand, to embrace the audacious truth that you were from The I WILL BE and returned to divine majesty. I, too, believe all these things! I, too, trust that you hold all things in the palm of your hand. And I, too, like your Devoted, fail you and run away, afraid of the cost that comes from standing beside you. O YOU WHO WILL BE, forgive my arrogance! Liberate me from a pride entrenched in my false self. Free me to live ever deeper into the truth that the God-life is a mysterious, precarious, wondrous journey—brutiful to behold.

### **John 17:1-8**

Having spoken to his Devoted, Jesus now lifted his eyes to heaven to pray for them. “*Abba*, honor your son

that your son may honor you, for you infused him with your divine prerogative and privilege, granting him the authority to share the fullness of the God-life with all whom you have entrusted to him.” (Now this is the fullness of the God-life: to perceive The I WILL BE by recognizing that Jesus the Anointed was sent to reveal Them.<sup>164</sup>) “I have honored you on earth by making whole and complete all that you have given me to accomplish and to fulfill. Honor me, then, with the radiance I enjoyed before the beginning of the cosmos.

“I have openly expressed and made known your character and goodness to those you entrusted to me from the brokenness of this world. They belong to you, and you shared them with me. These have guarded and served your Word and now perceive that all that I have shared with them comes from you. I shared with them your words and they received them in their mind,<sup>165</sup> welcomed them in their heart, and embraced them in their spirit; now your words live in their soul. They recognized with calm and confident assurance that I came from you and trusted that you sent me into the world.”

*The best (and worst)  
choices I have made in ministry  
happened at the end.*

*Knowing I was a “short-timer,”  
I both said the things I had too long neglected, and  
spoke too freely from my own ego and anxiety.*

*There’s a fine line between  
honoring all the good that has been shared while  
not excusing all that has been neglected.*

*It’s a delicate balance of  
saying goodbye without  
sounding defensive.*

*I wish I had embraced as a younger pastor  
what I am only now beginning to accept:*

<sup>163</sup> This sentence is an allusion to the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism and is not in the Greek text. It is added as an interpretive phrase to expand on Jesus’ claim to have “overcome the world.”

<sup>164</sup> I have chosen to take this out of Jesus’ prayer and make it a parenthetical statement of the Gospel’s author, as its literary features are quite distinct from the surrounding prayer.

<sup>165</sup> I have chosen to make “mind,” “heart,” “spirit,” and “soul” singular rather than plural to convey the sense of community and solidarity among those entrusted to Jesus rather than highlight the atomized, distinct responses of multiple, individual followers.

*It's not about me and never was.*

*Ah, to have been like Jesus,  
in truth and not just words,  
how I would have honored The I WILL BE.*

God, it's me. Forgive me all the times I have made ministry about my ego. Forgive those times I have stolen honor from Jesus, glory from you, and credit from the Spirit. Free me to a servanthood that embraces joy as others receive applause (and so are encouraged in their hard work). Free me to serve as one eager to point toward others, ceding to them all acclamation for what is good and kind and faithful. May I decrease, that others (and your honor) may increase.

### **John 17:9-19**

Jesus continued praying, "I ask that you honor me for the sake of my Devoted, especially those whom you have chosen and who belong to you. All I have comes from you. All you are and all you have, you have shared with me. And these, my Devoted, have honored me and seek to reflect my character into the world. So, protect them. They will continue to walk in the world, even as I go to be with you. I will no longer walk beside them day by day, but they will continue to reflect your character and goodness into the world. So, *Abba*, you whose name is sacred, whose very person makes others whole and complete, protect them—make them one, a unity, even as you and I are One.

"While I walked beside them day by day, I was their guardian and their guide and ensured their moral and spiritual wholeness through my vigilance. Not one of them was led astray except the child of ruin, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Now, while I am still in this world, I pray these things so they will know my care for them continues. I pray their joy will be made whole and complete, packed high to the rafters in their souls.

"I gave them your Word so that they would be transformed, embarking on the journey from living according to the rules of this world—with its abuse, betrayal, and corruption—to dancing the God-rhythms of the God-life. I'm not praying that you remove them from this world and its broken culture but that you would guard them and guide them, lead them along the Way that leads to you. Protect them from the Accuser, for they do not belong to this world and its broken culture, but to you.

"Set them apart and make them sacred—  
instruments of your justice, mercy, and peace in all they are  
and in all they do. As I sought to live the sacred Way that  
fulfills all justice, invites all mercy, and offers all peace, so  
may they discover the path that sets them upon this Way.  
Beyond words and beliefs, may their lives express the truth  
of the God-life. As you sent me into this world, I send  
them. As I have sought to live as one named and claimed  
as sacred in your sight, may they live as those called,  
named, and claimed to shine sacred light."

*"How will I know?" I asked my mentor.  
He smiled, understanding my angst and anxiety.  
"You'll know when you've done this," he said.*

*He walked to his file cabinet and opened the drawer.  
Pointing to...60?...100? sets of stapled papers,  
he said, "When you've preached this many."*

*I've remembered that moment  
many times over the years,  
when encountering something new:*

*my first baptism, wedding, and funeral,  
my first divorced couple and death by suicide,  
my first pandemic.... (Oh, I remembered then!)*

*I am not asked to know everything.  
I am not expected to do everything.*

*I am asked to be who I am.  
I am expected to do what I can (not what I cannot).  
I am required to keep close to Jesus.*

*All the rest is just details.*

God, it's me. Thank you for the many, many mentors  
from whom I have been privileged to learn. Some  
taught with their words, others with their actions, all  
with their character. Your goodness was expressed  
through them and helped mold me into the Christ  
follower I am today. May I be for another what  
others have been for me, for we are all better  
together and one in you.

### **John 17:20-26**

Jesus continued praying, “I ask these things not just for these Devoted before me but for all my Devoted who will follow them in following me because of the Good News they proclaim. I pray that they will be one just as we are one. As we share a holy communion with each other, so may they share holy communion with one another so that the broken world might discover that a holy compassion lives in its midst. Through them, may minds be opened, hearts pierced, and trust invited in the assurance that you sent me.

“I have honored them as you have honored me, so that they may be a beloved community even as we exist for all time as a holy communion—I in you and you in me and we in them, the fulfillment of union and unity. May those who experience their community perceive that you sent me and loved both me and them with *agape*.

“*Abba*, I want those whom you have chosen, those whom you have given me, to share in my honor and glory. I pray that all may be as you intended before the foundations of all creation, that your design for the cosmos may be made whole and complete. O *Abba*, your name is justice, your design is right relationships, your character is all that is good and kind and faithful, the world does not recognize you. But I know you in mind and heart and spirit, down to the marrow of my soul. I pray for these my Devoted that they would know you in the same way. Even more, I pray that they will perceive and experience that you sent me because of your *agape* for them. I pray they may perceive and experience your *agape* for them even as you are in me and I am in you and together we are in them.”

