



**WHERE IS THAT FIRE  
WHICH ONCE**  **DESCENDED?**

A PENTECOST JOURNAL

# WHITSUNDAY

*by George Herbert*

**L**isten sweet Dove unto my song,  
And spread thy golden wings in me;  
Hatching my tender heart so long,  
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee.

Where is that fire which once descended  
On thy Apostles? thou didst then  
Keep open house, richly attended,  
Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men.

Such glorious gifts thou didst bestow,  
That th' earth did like a heav'n appeare;  
The starres were coming down to know  
If they might mend their wages, and serve here.

The sunne, which once did shine alone,  
Hung down his head, and wisht for night,  
When he beheld twelve sunnes for one  
Going about the world, and giving light.

But since those pipes of gold, which brought  
That cordiall water to our ground,  
Were cut and martyr'd by the fault  
Of those, who did themselves through their side wound,

Thou shutt'st the doore, and keep'st within;  
Scarce a good joy creeps through the chink:  
And if the braves of conqu'ring sinne  
Did not excite thee, we should wholly sink.

Lord, though we change, thou art the same;  
The same sweet God of love and light:  
Restore this day, for thy great name,  
Unto his ancient and miraculous right.

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# THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH

*lyrics and melody by Rebecca Thompson Slane,  
guitar by Connor Slane*

**T**he Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove.  
Shortly, once He ascended, the Spirit was gifted to us.  
Since then the Church has been stricken, but it's light has  
never gone out.  
'Cause even in persecution, through Christ death has lost its  
pow'r.

*[Chorus]*

I see light in you, I see light in me.  
There's darkness and there's light, but the light's prevailing.  
O God, fill us afresh again.

*[Verse 2]*

By this they'll know we're disciples, that we love as Christ loved us.  
They'll trust the Gospel message when we, like the Godhead, are one.  
We may attend different "communions," but Communion still unites us.  
Because even when there's confusion, the Spirit of truth triumphs.

*[Chorus]*

I see light in you, I see light in me.  
Light comes from God, and He makes the darkness flee.  
O God, fill us afresh again.

*[Bridge 1]*

Like a flame, the Spirit came down.  
Like a flame, the world around us  
Burns with the smell of death.

Light a flame, and the darkness goes out.  
Light a flame, and we'll show the world  
Hope in the midst of the end.

*[Bridge 2]*

Famines and wars and rumors of wars,  
I see famines and wars and rumors of war,  
Famines and wars and rumors of wars,  
Terrors and evils and plagues.

But the gates of Hell shall not prevail  
The gates of Hell of shall not prevail  
No, the gates of Hell of shall not prevail  
With its terrors and evils and plagues!

*[Chorus]*

I see light in you, I see light in me.  
There's darkness and there's light, but the light's prevailing.  
O God, fill us afresh again.

*[Final Chorus]*

I see light in you, I see light in me.  
Darkness runs from light, and Christ's always prevailing.  
O God, fill us afresh again.  
O God, renew in us Your Spirit  
O God, help us to reach the end.

*[Ending]*

Help us, Lord, to glorify You.  
Help us, Lord, to not deny You.  
Help us, Lord, to shine forth Your light.

# WHERE THE SPIRIT IS, THERE IS FREEDOM

*by Charlie Ritch*

Peter lay on the floor swallowing the impulse to vomit and holding himself in futile protection against another assault.

“Why did you do that!?” he roared at Lyle, his sister.

“You said you wanted to see what I had learned. I didn’t mean to do it so hard, but that’s what Sensei taught us to do. That or ‘the stomp,’ which is supposed to break the foot bone when done properly, so I thought better not try that on you.”

Still wanting to vomit, Peter remained so still a Zen master would have envied his self-control.

“You alright, buddy?”

It was his stepdad.

“Don’t worry, Petey, it goes away in a few minutes. Lyle, dangit, you gotta be careful! Don’t they teach you how to *spar*?”

As he lay on his side facing the fireplace, Peter overheard his stepdad whispering to his mother about how she should call his father because that take down was just a little too easy. Eventually, they left him alone.

Ironic, Peter thought, that on this specific day he should be in this very specific kind of pain. Ironic, because just twenty-four hours earlier he had been caught looking at his mom’s lingerie catalogues in the master bathroom. He had been caught

cheating on a math test once, but that was a wink and a nod compared to his mother asking, “Petey, what you doing?” as he sat on his knees, looking at bra options for middle aged women. He responded with a hollow voice, “I was looking for aftershave,” which was true. He had only gone in the bathroom to use his stepdad’s electric trimmer on his newly darkened mustache, but when he went hunting for after shave in the vanity cabinet, he had found the stack of catalogues. For the first time in his life, he felt the overwhelming warmth and experienced the shallow, but heavy heart rhythms characteristic of something approximating demonic possession. Getting kneed by Lyle seemed poetic justice. Sin on Friday, penance on Saturday.

It was the end of summer, and Monday was meet-your-teacher day. Lyle was leaving soon to start her sophomore year at the local community college, and Peter was moving to the intermediate school. It was a season of change, but still it caught Peter by surprise when, on Sunday night, his mother called him into the kitchen to talk.

“I’ve spoken with your father, and we are in agreement: you need to do a sport. I have a list here of teams at the school, and you can choose any of them that play in the fall. Petey, it’s just time for you to try something new, to leave your comfort zone.”

“Is this because of the magazines?” Peter inquired indignantly. “Well. Petey. There are a lot of reasons.”

“I heard what Connor said. You know she kneed me right where it hurts, yeah? It’s not like I had a fair chance to fight back.”

“Petey, you know we don’t want you to fight. But there’s something a boy can only learn from being on a team, practicing to win, honing his skills, and all that.”

Peter protested, “I skateboard with Arthur every day, mom! I’m a few days from landing a kickflip. Skateboarding’s a sport!”

“Not a team sport. We want you to be part of something bigger than you,” she replied. She placed a piece of paper in front of Peter. It had Johnson’s Landing Intermediate letterhead and read “Athletics Teams” with a list of a dozen or so teams the school fielded each year. Peter’s mother set a pen down beside the list.

“Maybe put a check next to the two or three that interest you, and we’ll attend the informational meetings to see what we think?”

Peter took the list, and instead of checking anything, he started crossing out lines. “Football? Never,” he thought. “Basketball? Are you kidding? Lacrosse? What even is that?”

When he finished, only two options were left: E-sports and Cross Country. He hoped his parents may not know that the first consisted entirely of playing videogames. He mistakenly thought the second was racing motorcycles on dirt tracks, which would be awesome, but probably not feasible, thus forcing his parents to accept e-sports. His mother laughed at the his big “#1” next to e-sports, “In your dreams, Petey. That leaves cross country, I guess. Okay. Well. You do have the build of a runner. Just like your dad. You know he ran marathons.”



**A**t the informational meeting Peter felt comfort at the simplicity of the sport he had chosen. He wouldn’t need the expertise he assumed was required to play basketball or lacrosse, whatever that was. Furthermore, the cross country team was no-cut, so all you had to do was show up and run. Best of all, perhaps, he saw Sienna’s parents there. Her mom, especially, was impossible to miss with her waist-length, jet black hair and red and white beaded arm bands. Sienna and Peter had interacted a few times in the sixth grade, and Peter told his



mother Sienna was a “low- key friend.” Sienna represented the near ideal of female beauty. In spite of his attraction, Peter had felt that talking with Sienna was relatively easy. She was kind as well as beautiful. Before the meeting was over, he had convinced himself that if they were both on the cross country team there’d be strong potential for something more in their relationship. His choice for a sport was looking more auspicious by the minute.

On the first day of practice, Peter was happy to see Arthur had come out too. Sienna was a distant hope; Arthur was a fixture. The sight of him brought instant and abiding joy to Peter. The look on Arthur’s face, however, suggested the feeling might not be mutual.

“Thanks a lot, old Petey boy! My parents heard your parents were forcing you to choose a sport, they made me choose a sport. I thought skateboarding *was* a sport! Isn’t it supposed to be included in next year’s Olympics? Either way, you’re a total dork, you know.”

“Me?!” Peter responded with indignation. “It’s my fault my sister practiced self-defense moves on me and nearly took my manhood?!”

“That’s not the reason I heard, Pete...” replied Arthur with a knowing look. “Shut up,” Peter replied, with typical adolescent eloquence.

Just then the coach shouted for everyone to line up on the trail for time trials. A group of 24 seventh- and eighth-grade runners packed into the gravel path. “Alright, we’re putting you in training groups based on your initial three mile times. Four groups of 5-6 each. Got it?” He paused for maybe five seconds, then yelled, “Then let’s do this. Follow the yellow blazes or you’ll end up lost. Ready? Go!”

Peter was definitely not ready, but he and Arthur followed the pack. As long as they could. For a mile, the two boys could sort of follow the runners in front of them, but before long they were looking for the diamond shaped blazes to lead them. After

about fifty-five minutes, and several stretches of walking, Arthur and Peter arrived at the finish. Nearly everyone else was already there, including Sienna. Peter took a kind of twisted pride in seeing two heavy set boys and one very small girl pull up a few minutes behind them. When the last runner had finished, the coach called everyone over to the shed where there were bottles of water waiting in big buckets. Sienna's name was called in the first group, and, unsurprisingly, both Arthur and Peter were placed in the last group. There were two groups between Peter and Sienna. Not an entirely unattainable goal.