*The desert seethes beneath the summer sun.  
Death lurks under every stone and  
courses through grains of sand.*

*Surprised, then, is the desert wanderer who,  
beneath brutal sun, traversing stone and sand,  
discovers life amidst this fragile ecosystem.*

*Perfectly balanced and designed to endure  
are all who share this hardship,  
learning the gift and need of each other.*

*Intertwined and complementary,  
palo verde shades the cactus wren, while  
a saguaro shoots deep roots into the soil,  
forming the walls of the pack rat's shelter.*

*Together they live in communion,  
sacred community designed for life,  
as I am in thee and thee in me,  
becoming “we” in the One.*

God, it's me. I lift prayers today for family and friends—thankful and pleading prayers, remembering praises and hopeful petitions. I pray, aware that we become one in your love. I pray that you will open me to still others whom you have chosen for me to welcome, to enjoy, to serve, and to love. Make me ever more aware that what unites us—a shared humanity, a common calling—is far more meaningful than all that divides. May I remain open this day to all before me, to whom you send me to remind them of your justice, mercy, and peace.

#### **John 18:1-14**

After Jesus' words of encouragement, counsel, and prayer, he walked with his Devoted outside the walls of Jerusalem and down the hill into the Kidron Valley, entering<sup>166</sup> a garden. Judas, his betrayer, knew Jesus frequented this garden and led a gang of Roman soldiers and religious leaders, among them the Elite and the Intense, to this garden.

Jesus, unsurprised to see them, stepped forward to greet the gang, saying to the Roman soldiers, “Whom do you seek?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

“I AM the one,” said Jesus. As Jesus said this, Judas took his stand—his betrayer, who had given Jesus as an offering to the Elite, stood with the soldiers. But the soldiers fell back and away and down at the *dunamis* of Jesus' words.

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<sup>166</sup> The Greek word used is a variant of *eiserchomai*, which can refer either to “physically entering” or “entering as a state or condition.” John's translation uses the first meaning to refer to a change in location but, given John's love for metaphor, I hear also

the second meaning. Though I do not highlight these connotations in the paraphrase, one Haiku poem that follows is based on this metaphorical interpretation.

So, Jesus asked the soldiers again, more forcefully, “Whom do you seek?”

Again, the soldiers answered, “We seek Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus said to them, “I have already told you I AM the one. Now let these others leave.” (Jesus said this so that his word would be fulfilled: “I have not lost even one of those you entrusted to me.”)

Then Simon Peter drew his sword and struck Malchus, the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear.

“Enough!” shouted Jesus. “Sheath your sword!” he commanded Peter. “Shall I not consume the cup I am to drink?” And the soldiers with their captain, along with the servants of the Elite, arrested Jesus, bound him, and led him first to Annas, a previous High Priest. Annas was the father-in-law to the current High Priest, Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the one who had declared it is better to sacrifice one man in order for the nation to be saved.

*Paradise is lost  
Human betrayal comes nigh  
Cup consumed in full*

*Comes a savior  
Returning to a Garden  
Confronting darkness*

*Come seeking Jesus  
Stand not as friend of the night  
Sheath your armaments*

*Consumed to last drop  
Human imperfection bound  
Paradise regained*

*God, it’s me. May I be in the night all that people see in the light. May I lead others not in the path of darkness, armed with violence and slander, but in the way of Jesus, armed with peace and truth. And when it appears as if Paradise is lost, as if darkness triumphs over light, may I trust and continue to trust and always trust that even darkest night leads to dawn, even as “Crucify!” leads to “He is risen!” O YOU*

*WHO WILL BE, lead me to your Garden that I may experience Paradise regained.*

### **John 18:15-27**

Simon Peter and another of the Devoted followed the gang dragging Jesus to Annas for an initial inquiry. The other follower was known by Annas and his people and so was allowed into the courtyard, while Peter remained outside. The other follower spoke to the guard and was able to get Peter inside.

A female servant recognized Peter and asked, “Aren’t you with Jesus, the man who was just arrested? You follow him!”

Peter denied knowing Jesus: “No. I neither follow nor even know this man.”

As the night was cold, a group of the Elite’s servants and subordinates warmed themselves around a charcoal fire; Peter was among them.

Meanwhile, Annas sought to inquire respectfully<sup>167</sup> about Jesus’ teaching and his Devoted, but Jesus would not play this game. He responded, “I have taught openly, publicly, in full view of all the people, including the Intense and the Elite. Everything you seek to know I have already spoken. Ask these people about my message, for they all have heard it.”

At this, one of the Elite slapped Jesus with an open hand, a sign of disrespect, seeking to humiliate him. “Is this how you address High Priest Annas?” he demanded.

Jesus responded, “Did I speak evil? Were any of my words untrue? And if I speak words that are just and good and true, why do you beat me?” Annas, seeing that Jesus would not respond to his questions, had him bound and sent to Caiaphas, who was the sitting High Priest that year.

While Peter and the Elite’s servants and subordinates warmed themselves by the charcoal fire, someone asked Peter, “Don’t you follow Jesus, the man they arrested?”

Peter denounced Jesus: “No, no. I said it before: I know not this man, nor would I ever follow him.”

But a relative of Malchus was present, the servant whose right ear Peter had lopped off. He said, “I am certain I saw you in the garden with this Jesus.” And after Peter disowned Jesus again, immediately a rooster crowed.

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<sup>167</sup> The Greek word used is *erostesen* which has the connotation of politely asking, which contrasts with the interrogation and accusations to come.

*Deny, denounce, disown.  
Are they one and the same  
Or descent into Dante's levels?*

*I like to imagine my sins as "less than,"  
not nearly as venal or corrupt as  
what YOU do (no matter who YOU are).*

*I imagine my  
framing of the facts  
hedging on full disclosure  
adding "a bit of spice" to the narrative  
are not nearly as  
broken as your bias  
caustic as your bluntness  
toxic as you just being yourself.*

*Deny, denounce, disown.  
Who am I kidding? (Certainly not the divine.)  
I am Peter. Peter is me.*

*In your mercy, hear my prayer.*

God, it's me. The game begins—that leads Jesus through layers of deceit and duplicity, through both denial and degradation; that leads Jesus inevitably and inexorably to the cross. I read between the lines to imagine I was there. Would I have been as fearful as Peter or slapped Jesus for his insolence? Would I have reveled in Annas' authority, having the power and privilege to command and direct the fate of another? Would I have stood in the courtyard or the hall of power? I can only imagine what I would have done then, but I know what you call me to do now: speak words that are just, good, and true; stand with those who are accused and arrested unjustly; accompany those dragged into unmarked vans and destined for a gulag in El Salvador. O YOU WHO WILL BE, give me courage beyond that which Peter had, that I fail not them nor thee.