**T**he season progressed with Sienna regularly placing first while Peter improved just enough to join the third training group. He still puked or nearly puked at the end of every race, but like it or not, the running was having the effect his parents intended. Peter was getting fit and feeling confident. He studied hard so as not to lose eligibility, he started avoiding sugary foods, he felt included in the cross-country clique, and, to his mother's delight, he ate like a horse. There was more man and less boy every day.

Halfway through the season, the coach announced that the long-run training route was changing. All the kids already knew why, the story had been passed through the ranks of adults and students: A prowler had been spotted several times around mile two of their long run, near the giant oak the trail curved around, at the top of the "Suicide Climb" (a brutal 50 foot climb on the southeast end of the route). Reports of the prowler's behavior varied widely with some claiming he had exposed himself to unsuspecting females and others saying he just stared menacingly before dashing off into the woods before anyone could ID him. The new training route would bypass the hill and

swing out by the Baptist church, coming back home by the pond along the paved sidewalk, all of which was designed to keep them nearer the edge of the woods, avoiding possible confrontation with unsavory creeps.

All of this was white noise to Peter, who had been trying his best to get Arthur to break up while the coach talked to get him in trouble. The coach finished the instructions and called everyone to line for the long run of the week. As they were moving to the trail, the coach caught Peter's attention.

"Hey, Petey, I want you running with group two today, got it?" Coach spoke with his chin up and eyes glancing down at Peter to communicate a mutual sense of pride in the promotion. Peter did feel pride, but he also felt crushing anxiety. Kids in group two contributed to the team score. Sure they always finished fourth or fifth, but they were real runners. Sienna was in group one, but team two was closer than Peter had ever been to even seeing her on the trail.

Right away Peter could see he was out of his league. The coach delayed starting the groups so they wouldn't overlap too much. The first group was already disappearing behind the curve when the coach barked "go" for the second group to commence. Within a hundred yards Peter was running by himself, trying with all his might not to lose sight of the last runner in his group.

The effort was futile. In the twists and turns through the forest path, Peter soon found that he was running entirely alone. The anxiety of watching his training group leave him in the dust was compounded now by the frenzied attempt to piece together the route the coach had described while he was goofing off with Arthur. He remembered something about Suicide Climb and then, maybe, head to the Baptist Church, he couldn't remember. His memory went blank, but Peter ran on, guessing at turns along the way. He approached the turn-off that led to the Baptist Church, which he took. It was followed by another fork Peter didn't recognize. He took it too. And then another. And another.

Each time, Peter went deeper into the forest paths, lost in a maze of unaccountable decisions. Panic pounded for release at each fork, causing Peter to run faster and faster. There was no reason to take one way or the other, only a vague sense of a destination somewhere ahead.

Peter found himself at the end of steady incline when the trail took a hard left turn, harder than anything he remembered from his past runs. He finally stopped, convinced he was lost and, anyways, nearly out of air. He doubled forward with his hands on his knees, then remembered his coach telling him it was bad to let his head sink below his heart. He reached for the enormous tree in the elbow of the curve to support himself at a higher angle. At the same moment, several things happened all at once. First, Peter realized he was leaning on the oak tree near the top of Suicide Climb, then he noticed a shirtless man in skimpy gym shorts standing about ten yards away, slightly off the trail. Last, he heard the rhythmic crunch of feet coming down the path behind him. He turned away from the shirtless man to see Sienna, alone, running in his direction. Her eyes bounced from Peter to the shirtless man, and she froze in place.

To his surprise, Peter felt his spirits lift. The panic was silent. To begin, Sienna was clearly lost, and that sort of put them on the same level. It nearly vaporized the feelings of weakness and stupidity that were so thick on his soul only moments before. Then he noticed again how beautiful she was and found himself energized by the random chance that they would intersect on this trail together. In a real sense, he felt privileged to be here. How many boys have the chance to save a beautiful woman from a real life bad guy. He felt as if his life was being written by an author who had planned all along on his being the hero.

This reverie was broken by a sudden guttural snort from the shirtless man, who was smiling hungrily and staring at Sienna. He began moving toward her with proud steps across the gravel,

looking ever like a man headed the stage for his gold medal. His language was primitive and grunting.

Like any adolescent boy Peter regularly imagined himself as a hero, but there were typically large automatic weapons involved, or at least sophisticated karate moves. Now in a genuinely historical moment he found himself equipped with instinct and reflex only. What he did with this native ability was to place himself between the man and Sienna and shout, “Back up!” When the man did not, Peter performed the only action his mind had filed away in the never-before- accessed category “realistic self-defense.” Peter took three steps forward, stuttering after the third step like he was attempting a field goal, and kicked as hard as he could with the toe of his running shoe, directly between the shirtless man’s legs.

Backing away, Peter scanned the shirtless man’s face and stature for the first time. He noticed the unusually small nose, the upward slant of the eyes. He noticed the disproportionately soft and immature features of the face compared to the thick and heavy body. He noticed the confused look on the man’s face. He noticed the convulsions. He noticed retching.