## John 18:28–40

The soldiers led Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate, the Roman governor. The Elite did not enter Pilate's palace because by then it was morning, and to enter a Gentile residence would have made them corrupt, defiling them and making them unable to eat the Passover.<sup>168</sup> So, Pilate went out to the Elite and asked, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

The Elite responded, "He is guilty, or we would not have brought him to you."

Pilate, irritated, replied, "Then judge him according to your own law and quit bothering me."

"We have no power to execute him, which is why we have brought him to you." Now, Roman law prohibited its conquered people from inflicting corporal punishment; only Rome was allowed the right to execute criminals and political prisoners.<sup>169</sup> The Elite's words fulfilled what Jesus had said about the manner in which he was to die, that he would be handed over to the Roman authorities. The Elite now had Pilate's full attention.

Pilate returned inside and sent for Jesus. He asked Jesus, "Are you your people's king?"

Jesus answered, "Are you genuinely curious, or did someone tell you to ask this?"

Pilate replied, "Am I Jewish? Am I not Roman? What do I know about your people's internal squabbling? Your own leaders want you dead. Why? What have you done?"

Jesus confessed, "My kin-dom is in this world but not of this world. It is all around you, even in your very breath, but does not conform to the broken values of this culture of death. My kin-dom is a reign of honor and humility, whose hallmarks are *agape* and *shalom*. Justice is its horizon, and the moral arc of history bends toward it. Your kingdom is predicated on power and rule by abuse, betrayal, and corruption. We are different, you and me, and so my servants will not take up arms to prevent you from doing to me as all kingdoms must if they are to survive."

"So, you are a king then," said Pilate.

<sup>168</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for interpretive context.

<sup>169</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for interpretive context.

“You say so. What I say is this: I was born for a reason—to speak the truth and incarnate it. All who are born of truth and belong to it listen to my words.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked and wandered away from Jesus. Pilate then went out to the Elite and told them, “This man has done nothing wrong, but it is my tradition to release to you one prisoner during the Passover. Do you want me to release your king?”

“No!” they shouted, “not Jesus. Release Barabbas!” (Barabbas was an insurrectionist and had committed the acts for which Jesus was arrested.)

*The kin-dom is not a “there and then”  
but “here and now.”*

*The old woman stooped toward the boy,  
gently brushing a tear from his cheek,  
noting the bruises already beginning to form.*

*Placing her fingers under his chin,  
tilting his face toward her own,  
she said, “You will be okay. I am with you.”*

*Hail the royal servant who cares!*

*The woman stopped her frantic pace,  
noticing, as if for the first time, her assistant.  
“How are you?” she asked, “You seem anxious.”*

*“I’m not sure how to do what you asked,”  
he stammered, worried about his job.  
“Let me show you again. We’ll do it together.”*

*Hail the royal servant who serves!*

*Side by side they marched:  
peasants and patricians, blue collars and white collars,  
artists and industrialists, citizens and undocumented,  
“Elephants” and “Donkeys.” United in community.*

*Hail the kin-dom of Jesus!  
The kin-dom—not a “where” but a  
“how” and a “hallelujah.”*

*God, it’s me. Make me a citizen of your kin-dom: living  
the way of Jesus, seeking shalom for one and all,  
enduring hardship for the sake of justice, offering  
mercy in the face of judgment. I bow this day to the  
rule of your Sovereign love and to the Ruler who gave  
his life that all may live.*

### **John 19:1-7**

Pilate had Jesus whipped. The soldiers used the Roman *mastix*, a leather strap with bits of bone and metal to gouge the flesh, tearing apart one’s humanity from back to front with each brutal strike.<sup>170</sup> The soldiers took branches from a thornbush and fashioned Jesus a “crown,” slicing his head as they thrust it over his brow. To mock Jesus, the soldiers draped a purple cloth—the color of royalty—around him and shouted, “Hail King!” as they slapped him.

Pilate again went out to the Elite, seeking to reason with them. Showing them the brutalized and humiliated Jesus, Pilate said, “I’ve found no basis for a charge against him. See the man for yourself!” (Pilate sought to coax compassion from the Elite by parading Jesus before them in this humiliated state.)

The Elite were immersed in their own fury, and upon seeing Jesus began to chant at Pilate, “Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!” The crescendo broke Pilate, who said again, meekly, “But why? He’s done nothing wrong.”

The Elite answered, “We have rules and order and a system that cannot be defied. By our rules, this man has committed blasphemy by claiming to be the Son of The I WILL BE. He. Must. Die.”

*Blinded by fury, they could only hear blasphemy, not  
dignity amidst degradation,  
holiness amidst humiliation,  
a savior amidst suffering.*

*Blinded by fury, they could not imagine  
providence amidst poverty,  
grace intended for a gulag,  
divinity incarnate in human form.*

*Blinded by fury, they*

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<sup>170</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for interpretive context.

*lashed out against the helpless,  
accused the abused,  
shouted for death.*

*Buffeted by furies on every side,  
where do we see the kin-dom?<sup>2</sup>*

*Can we imagine a new creation with a different Way?<sup>2</sup>  
What will we shout when called upon to declare?<sup>2</sup>*

God, it's me. Rescue me from my fury! Help me to see the unlikely citizens who populate your kin-dom. Help me to imagine new ways to dance the God-rhythms and live the God-life. When called upon to declare my allegiance, may I proclaim, "I serve the Crucified One!"

### John 19:8-16

When Pilate heard the Elite's response, he grew even more afraid<sup>171</sup>—awe and reverence toward Jesus flooded him. Pilate returned to his palace and confronted Jesus, saying, "Where are you from?" (Pilate's question was not about geography, for he knew Jesus to be Jewish. Rather, he wondered if perhaps Jesus could be the kind of god-man spoken about in Roman myths.) Jesus remained silent.

"Do you refuse to speak?" asked Pilate. "Do you not know that I have power over you, the authority of life and death—your life and death, in my hands?"

Jesus finally spoke. "You are without authority, and your only power is given to you from above, from The I WILL BE. Indeed, even all that has happened and will happen originates not with you but with the one who betrayed me into your hands."

Pilate returned to the Elite and tried to send<sup>172</sup> Jesus away but was powerless. The Elite kept shouting, "If you send this man away, you are no friend of Caesar, for he has committed sedition! To defy Caesar is treason!" Hearing these words, Pilate submitted to the Elite and had

Jesus escorted to the official tribunal, which the Romans called the Stone Pavement and which in Aramaic is called *Gabbatha*.

It was the day before the Passover (called the Preparation Day) around noon. Pilate had Jesus paraded before the Elite and a small throng of their followers. Pilate addressed them with subtle irony, "Look upon your King!"