Then the shirtless man vomited. He made no effort to direct the flow, but stood erect and sputtered it up, mouthing it out the way a baby does after nursing, even blinking his eyes a little as thought surprised by this odd feature of his physical existence.

Peter looked back at Sienna.

“God, Peter. What did you do?”

“I was just trying to stop him coming at you,” Peter pleaded with a familiar hollow tone of voice.

“He’s not right!” Sienna said with scornful maturity. “Look at him. He doesn’t even know what’s going on!”

Sienna took a step in the direction of the shirtless man. Peter wondered if she would touch him on the shoulder, speaking softly and confidently to comfort the man. She might take his

hand in hers, lead him to the creek at the bottom of the hill. She might cup water in her hands a little at a time to wash the vomit from his face and chest. He might feel so refreshed in those frigid waters he would kneel down in it.

But none of this happened. As soon as Sienna took one step toward the shirtless man, he wheeled around and jogged away, straight into the woods, half hunched over, his arms swinging too much for how slowly he ran, occasionally reaching to push the brush out of his path.

Peter also ran, all the way back to shed, past the buckets of water, straight to his father's minivan. "How was practice?" his father asked.

"Fine."

"You're soaking with sweat. Sure you don't want some water?"

"Yeah. Can we just go home?"



When they arrived at his father's house, Peter went straight to his room and flopped on his bed. He rehearsed over and over the events of the last hour: the sight of Sienna looking beautiful as ever, the kick, the disabled man's blank stare as he puked like a baby, the man's running innocent and afraid into the woods, and that excruciating single expression on Sienna's face communicating the utmost compassion and the utmost disgust at the same time. Voices in his head came to his defense, but they were idiotic, mindless rants that had no purchase on his thoughts and no power to absolve the shame that rested on his chest like a ten pound weight. He lay in this ferris wheel of misery till his father came into the room and sat on the edge of his bed. He was holding a small paper bag with the top folded down.

“Hey, Pete. I just got off the phone with Sienna’s father. He told me what happened today, how you kicked that young man. You know who that is, right?”

Peter did know who it was. It had dawned on him even as he ran home through the woods.

“Tomorrow, we are going to go see Harold and his family so that you can apologize, okay? We may even spend some time there. Do you understand me?”

Peter nodded his head and sniffed.

“And also, this is for you,” his father said and set the paper bag beside his son.

Peter’s brow furrowed. He did not smile. He began to unroll the top as though it were his duty. Inside was a new razor, a travel size can of shaving cream, and a glass bottle of aftershave. Peter grabbed them out of the bag one by one, sniffed again, and looked up at this father.

“If you’re old enough to defend the honor of a lady, you’re old enough to start shaving. Now go run some hot water in the bathroom, and I’ll show you how it’s done.”

# GOD'S ARMOR: A REFLECTION ON EPHESIANS 6:14-17

*by Stephanie McGuire*

**S**tand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth. The truth of God wraps around us, revealing our wickedness and impotence before a Holy and Almighty God. We are but poor, wretched sinners and no good thought comes from us. With the truth revealed, we can rejoice that we do not stand in our own strength.

The breastplate of righteousness covers us in the blood of Christ, exposing our own corruption and sinfulness hidden deep within. The breastplate perfects us before God's righteousness and empowers us against the enemy.

Shoes for our feet, having put on the readiness given by the Gospel of Peace: Enmity and chaos dwell within us, but the peace of God shackles, subdues, and orders the chaos of our sinful natures. We are grounded, having now a firm foundation from which to wage battle.

The shield of faith to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one: Faith is obedience, but the arrows of our selfishness, willfulness, and stubbornness fly free and fast as we constantly search for self-satisfaction and reject God's goodness. Mercifully, God's grace flows, opening our eyes to the battle that rages within. As obedience increases by grace we are prepared for this inward assault and able to raise our shield in defense.

The helmet of salvation unveils the stronghold of the enemy—where idleness and distraction lead us willingly into the



enemy's camp. This helmet protects our minds and thoughts where the seeds of sin and lust would take root, sprout, and grow. It reminds us who we are and to whom we belong.

The sword of the spirit—the word of God—a weapon to vanquish the enemy, or to pierce our very souls. Slayed by the Spirit of God, the weight of this armor brings us to our knees. Unwilling victims of God's righteousness and love. So blinded by our own corruption that we would fail to see God's goodness without His relentless pursuit.

Humbled and broken, brought to our knees before God, we find a quiet and still place where we confess our weakness and insufficiency. God's armor has been our protection and strength, but proves also a powerful force that lays conviction at our feet and condemnation in our souls. We wrestle and struggle with this force as it drags us and draws us to repentance and salvation over and over again.

For in our weakness, he is made strong. In our weakness the Spirit rushes in like fresh air in a dark and dingy room, transforming a broken and repentant soul into the likeness of Christ. God's armor readies us for the battle and His Spirit renews and replenishes our soul. Perish that unwelcome pride would induce us to think ourselves the authors of revelation.

Lord have mercy on me a sinner!

# AVALANCHE

*music and lyrics by Alison Ritch*

**T**he mountain that needs moving is my stone-hard heart  
Is this tiny seed enough?  
Can you make it grow until it splits the heights?  
My broken heart an avalanche of love

The fish and loaves I'm holding couldn't feed a soul  
Is this paltry meal enough?  
Can you multiply it til it overflows?  
My meager offering a feast of love

Lord, I give you  
The little I have  
Lord, I love  
Help my lack

Your kingdom is a mustard seed which sown into the ground  
Is smaller than the rest  
Yet when it grows it spreads into the garden's largest plant  
With branches where the birds can build their nests

It's not enough  
The little I have  
Take this love  
Help my lack  
Lord, I give you  
All that I have  
Lord, I love  
Help my lack

# A SIGN

*by Zack Clemmons*

**Y**ou couldn't miss it if you wanted to, and most wanted to. The budget hotels and fast food chains at exit 141, 3 mi. ahead, did nothing to prepare you. Unlike the actual advertisements, this board did not rest on a giant corroded metal pole, but on five evenly spaced wooden beams, rough enough to look hand-milled. The billboard stood at the edge of active farmland, rising three times higher than the ripe ears of September's corn crop. Three large, solar-powered lights set the sign in a piercing white glow every night, so that even the nocturnal truckers would not miss the grizzled visage.

There was no densely worded website at the bottom, as was usually the case. No preposterously named church took credit or invited you to its Sunday morning service. There was no context at all, really. Only a gruesome image of the crucified Christ over which was hand-lettered in red the looming words, "The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God." His eyes were bulging and cast down to his heaving chest and distended belly. The face was too young. His side was savagely gouged, and messy yellow liquid spilled out in cartoonish drops. The legs were crumpled, and an inhuman pink. His mouth hung open in slack-jawed surrender. The colors were all wrong, ghoulish. An Isenheim altarpiece, but if Grünewald had been an egregious drunk.

It had gone up unannounced in April. One day it wasn't there, and the next it was. Sitting, looking out, silently announcing its grave message.



Great, here we go. This is exactly what Amos and I were talking about last night,” said the young seminarian to his new wife. “Look how ugly this thing is. It’s almost as bad as that one north of Birmingham, with the guns and the flag and the prayer for the nation. God, who makes these?”

“I imagine old, concerned farmers,” his wife said. “Old farmers who just care about the souls of their fellow humans.”

“I guarantee this thing damages the faith. But they, farmers or otherwise, have zero framework to understand that. This is the sort of thing that happens when you think conversion is everything. Or that the faith is reducible to some proposition to affirm or deny. When you lack an adequate theology of sanctification. An a rudimentary understanding of aesthetics.”

“A lot people in places like this haven’t even heard words like sanctification, honey. They’re not less faithful for that, just uninformed.”

“It’s in the Bible, Abby.”

“What is?”

“Sanctification. The word, literally. It’s in the Bible.”

“You don’t have to get so angry.”

“I guarantee this thing damages the faith more than it could possibly help it. I guarantee commuters have resolved to never set foot in church again looking at that monstrosity. You remember what Amos and I and the other guys were saying, about the futility of the pastor’s task in a vacuum of proper catechesis?”

She didn’t much care for the discussions he and his seminary friends had. “Yes, I remember.”

“And it’s like, the medium is the message, right? A billboard, Abby. An advertisement. Christ as just one more commodity. Choose him, or Arby’s. But did he think about that? Does anyone think?”

“It looked hand-painted, honey. That much effort would make me think whoever made it put some thought into it.”

He wasn't listening. "It makes me want to write a poem, or an essay or something. God know if I don't someone at the New Yorker to the punch."

"I'm committing my life to this stuff, but for every semester I put in at the library and in class, five backwoods farmers who've never actually cracked open their Bible put up some thoughtless billboard bound to confound or offend the people I'm, we're, committed to reaching."

"It's in the Bible."

"What is?"

"The verse on the sign, 'The Fool hath said in his heart...'"

"I know it's in the Bible, what's your point?"

"You just said that he'd never cracked open his Bible, and I was just pointing out—"

"I was making a point, Abby."

"Okay, honey." She didn't want to rile him anymore than he already was. He took all this seriously; it would be their livelihood, after all. She closed her eyes so as to focus on the sensation of having eyes at all, and then what it was to strain them, to push them beyond their comfortable sockets. She was thinking of Christ's eyes on the billboard, bulging from the their place, wondering what he was seeing.



**H**ey, look guys. Coming up on our left."

"Wow."

"Nice. Guess we've got a car-full of fools, then."