The throng shouted back, "Away with him! Away! Crucify! Crucify!"

Pilate goaded them, asking, "Shall I crucify your king?"

The people gathered before him, even the Elite, repudiated their own religion, saying, "We have no king but Caesar." So, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and soldiers took him away.

*Blinded by fear, he could only see sedition, for  
the one condemned ignored the rules,  
rejected the claims of human authority,  
repudiated the power of the sword.*

*Blinded by fear, he could not imagine  
a society in which he was not privileged,  
a world where might does not make right,  
a man who was truly, utterly innocent.*

*Blinded by fear, he  
accepted the invitation to play his part,  
acceded to others who demanded death,  
acquiesced to how rulers and ruled have always been.*

*Buffeted by Fear's swirling winds,  
how do we stand against the powers and principalities?<sup>2</sup>  
Can we imagine kin-dom and kingdom united  
by neither nation nor race but through imago dei<sup>173</sup>?*

God, it's me. Release me from the clutches of my fears. May I stand with you and for you regardless of who

experimented with this second connotation throughout the interpretive paraphrase of this passage.

<sup>172</sup> The Greek word used is *apaluo* which translates from the Hebrew word *shalach*, meaning "to send." In John's Gospel, the fact that Jesus was sent into the world is a primary theme; that Pilate is powerless to send heightens the contrast between Pilate's alleged "power" and the true *dunamis* at work through and upon Jesus.

<sup>173</sup> Latin phrase used by theologians and meaning "image of God."

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<sup>171</sup> The Greek word used is a cognate of *phobos*, which may connote either "fear or terror" or "awe and reverence" (e.g., "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.") The closest referent is what the Elite say, so the former is the more likely connotation. However, I wonder how the meaning of the passage shifts if Pilate's reaction harkens back to Jesus' equanimity and measured words about his kin-dom. Might Pilate have been in awe that Jesus could respond as he did in the face of such clear hatred? I have

stands before me or against me. May I listen to the voices of the poor and oppressed with compassion and courage.<sup>174</sup> May I speak truth to power with dignity and humility. May I live seeking your presence as my reward. In the freedom from fear that you give, may I conceive neither power nor privilege, neither pearls nor prestige, as a worthy pursuit for my life.

### John 19:17-27

The soldiers marched Jesus up Skull Hill (called *Golgotha* in Aramaic), with the soldiers inflicting upon Jesus the indignity of carrying his own cross to his execution. Atop Skull Hill the soldiers crucified Jesus and two others, with Jesus in the middle. Pilate continued to provoke the Elite by ordering the soldiers to hang a sign above Jesus that read: KING OF THE JEWS. It was written in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin so everyone who saw it could read its message. The Elite were appalled and appealed to Pilate, saying, “Don’t say that he is the king but that he said he is the king.”

Pilate answered them, “You’re not the boss of me” (though he had done and was doing their bidding).

After the four soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross, stripping him naked in order to degrade and dehumanize him, they divided his clothing among them. However, Jesus’ tunic was woven as a single cloth and, not wanting to destroy it, they rolled dice to see which of them would get the tunic. This fulfilled the words spoken by the Psalmist:

Dividing the spoils of cruelty  
with a game of chance,  
my nakedness becomes your splendor.<sup>175</sup>

Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother Mary; her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas; and Mary the Tower from Magdala.<sup>176</sup> Also there was one of the Devoted, whom Jesus loved. Seeing him, Jesus said, “Behold your mother.” And Jesus said to his mother, “Behold your son.” From

that day, Mother Mary and Jesus’ beloved follower lived as family.

*Pilate pandering*  
*Seeking moral victory*  
*Shows them who is boss*

*Not seeking death*  
*Chose appeasement to honor*  
*Never took a stand*

*How often do I,*  
*Choosing the path more traveled,*  
*Dishonor my Lord?*

God, it’s me. I, too, pose as moral while I serve corruption. I, too, speak boldly amidst my confirmation silo while remaining silent among the powerful and influential. Immersed in a broken culture of enmity and greed, my attempts to shine end up hidden in shadows, I so want to judge Pilate, but when I look upon him I realize I am looking into a mirror. In your mercy, hear my prayer!!!

Kyrie eleison!  
Christe eleison!  
Kyrie eleison!<sup>177</sup>

### John 19:28-37

After connecting his mother and his beloved follower, Jesus knew that he had done all that was asked or required of him, making whole and complete the will of his *Abba*, The I WILL BE. Now, as crucifixion tormented the body, it created thirst in the crucified, so Roman soldiers routinely kept sour wine nearby.<sup>178</sup> Jesus said, “I thirst,” so the soldiers used a hyssop branch and a sponge dipped in the wine to quench his thirst. And seeing that all was fulfilled—made whole and complete—he surrendered his spirit.

<sup>174</sup> Some readers may wonder why listening with courage is important. As one who comes from the privileged classes (white, male, cis, affluent, etc.), trusting the stories of the poor and oppressed compels moral response; therefore, I couple courage with compassion in the hope that I will respond according to the Way of Jesus.

<sup>177</sup> This prayer, known as “the Kyrie,” is an ancient Christian prayer and translates as “Lord have mercy! Christ have mercy! Lord have mercy!”

<sup>178</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added for context.

<sup>175</sup> cf. Psalm 22:18.

As it was the day before a Sabbath, Jews regularly prepared for the following day so that they could honor the Sabbath commandment by resting from work. As the following day was a high and holy Sabbath associated with the festival of Passover, this work of preparation was even more important to the Jews.<sup>179</sup> So, to expedite death, those in attendance asked Pilate to have his soldiers break the legs of the three men being crucified. (By breaking their legs, the men could not use their legs to bear their weight, which led more quickly to asphyxiation.) Pilate agreed to this request, and the soldiers broke the legs of the other two men but found that Jesus had already died. So, the soldiers did not break Jesus' legs, but one of them speared Jesus deeply on his left side, piercing his heart so that bloody mucus<sup>180</sup> flowed from him.