"Any votes on where we should rush in next?" They all laughed.

"Kym, quick, grab a picture of that. Man, it'd be perfect for the blog. Or at least the twitter feed. Yikes, that is ugly. Patrick, you could probably slay the aesthetic side if we wanted something

longer form, something about the bankruptcy of modern Christian art. Or something like Christians having to advertise their myths like products now. I don't know."

"Don't you think the backwoods fundamentalist is a little played, a little tired? It's too easy."

"Well they obviously still exist, Kym, god. And if they still exist, I say they're still worth mocking. No mercy, or they'll never quite phase out, and they'll be some eternal vestigial organ in society's gut. Did you get the pic, Kym?"

"It came up so quick, so it's blurry. You can't really see anything. Except for the mouth, kind of. Weird. How clear the mouth is. The words are definitely too unclear to read."

"Dangit, let me turn around at the next exit."

"Come on, James, it's really not worth it," Kym said, her eyes unable to rise from the agonized groan on her phone's screen. The mouth was too red, was he coughing up blood? Or was the open mouth a deep breath, like he was trying to take the whole world into his lungs and belly?

"This is literally our assignment, Kym. We're covering religion in the South. That sign is the sort of thing we've been looking for. Shoot, it might be worth trying to find the guy who put it up. I'm sure he has some things to say."

"Everyone's definitely been way too tame so far," said Patrick. "Every pastor we've talked to seems scared. Congregants too. Everyone's afraid to offend."

"Last time Anthony called he said hits were slowing down. Only like fifteen thousand unique visitors. *Vice* did a story last month about some church of white supremacists in Pennsylvania and it cleared a million. He used the word 'milquetoast', said *FaultLine* doesn't do 'milquetoast'. Obviously we're not going to go total click-bait, but we need a some controversy. An antagonist or something."

Kym knew James and Patrick would go on now for at least an hour about the relative virtues of *Vice* and *FaultLine*, cursing eternally the unjust distribution of readers, so she began to phase

them out. She zoomed in and then back out on the gaping mouth, and couldn't remember what he was supposed to have said.



She hadn't spoken for ten minutes now. He was sympathetic through minute three, annoyed by minute five, but now he was reaching a full-fledged indignation. He'd gone through this, too, after all. He volunteered to drive her into town; he sat with her through even the worst parts of it. When the nurse talked through the possible complications, he had put his arm around her left shoulder and his free hand on her right, holding her together. And of course, all today's work after the month of endless, painful discussions. The daily undulation between decisions—definitely for, it made sense, then definitely against, they just couldn't. Crying with her, when she seemed to need it.

And now she oscillated every two minutes between staring blankly ahead and then closing her eyes against the world. Her eyes were closed now.

"Come on, Sam, I need you to process with me. I'm here for you. I've been here for you."

Her mouth hung open. She was going to respond, she was desperate to speak, but then he had to say he'd been there for her. Not just he was present now. It was always guilt with him. He was never present, anyways. When they were together, it was clear he was biding his time until the night, when they might go back to her apartment. And then afterwards he was fixated on the past, comparing this most recent time with others. The drive into town he had talked about their future together.

"Sam, come on, talk to me." She close her mouth--quiet, fuming. He turned his eyes to the road.

"God, nobody needs to see that," he said to himself.

She opened her eyes to catch a long glimpse of the passing image. Her mouth fell open again. She closed her eyes against the afterimage. It was the distended belly, pierced and leaking.

“Yeesh, that was ugly, wasn’t it?” he said, hoping to finally prompt a response.

“Please, just, shut up.” She put her hand over her stomach and winced in pain.

They fell again into a silence, hers hurt, his seething.



Roger Williams looked nervously down at his dashboard clock. If he left his office precisely at 6:30, and didn’t get caught too long at the McClellan Ave. intersection, he’d approach the sign just as the lights flashed on for the night. It took him two weeks on the job and a serendipitous streak of four days to realize the lights came on at precisely the same time every night. It became a fascination for a month, and then a comfort, this tiny regularity in an otherwise chaotic world. The hazy twilight outline of the cross and its victim would pop into high relief, almost sculptural, and the red words would jump like a scare cut in a movie.

He remembered a scene at the beginning of a Tarkovsky film he’d watched half of in college, where a father told his son how the sincerity of one ritual, done every day at precisely the same time--even something banal as watering a tree or flushing a toilet--if it were truly done every day, could be enough to redeem the whole world. And now he was a part of one, driving home, adjusting his speed so that he would come upon the sign at 6:53 each night. This was the Archimedean point of his day, the place and time at which the anxieties of the day were laid down and the peace of the evening stretched out before him--a quiet dinner, perhaps a film. He mostly noticed the outstretched arms. He



knew in actuality the pinned limbs were slowly suffocating him, were no doubt burning, flaming in pain, but when those lights flashed and the sudden contrast made the cross holding him up fade, they looked open in welcome.