The one who witnessed this, even I who write this testimony, saw all that happened. It is unforgettable.<sup>181</sup> I remember and cannot forget, so you may trust my testimony and believe into Jesus. Now, these things happened to fulfill Torah and Psalms, as is written:

No bones broken! Not on this one.<sup>182</sup>  
 They will behold the One they pierced  
 and gaze upon his wounds.<sup>183</sup>

*I thirst*  
*for sunrises and sunsets,*  
*for strolls on the beach with umbrella drinks,*  
*for a night sky with a trillion stars.*

*I thirst*  
*for enough food,*  
*for enough work and rest (in work-life balance),*  
*for a roof over my head.*

*I thirst*  
*for intimate friends,*  
*for a life companion,*  
*for family and community in harmony.*

*I thirst*  
*for children not to contract HIV from their mothers,*  
*for immigrants to be afforded due process,*  
*for justice to roll down like an ever-flowing stream.*

*I thirst*  
*to welcome The I WILL BE's glory and honor,*  
*to follow the Way of Jesus in all that I am and do,*  
*to be shaped, formed, and transformed by the Spirit.*

*For what do you thirst?*

God, it's me. I mourn that Jesus, in his humanity, experienced crucifixion, even thirsted as his body failed. I celebrate that Jesus, in his divinity, did not consider this too humble a place to go. I mourn for the brokenness of the world (and my part in that brokenness). I celebrate that Jesus heals and saves and restores this world (including me). I mourn that Jesus thirsted on the cross. I long to thirst for that which Jesus thirsts.

### **John 19:38-42**

After Jesus died, a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, came to Pilate requesting permission to take Jesus' body away. Joseph was one of Jesus' Devoted—but secretly because he was afraid of what the Elite would say and what they might do to him. Pilate granted his permission, and Joseph took Jesus' body away. Also present was Nicodemus, who had secretly approached Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought spices for Jesus' burial: an offering of seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes to wrap within Jesus' burial linens and to place around his body to fill his tomb with their aroma. Together they took Jesus' body and, according to their Jewish burial customs,

and it was believed that some who died cross the River Lethe and forgot their mortal travails. Thus, the word *a-leitbeia* is a compound word that translates literally into English as “not-forget.” Something that is true is that which is unforgettable or always to be remembered. The paraphrase seeks to bring out these connotations.

<sup>182</sup> cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and Psalm 34:20.

<sup>183</sup> cf. Zechariah 12:10.

<sup>179</sup> This context, or justification, for breaking a crucified person's legs is not in the Greek text but added for interpretive context.

<sup>180</sup> The Greek text indicates “blood and water” flowed from Jesus, which would be the result if his heart's pericardium was pierced.

<sup>181</sup> This verse twice uses variants of the Greek word *aletheia*, which is translated as “true” or “truth.” However, in this context, *aletheia*'s etymology is significant (or at least interesting). In Greek mythology, the River Lethe was known as the river of forgetting,

wrapped the body in linen cloth, placed the spices within, and laid the body in a tomb that had been carved out of the limestone rock. This tomb was in a garden and had never been used. It was nearby and, as the hour grew late and the Sabbath approached, they hurried to complete the burial. They laid Jesus' corpse in the tomb.

*Jesse snuck into the church four minutes late,  
sliding into the last pew, sitting on the far left,  
with tousled hair and rumpled jeans.*

*Jesse looked around to make sure  
no one had noticed him, no one he knew was present.*

*Singing, reading, praying,  
Jesse did it all—fully participating in the worship.*

*Once he even mimicked those around him and  
raised his hands while singing, though  
his hands never rose higher than his second rib.*

*Jesse was absent-minded one Sunday,  
slower to leave than he intended.  
He got to the back just as the pastor arrived.*

*Jesse wanted to slip past the pastor,  
but that seemed rude.  
He let her pass.*

*Pastor Shirin smiled at the man with tousled hair,  
extending her hand as she smiled in welcome.  
“Good morning,” she greeted Jesse.*

*Jesse was silent.  
Never having been greeted in church,  
he didn't know how to respond.*

*All week, Jesse pondered what had happened.  
He enjoyed the sermon and prayers, though  
singing sometimes made him uncomfortable.*

*Why was he afraid to be seen?  
Why fear that someone would recognize him?  
Why did he shy away when greeted?*

*Eventually, something sparked courage within Jesse,  
He knocked on the door to the Pastor's office.  
Shirin lifted her gaze upon her “silent friend.”*

*Never having been introduced,  
Shirin thought of him as “The Rumpled Man,”  
a regular visitor to her services for six months.*

*“Well, hello!” she said, though she remained seated,  
having discerned that less is more with this man,  
who seemed quite skittish about being known.*

*“What brings you into the office?”  
“I, I,” he stammered, “I'm not sure what I want,  
“but I was wondering if I could be baptized.”*

*And so began a journey:  
of knowing and being known,  
of moving from the shadows into the light.*

*The journey continues:  
from claiming one's belovedness  
to proclaiming everyone's belovedness.*

*The journey never ends:  
living as part of the Beloved Community and  
welcoming all to the family.*

God, it's me. I thank you that I get to be a part of your Beloved Community—the Church of Jesus, Christ's Body here on earth. May I do my part to support its work, to love its people, to extend its justice and joy into all the world. Help me to notice the moments when you call me to bring the spices of life to cover the shroud of death. And, noticing these moments, inspire me to seize them as opportunities to be Good News to the world.

### **John 20:1-10**

Sunday saw the dawn of the first day of new creation, as night gave way to the rising sun. Mary the

Tower went to the Garden<sup>184</sup> the first of all Jesus' followers to approach Jesus' tomb. Mary saw<sup>185</sup> that the stone covering the entrance had been rolled away. She ran and told Simon Peter and another Devoted, the one whom Jesus loved, "Someone stole Jesus' body, and I don't know where they hid him."

Peter and the other Devoted both ran to the tomb, with the other Devoted getting there first. He peered in and observed the linen cloths in which Jesus had been wrapped. Peter arrived and entered the tomb and noticed not only the cloths but discovered that the cloth that had been around Jesus' head lay separately from the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' body. Finally, the other Devoted entered the tomb, discerned what had happened, and trusted. He returned to where the others were staying.

*See the One who is with you.*

*Peer into the experience of your life.*

*Observe its challenges and opportunities.*

*Notice its brokenness and blessing.*

*Discover the healing touch of Jesus.*

*Discern the call he places upon your life.*

*Discern how the Spirit speaks in whispers.*

*Discover the Way you are to walk.*

*Notice the beauty of dancing to God-rhythms.*

*Observe the many gifts of the God-life.*

*Peer into each moment as if it were an eternity.*

*See that Jesus lives.*

*God, it's me. Teach me to look for your goodness that I may see your wonders and one day notice the many ways you are with me each moment of every day. Teach me to hear your Word that I may listen to its Good*

*News, heed its message, and live the God-life. Teach me not merely to speak but to tell your Good News and share the love you have for all people—even all creation. And as I learn to notice and heed and live, may I dance the God-rhythms of the God-life in a manner that conveys your praise.*

## **John 20:11-18**

Mary, having returned to the Garden with Peter and the other Devoted, stood before the tomb wailing in lament<sup>186</sup>—the cry of grief and agony that refuses consolation. As she lamented, she peered into the tomb and observed two messengers,<sup>187</sup> one at the foot and the other at the head of where Jesus' body would have been. The messengers said to Mary, "Woman, what's with the lament?"

"They have stolen my Sovereign, and I do not know where they have placed his body," she replied. Mary glanced and saw Jesus standing nearby but did not recognize him.

"Woman," said Jesus, "why lament? Whom do you seek?"

Thinking Jesus was the gardener of that place, Mary replied, "Sir, if you have taken his body, tell me where it is, and I will go to him."

Jesus then spoke her name, "Mary."

Mary turned<sup>188</sup> around, turned toward Jesus, and in that instant her life was transformed. "*Rabboni!*" she exclaimed (*rabboni* means "teacher" in Aramaic).

"Do not grasp me and do not cling. You see me as I have always been to you. But the past, even my past, is not the horizon toward which you will journey, for I rise to my *Abba*. Go now and tell my Devoted that I rise to my

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<sup>184</sup> "Garden" is capitalized to indicate John's symbolic message: Jesus' resurrection didn't merely happen in a garden as a particular location but served as the beginning of the New Creation, a restoration of the Garden found in Genesis 2 and 3.

<sup>185</sup> There is a succession of Greek words used in this passage, all of which can be translated as "to see" though connoting differing sensory experiences: *blepo*, *theoreo*, *parakupto*, and *horao*. In English we might distinguish between "look, see, notice" or "hear, listen, heed." I seek to convey this ascending intensity in the paraphrase through the verbs.

<sup>186</sup> Throughout this passage, the Greek words used to refer to Mary are variations of *klaiō*, which is the traditional Middle

Eastern form of expressing grief which we see on news broadcasts. *Klaiō* is distinguished from *dakrno*, which connotes the quiet or silent crying more familiar in Western culture.

<sup>187</sup> The Greek word used is *angelous*, which literally means "messengers" and figuratively means "angels."

<sup>188</sup> The Greek word used is a variation of *strepho*, which literally means "to turn in a different direction," suggesting that Mary had previously been facing away from Jesus when she thought he was the gardener. *Strepho* figuratively means "to convert, as in change one's behavior or attitudes." The paraphrase seeks to convey both meanings.

*Abba, The I WILL BE, who is also their Abba and their I WILL BE.”*

Mary the Tower, the first of Jesus’ Devoted to be sent by him to announce the Good News of his risen life, was obedient to him. She proclaimed, “I have discovered Jesus the Anointed! He is risen!”

*The chaplain sat beside the old woman’s bed  
as the hospice patient traversed her final steps. She  
still had some fight left in her,  
still had weeks, perhaps months, to her journey.*

*“Tell me about your daughter,” said the chaplain.  
The patient sighed, then frowned.  
Then said, “No, I don’t think I want to talk about her.”*

*The course of visits progressed, little by little,  
Vistas into the patient’s soul slowly unveiled,  
opacity becoming clarity, bit by bit, until  
the chaplain sensed it was time again.*

*“Tell me about your daughter,” nudged the chaplain.  
The patient sighed, then frowned.  
Then said, “It’s not something I’m proud of.”*

*The final steps of the patient’s journey were spent  
unpacking the past, unburdening, releasing  
sins and slights until harm gave way to holy ground.  
“Will you call her? Tell her I’m sorry.”*

*“I will call her,” agreed the chaplain gently,  
“and I’ll let her know you would like to see her.”  
And so a date was set—sooner rather than later.*

*Death came too suddenly for  
daughter and patient to reunite,  
yet even their willingness unpacked  
anger and rupture and despair.*

*In choosing to seek reconciliation,  
they released a past that cannot be changed  
for a future in which we will be changed.*

God, it’s me. Help me to see when I cling to a past version of my life—to what has been, to what I wish would never change. Help me, rather, to unburden

myself of what has been so that I might encounter new creation. Releasing my comfortable nostalgia, may I discover my life’s purpose is in serving you. May I seek always to be with you as one who is sent into the world to share Good News.

### **John 20:19–23**

It was Sunday, the first day of the new creation, and the Devoted huddled together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Elite, the Intense, and also the Collaborators, who worked for Herod, Pilate’s puppet. Jesus came to them and said, “*Shalom!* Peace be upon you all.” Then, Jesus showed the Devoted his hands and his side, that they might experience that it was really him. They were overjoyed to see him alive.

Again, Jesus said to them, “*Shalom!* Peace be upon your heads and your hearts and your hands—may your whole person experience my peace. As The I WILL BE sent me into this world, so I am sending you.”

Then, Jesus breathed upon them, commingling his breath with their own, his Spirit with their spirits, an act of intimacy so powerful that it unleashed the Divine Spirit upon them all. Jesus said, “Welcome the Spirit! Both take and receive,<sup>189</sup> lay hold of the Spirit with your entire person. As you forgive others, you liberate yourself from the hold they have over you. If you do not forgive, the hurt and harm and heartache they have inflicted remains with you still.”

*Usually, I think of forgiveness as a passive event—  
a letting go, a releasing  
of hurt and harm and heartache.*

*Sometimes, I consider forgiveness as interactive—  
I’ll forgive you if...  
...you say you’re sorry.*

*Rarely, I experience forgiveness as active—  
a choice I make for my own good,  
knowing that holding onto another’s sin imprisons me.*

*Never have I imagined forgiveness as a dance—  
giving and receiving, taking and letting go,  
liberating and being liberated.*

<sup>189</sup> The Greek word used is a variant of *lambano*, which can mean either “to take” or “to receive.” HELPS / Word Studies (2983)

defines *lambano* as “accept with initiative and emphasizes the *volition* (assertiveness) of the receiver.”

*Come, Spirit, teach me to dance these God-rhythms!  
Through the intimacy of shared breath,  
release divine dunamis within and through me.*

God, it's me. Breathe on me, Breath divine. Fill me with life anew, that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do. Breathe on me, Breath divine, until my heart is pure, until my will is one with yours, to do and to endure. Breathe on me, Breath divine, so shall I never die, but live with you the perfect life for all eternity.<sup>190</sup>

### John 20:24–31

Thomas, one of the Devoted who was nicknamed “The Twin,” was not present the first time Jesus revealed himself as resurrected. When he returned to where everyone was staying, the other Devoted said to him, “We saw Jesus! He is risen!”

Thomas responded, “Nope. No way. In fact, I refuse to trust your words unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my fingers into his side. I could never believe such an outlandish story!”

Eight days later the Devoted, including Thomas, were all together behind locked doors. Jesus came to them, stood in their midst, and said, “*Shalom!* Peace be upon you.” Then Jesus turned toward Thomas and said to him, “Bring forward your hand<sup>191</sup> and touch me. Bear the weight of this moment so that you can carry its truth forward into the world. Move from untrusting<sup>192</sup> to trusting.”