It was her first offense, and the judge had just eaten a good lunch, so she only had twenty hours of community service and a year's probation. This was her last Saturday working on the afternoon clean-up crew, the last Saturday she'd have to wear WASHINGTON COUNTY in black block letters against the orange of the vests.

She kept her head mostly down and her distance from the other workers. They had toxic attitudes and bad mouths, and today's work was only a small break between highs for them. But she would not allow the judge's mercy to be lost on her. She had a kid to care of. Being out in the first cool of the autumn these past three weeks, hands full, had been good for her.

Each Saturday the Drug Court Clean Up Crew was responsible for six miles of highway. Whether they did it fast or slow, they had to cover all six miles to get the seven hours signed off. She was hoping they would finish in four hours today. When they had finished the first mile stretch they came up to small blue metal sign, "This Mile of Highway Adopted by Grace Community Church." A reprieve. They piled into the two vans and watched the free mile pass by in chatty bliss. When they reached mile marker 144, they crowded back out of the vans.

Because she worked instead of talked, she was always a quarter mile ahead of the others. So she was the first to come over the rise and see the billboard. She dropped the blue plastic bag, letting it rest on the ground, and stabbed her poker into the earth. She raised her wrist to her forehead to wipe the sweat from her brow and stared. Where he wore his crown of thorns, she felt

a cool breeze. Where a trail of blood snaked down his long face, she felt a bead of sweat roll down hers. Carefully, she sounded out the red words. Her GED prep was going well. She didn't think to move until the others had almost caught up. One of the white vans pulled parallel with her on the shoulder of the road.

"Let's go kid, keep cleaning, or we'll add hours," said the warden from his passenger window.

She stabbed at an errant soda can and a spray of brown liquid shot from the puncture site, misting the leg of her jeans. She laughed. "I'm not gonna be no fool."



What most did miss was the small white cross at the base of the central wooden column, unadorned, and a bare metal folding chair leaning against the other side of the pole. Because he sat out in the dark, facing the sign along with the lights, nobody saw him either.

He was driving back, or rather, being driven, from the funeral when he looked out to the left and saw the sign, a sickly yellowed portrait of Christ crucified and the words across the bottom in blue "For You." How many times had he asked God for a sign, only met with silence? Now, he was ashamed at his presumption. Though he did not yet believe it, he knew then what he had to do.

My son, my son. My God, my God. His wife had warned him, years before she left, that if he didn't quit, the alcoholism would pass down sure as if it were genetic. She was right, and only missed that when it passed down, it doubled in strength. People couldn't believe a twenty-four year old could die from liver failure, so most attributed his death to freak complications from the previous year's car crash.

He constructed and painted the billboard himself, every step, in his cracked white barn. Milled the poles and boards,

mixed the paints, though he'd never painted before. By the time it was finished, it had taken a year.

Now he sat for hours each night, facing traffic and praying.

Oh that salvation would come down from Zion. Oh for the days when Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel be glad. Bring back from captivity your people. My God, my God, forgive this fool.

# A PANE OF TIME

*by Riley Kross*

**T**he brighter lights of Easter morning  
filled the nave and reflected  
against the window the faces within  
and among them I saw those I had not seen  
since their bodies were returned to earth.  
It was not a stained glass window of old forms  
but the flat, clear plane of modern vision  
as real as the day.  
I saw not the dead among the living  
but the living among the living.

Oh, how do I make you believe  
such an unbelievable thing?  
How do I believe it myself?

On the otherside, the overcast sky glowed  
against the glass darkly, dimly lit  
and the faces—their faces—our faces—  
were part trees and hillside, part sky  
with an opaque clarity faint and thin.  
The bodies—their bodies—our bodies—  
held light within, spirits  
moving with bone and skin.

They were beside us in the very room.  
I saw them there. I saw them.  
We were together, all of us  
in reflection: a great gathering

but thinned into a pane of time.  
I saw them. I saw us all, then I blinked.

Is this the nature of prophetic vision:  
to be held only as long as the eyes can sustain?  
Should I have pried mine wide with fingers  
and let them burn dry to casings?  
Would I have more to offer you?  
Would it be enough? Even I question it now.

That same pane today is just a window  
in the nave, lit and transparent to the other side—  
the trees, hills, and sky—reflecting  
our comings and goings.  
What prayer then is left to say—none  
but a groaning.

# ARTIST BIOS

**Bethany Boggan** has spent the last two decades using art to wrestle with deep spiritual issues, and as a tool for coping with the intersection between our perceived reality and the unseen world around us. Currently her favorite mediums are clay and watercolors.