Thomas dropped to his knees<sup>193</sup> and said, “My Sovereign! The I WILL BE!”

Jesus helped Thomas to his feet, saying to him, “Because you have discerned that it is truly I who stand before you, you have trusted. Embraced by the sacred will be all those who trust even though they cannot see.”

Jesus performed many other signs, and his Devoted witnessed them—more than can be included in

this book. But these signs are recorded—both words and actions, how he lived and died and was raised to life, to whom he went and for what he stood—so that you, Dear Reader, may believe into Jesus and through your trusting learn to dance the God-rhythms of the God-life, today, into all tomorrows, and throughout eternity.

*Huddled in a locked room,  
whispers of paranoia and conspiracy,  
darkness prevails though the sun is high.*

*Every footstep a threat,  
every knock frays nerves  
already at their breaking point.*

*Soldiers donning military gear  
roam the streets looking for prey—  
every tattoo a narrative that can betray and destroy.*

*Into this den of fear and trepidation  
comes Messiah to calm and assure:  
“Peace, peace” (though there is no peace).*

*Can I trust these words,  
ethereal and from above,  
to embody divine providence and protection?*

*Unless I see, unless I touch,  
I cannot hope, I cannot trust. O Messiah,  
reveal yourself as flesh and bones and blood.*

*Guard me from the American Gestapo.*

God, it's me. Give me courage in this historical moment to stand for liberty and justice for all—not just for those who look or think or act like me, not just for those who believe or worship like me, not just for those who were born into the privilege that is citizenship. But for all who are my neighbor, as Jesus defined my

the Greek text and have included the wider connotations of *phero* in the interpretive paraphrase.

<sup>192</sup> Ordinarily this verse is translated as “Stop doubting and believe.” The key Greek words are the verbal forms for *a-pistis* and *pistis*, which translate literally to “not trusting” and “trusting.”

<sup>193</sup> The senses of movement conveyed by the paraphrase are not in the Greek text of this verse and the next but are, I believe, reasonably surmised.

<sup>190</sup> Prayer adapted from lyrics to *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*, by Edwin Hatch (Allon's Congregational Psalmist Hymnal, 1886).

<sup>191</sup> The Greek text of 20:27 uses an odd word choice, *phero*, which English translations translate as “put,” “reach,” or “bring.” However, Greek lexicons translate *phero* as “to carry a burden,” “bear, i.e. endure,” or “to bring forward.” In the previous paragraph, *balo* is used, which is the ordinary word translated as “put.” I wonder about the theological nuance being conveyed in

neighbor<sup>194</sup>—the one created *imago dei* (in the image of God) who is before me. May your courage cause me to stand not just for liberty and justice but also for Jesus and for all people whom he commands me to love.

### John 21:1-14

After Jesus' appearances to the Devoted in Jerusalem, he also revealed himself to them in Galilee. Some of the Devoted were at the Sea of Tiberius (its Roman name, though it's called the Sea of Galilee or Lake Capernaum by Jews): Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, James and John the Sons of Zebedee, and two others. Simon Peter said to them, "I'm going fishing." The other Devoted said they would join Peter, and they took their boat onto the lake. It was night.

As dawn broke, Jesus stood on the shore, though the Devoted did not recognize him. Jesus called out, "My children, have you caught any fish?" They replied that they had caught nothing. Jesus then shouted to them, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will." Being obedient to Jesus (even though they still did not know it was him), the Devoted threw their nets into the water, and the haul of fish was so great it took all their strength to bring it in.

One of them, whom Jesus loved, said to Peter, "It is our Sovereign! It is Jesus!" Peter immediately leapt to his feet, put on his outer garment (for he had taken it off while fishing), and jumped into the lake to swim to the beach. Meanwhile, the other Devoted brought the boat ashore (they were only about 100 yards away).

When Peter and the other Devoted were ashore, they smelled a charcoal fire upon which Jesus was preparing breakfast. For Peter, this brought back memories, for he had warmed himself around a charcoal fire while in Pilate's courtyard the night of Jesus' arrest—the aroma of charcoal inflaming painful memories of his denial.<sup>195</sup> Jesus said to the Devoted, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught. We will add them to the fire." Simon

Peter and the others went to the boat and dragged the net full of fish onto the shore, a total of 153<sup>196</sup> fish!

Jesus invited them to sit and said, "Come, have breakfast." Now, none of the Devoted were brave enough to ask him who he was; besides, they knew it was Jesus the Anointed, their Sovereign. Jesus then took the bread and offered it to them and did the same with the fish. This was the third time Jesus had revealed himself to the Devoted since his resurrection.

*Who would have imagined?*

*Who could have guessed it?*

*Jesus invented fish tacos!*

*Turning the stench of a charcoal fire  
into an aroma—something beautiful, creative, blessed.  
Jesus fed the body and the soul!*

*I recall times I have failed Jesus—  
denied and deceived, reneged and rejected, betrayed  
the One who forgives and feeds!*

*Him I will obey.*

*To him I will dive and swim and row:*

*Jesus, my Feast and my Friend!*

God, it's me. I thank you for healing what is broken, restoring what is lost, and choosing me, a sinner of your own redeeming—again and again and again. Transform the memories of my failure into the blessings of your forgiveness. May I never define myself by my past but by a future hope toward which I journey, a hope that leads to you.

### John 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus turned to Simon Peter and asked him, "Simon son of John, do you *agape*-love<sup>197</sup> me more than you love these fish, more than

<sup>194</sup> cf. Luke 10:25–37.

<sup>195</sup> This sentence is not in the Greek text but added as interpretive paraphrase.

<sup>196</sup> The history of commentary surrounding this number is interesting. Ancient commentators often saw mystical or figurative meaning in the number (e.g., One God, five books of Moses, three persons of the Trinity; a reference to 2 Chronicles 2:17 in which Solomon numbers the Gentiles in the land at

153,600; or the number of kinds of fish ancient people believed existed). Most modern commentators point to the distinction between the zero fish caught without Jesus and the great haul of fish caught when obedient to his command.

<sup>197</sup> The heart of this passage (18:15–27) is formed by its structure of three denials, three affirmations, and three commands. A key aspect of the passage is the verbs for "love" that are used. In Jesus' first two questions, he used the Greek word *agape*, signifying love

you love these brothers and sisters, and better than they *agape*-love me?"<sup>198</sup>

Peter answered, "My Sovereign, you know I *philo*-love you."

"Then care for my little lambs."

Again, Jesus asked him, "Simon son of John, do you *agape*-love me?"

Again, Peter answered, "My Sovereign, you know I *philo*-love you."

"Then protect my sheep."

A third time Jesus questioned him, but this time, acceding to Peter's capabilities, changed his question, "Simon son of John, do you *philo*-love me?"