**Erin Clemmons** has been working with clay for 10 years. Since her hands first touched the clay she has explored the healing of the ceramic process, the meaning found in material, and the joy of drinking out of a handmade mug. Erin makes functional ceramics—attending to the intersection of form and function—and figurative sculpture, which embraces the slow and meditative processes of ceramics. Erin earned her BA in ceramics and sculpture from Union University in 2016. She is married to Deacon Zack. They are raising three future studio assistants.

**Zack Clemmons** is an erstwhile Latin teacher and literary arts editor, a sometimes poet and seminarian, and presently serves as a transitional deacon at Christ the King. He's an aspirant polyglot and probable dilettante. Zack has been married to Erin for six years, and they have three children, only two of whom were named with specific literary referents.

**Ann Jett** | Although I graduated from Auburn University with an Art degree, I never actually painted until I retired. I started painting dogs for friends and others but recently I have begun to dabble in abstracts. I would describe my style as stylized realism.

**Cathy Karr** | My mother loved needlework. She sewed not only for herself and our family, but the public, too. She made most everything I wore. She also crocheted a layette for anyone in the family expecting a child. So, I learned these skills from her, and they are my outlet for artistic expression. I enjoy sewing, knitting, and crocheting. I did not quilt until after my retirement in 2016. I have hand quilted one quilt for my daughter in law, machine quilted one each for my two grandchildren and made two Quilts of Valor for my brothers who served in the military. This is my first wall hanging and I thoroughly enjoyed making it to share with my church family.

**Riley Kross** has an MFA in creative writing from NC State. He writes poems and fiction between caring for his three kids and freelance editing jobs. You can read more of his writing on-line in the journals Blackbird, Fiction Southeast, and New Ohio Review.

**Stephanie McGuire** | I started reflecting on this passage in Ephesians during Lent. I wondered what the apostles and followers of Christ must have felt like at Pentecost. After being devastated at the loss of Christ, overjoyed at His resurrection – then he leaves them alone and promises a helper. How

bewildering that must have been. Combine that with real fear of facing their own persecution, they found themselves hiding rather than participating in the celebration. It was in this fear, confusion, and helplessness the Holy Spirit arrived, bringing this refreshing life and power. The modern-day Church faces no such fear of persecution (though we might perceive it). Indeed, the Church has contorted itself so much to prevent offending anyone that it more often reflects society rather than God. Perhaps God has withdrawn from us out of mercy. It happened to the Israelites as they chose worldly idols and kings over God. Foolishly, we don't feel the need to ready ourselves for battle anymore, yet it seems critical at this time as we watch our world descend into chaos. If we humble ourselves before God, he will forgive our sins and restore our land.

**Alison Ritch** is a wife, mother of four, nurse, worship leader, and singer-songwriter. She loves dates with her guys, laughing with her girls, cooking, and - her new favorite hobby - nature journaling. You can find her 2019 full-length album, *Heaven Holds*, wherever you listen to music online.

**Charlie Ritch** is a husband and father of four. He teaches humanities at the Westminster School and loves traveling with his family, mountain biking, and periods of extended silence. He also enjoys working with the wonderful children at Christ the King.

**Sarah Scherf** is mother to four wonderful kids, a lover of live music, a writer at times, an editor here and there. You'll find her most evenings on her front porch with a book.

**Connor Slane** was inspired to play guitar by Joe Bonamassa as a freshman in college. He then took a liking to Stevie Ray Vaughan who has been my biggest influence. He likes to play the blues, but is now learning to play worship music.

**Rebecca Thompson Slane** | While most of my creativity is confined to the kitchen and I typically don't enjoy reading or writing, at times the Holy Spirit will suddenly inspire me with song lyrics or a thoughtful reflection and I find myself compelled to write and to share what He has shown me.

**Micah Simpson** attended Georgia Southwestern University where he majored in Accounting and Fine Arts, with a concentration in glassblowing. He also received a Master's of Divinity from Beeson Divinity School in 2009, which is what brought him to Birmingham. He has been blowing glass for 22 years and woodworking for 13 years. Micah, Heather, Daniel, and Nathan have attended Christ the King for six years.

**David Templin** | Inspired by the "Adagio Assai" movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major, David's composition is the result of an experimental combination of jazz elements, dissonance, and melody within a repetitive meter. Acts of creativity glorify the Creator in whose image we are made by reflecting His creativity into the world.



# ORDO

“The Light of the Church”      *lyrics & melody by Rebecca Slane,  
guitar by Connor Slane*

“Whitsunday” + Introduction      *Zack Clemmons*

Invocation      *Fr. Michael Novotny*

God’s Armor      *Stephanie McGuire*

“It Was Quiet” + “Kept”      *Sarah Scherf*

A Sign      *Zack Clemmons*

“Impossible Things” + “Avalanche”      *Alison Ritch*

A Pane of Time      *Riley Kross*

“Adagio in A Major”      *David Templin*

Dismissal



**Christ *the* King**  
ANGLICAN CHURCH

*Worshiping God in Spirit, Word & Sacrament*