A third time Peter responded, only this time his feelings were hurt because Jesus had again asked him about his love. He said to Jesus, "Sovereign, you know all things. You know I *philo*-love you."

"Care for my sheep. I tell you the truth, Peter. When you were young, impulse and desire directed your path—you went where and when you wanted. As you age, a time will come when your control will diminish and then disappear—others will determine and direct what you do." (Jesus said this to indicate that Peter would one day be arrested, imprisoned, and die a martyr's death.) "For now, follow me."

*Bob<sup>199</sup> felt the burning rise in his cheeks,  
fingers curling into a tight ball,  
forcing his hand to become a hammer  
with which he would beat his Shame like an anvil.*

*Pummeling his anvil with the hammer,  
over and over and over and over and over  
until fingers crippled, bloody and broken—still  
the anvil remained, undaunted.*

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as a moral choice—perfect love that moves beyond the other's value or worthiness to be loved. In all three of Peter's responses, he used the Greek work *philo*, signifying the bonds of affection for a friend. The distinction between *agape* and *philo* is short-handed as the will to love vs. feeling emotion or, less often, commitment vs. impulse.

<sup>198</sup> Most commentators argue the "more than" (i.e., of greater quality) refers to Peter's proclamation in 13:37 where he claims his fidelity is greater than the other Devoteds'; a position with which I agree. However, some commentators suggest the "more

*Into subterranean caverns,  
the anvil disappeared from sight,  
heart magma,  
awaiting an inopportune moment to erupt.*

*Yelena also waited, and waited and waited—  
patiently observing Bob,  
saddened but not fooled  
by the "disappearance" of the anvil.*

*Yelena descended into the magma caverns,  
there to encounter the anvil—  
the gift of community in one hand,  
a bouquet of kindness and mercy in the other.*

*Bob's senses became disoriented  
by the aroma of Yelena's gifts:  
Why is the Sun beginning to shine in the caverns?  
What's happening to my companion, the anvil?*

*Slowly the magma cavern began to rise, and cool, cresting  
the Earth's surface, becoming  
exposed to the light, beginning  
the slow process of dissipating the anvil.*

*The anvil remains even today,  
in miniature form, more a paperweight,  
sitting upon Bob's desk as his fingers  
dance over the keys, texting his friend, Yelena.*

God, it's me. Help me to release my Shame! Having been forgiven by Jesus himself, teach me the practice of letting it go, letting it go, letting it go—until the practice becomes a habit that liberates me to love. Only then will the Spirit you breathed into me become fully expressed within, through, and beyond me. May I begin today to release the anvil—the heavy weight of

than" may refer to Peter's worldly profession (fishing) or his desire for community (friends). I include all interpretations in the paraphrase to remind readers that biblical interpretation is both an art and a science and that the Spirit speaks into our lives on a daily basis. Therefore, it is wise to remain open to the Spirit while reading sacred text.

<sup>199</sup> This poem seeks to convey Peter's release from shame found in the passage; however, the names used are inspired by Marvel Studios' excellent depiction of releasing shame found in the movie *Thunderbolts*.

Shame—and so journey with others, giving to them the gifts of community, kindness, and mercy.

### John 21:18–23

Having been forgiven and commissioned to his life's work, Peter turned and pointed to one of the other Devoted, whom Jesus loved and who had asked Jesus at the Passover meal about who was going to betray him. "What about him?" Peter asked.

"What is that to you?" Jesus responded. "If I want him to stay and abide with me until the age to come is unveiled in all its fullness, it shall be. If I want something else from him, it shall be. You don't worry about him. You follow me!"

Because of Jesus' words, speculation spread that this follower would not die, but this is not what Jesus actually said. Indeed, I am that follower,<sup>200</sup> the one whom Jesus loved. My testimony is true; my words tell the Story of what happened and can be trusted. In fact, I have not even told all the stories that could be told! If everything Jesus said and did was written down, entire libraries would be filled with wonder. Even the whole world could not contain all the wonder found in the Story of Jesus the Anointed: my Sovereign, whom I love.

*It's not about...*

*the gal, the guy, or the politician;  
your neighbor, colleague, or sibling;  
someone who did, didn't, or won't.*

*It's about you...*

*your choices, decisions, and actions;  
your practices and the habits you cultivate;  
your becoming your true self (or not).*

*Oh, yeah, one other thing: it's also about Jesus...*

*who calls you to a purpose;  
who forms his character within you;  
who offers eternity as a gift.*

*"Whom do you love?"*

*God, it's me. I love you! You are my Sovereign, who calls me a friend, your beloved. I am a sheep of your pasture and a sinner of your redeeming. In you I live and move and have my being. May my choices, decisions, and actions honor your name. May I heed your call and welcome your Spirit as it forms my inner character to resemble yours. May I receive eternity as a gift offered by the One whom I love!*

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<sup>200</sup> The Greek text puts this authorial note in the third person, most likely because "John" (as I noted earlier, some scholars suggest the author was Lazarus) was dictating to a scribe, as was

common in the ancient world. I adapted it to first-person address to conform with today's syntax.

## 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*

Write<sup>201</sup> 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!

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<sup>201</sup> 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!

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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!

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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!

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**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:

<b>ACTS Prayer</b>	/	<b>Colloquial Alternative (different order from ACTS)</b>
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!

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Write!

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Write!

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### Paraphrase Exercises

**Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV):** “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,<sup>u</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister<sup>u</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’<sup>u</sup> 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:**

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**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.<sup>32</sup> 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:**

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**Luke 1:1-4 (NIV):** Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>bl</sup> among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup>With 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, <sup>4</sup>so 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:**

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**John 1:1-3 (NIV):** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through 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:**

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**Acts 10:12-14 (NIV):** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. <sup>13</sup>Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup>“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:

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## Appendix D: Reading Plan for Rhythms of the God Life - John

### John

Week 1:	Introduction and John 1
Week 2:	John 2-3
Week 3:	John 4-5
Week 4:	John 6-8
Week 5:	John 9-10
Week 6:	John 11
Week 7:	John 12-13
Week 8:	John 14-15
Week 9:	John 16-17
Week 10:	John 18-19
Week 11:	John 20
Week 12:	John 21

## 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.”

### John 1:1-3

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.

*Was the primordial soup gray and drab or a rainbow  
bursting forth, straining against containment— a uni-  
corn itching to gallop?*

*Into the darkness the Verb speaks, creating shadows  
of incomprehension. On those who welcome the  
shadows, light permeates, infecting with soul-life.*

*Did the Spirit’s breath, like fire, burn when filling the  
lungs of Lucy Australopithecus? Was her first dawn  
more sublime upon being gifted God-consciousness?*

*Speak, O Verb, speak! Shine, O Light, shine! God-life  
comes as God-life.*

## 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](http://www.BradMunroe.org).

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