

## December 2, 2018 | Psalm 25:1-10

### Whatever Became of Sin?

The celebrated doctor Karl Menninger wondered,  
“Whatever became of sin?” Good question.  
The smart set today dismisses sin  
and God: they are dustbin notions as good as buried.  
Belief in God is a modern option, but sin  
through an array of names lives on to nurture guilt.  
Unacknowledged and unresolved guilt will out  
in untold unhealthy ways—escapism, rationalization,  
physical disease, mental turmoil—unless  
you speak to the one you wronged face to face,  
set the record straight and ask for grace.  
It is wholesome to somehow find a way to confess  
old lingering wrongs, and lift the weight  
of conscience groaning and wavering within the heart.

**December 9, 2018 | Baruch 5:1-9**

## Righteous Peace and Godly Glory

Jerusalem today is wearing  
the garments of sullen sorrow,

but will rise to righteous peace  
and godly glory tomorrow.

As day follows the night,  
Jerusalem shall rise again

and show the fullness of splendor  
everywhere under heaven.

Stand tall, Jerusalem,  
and look to the rising sun.

Your children who marched away  
in defeat are coming home.

## December 16, 2018 | Luke 3:7-18

### John the Baptist

Listen: You won't be saved because  
you claim the lineage of Abraham.  
God can raise up ordinary stones  
to be the children of Abraham.

If you do not produce good fruit,  
God is certain to cut you down.  
There is an axe lying at your feet;  
you will burn from toe to crown.

The people asked John the Baptist,  
"What then should we do?"  
"Share your goods with those in need;  
be fair to all, to Gentile and Jew."

John was a man sent from God.  
He came to testify to the light.  
He proclaimed good news to the people,  
but he himself was not the light.

He baptized with water, but one is coming,  
he said, to baptize with the Spirit and fire.  
The Messiah holds a winnowing fork  
to gather wheat into his granary.

Listen: John the Baptist proclaimed  
the imminent hour of the Anointed One.  
John declared, "I am not the Messiah;  
I was sent ahead of him.

## **December 23, 2018 | Micah 5:2-5**

### Micah

The prophet Micah foretells the fall  
of the corrupt and faithless elite of Jerusalem;  
the fall and revival of the Kingdom of Judah;  
the Messiah's birth in the town of Bethlehem.

Because of Bethlehem, we honor Micah.  
We are mindful that the great and good  
often come from out of nowhere  
and not from the gilded houses of the world.

Born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth  
by ordinary folk Mary and Joseph,  
Jesus came from out of nowhere  
to shock the world into the Common Era.

**December 30, 2018 | Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7**

## We Were Children

We were children, under the law.  
We were children, under guard.

We were children, still in school.  
We were children, following the rules.

We were disciplined. We were deprived.  
Until the day faith arrived!

Because of faith, we are free.  
Our Christian faith sets us free.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**January 6, 2019 | Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14**

Inauguration Day, 2021

The test of a great civilization is how it defends all its people, especially the needy, the weak, and the poor, who do not have a voice to speak against the wealthy and their well-connected friends.

We ask our new president to reverse the trend toward a serf society. Reset the national compass to bring about true righteousness and justice.

Lift up the lowly; bring a long-sought end to suffering throughout the land. Ensure that all may live in dignity—everyone, great and small. It's Inauguration Day and America is on the mend.

## January 13, 2019 | Psalm 29

### The Voice of the Lord

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters  
and the waters tremble before the Lord.  
The voice of the Lord shakes the cedars.  
The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

The Lord thunders and the wilderness quakes.  
He lashes the harsh wilderness of Kadesh.  
The mountains leap like wild oxen!  
Lebanon skips like a youthful calf!

The Lord loosens fire and flood.  
He sits enthroned as king for ever.  
The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice  
and we ascribe to Him the glory.

He is the Lord of earth and sky.  
He gives his people the blessing of peace.  
Glory be to God on high!  
Glory be to the king of kings!

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**January 20, 2019 | John 2:1-11**

## For the Good People of the Village

The wedding party in Cana was underway!  
There was music, dancing, laughter, and strong wine  
for the good people of the village. Suddenly, a sign  
the wine was running low threatened to ruin the day.  
The ancient rabbis say, “Without wine,  
there is no joy!” So Jesus told the servants  
to fill the stone jars with water, and then  
take to the steward this fortuitous fruit of the vine.  
The steward tasted it and thanked the giddy groom  
for saving the best wine for the very last.  
Jesus was a man of the people, and this was his crowd.  
For the good people of the village, there was always room  
for simple kindness. His love was unsurpassed  
for the salt of the earth, as much as love allowed.



**January 27, 2019 | 1 Corinthians 12:12-31**

## The Ideal Starting Lineup

Coaching college basketball  
is not an exact science,  
but you cannot have a lineup  
with five 7-foot giants.

Who will handle the ball  
and bring it up the court  
or pass to the open man  
or make the outside shot?

It's also true with short guys.  
You won't be crashing the boards  
or making the put-back shot  
with a lineup full of guards.

The ideal starting lineup  
is not a cryptic riddle.  
Success always begins  
with the big guy in the middle,

then add a pair of forwards  
with in-the-paint talent,  
a catch-and-shoot guard,  
and a guard to run the point.

Complementary skills  
are needed to win in sports.  
In basketball, the whole must be  
greater than the sum of its parts.

**February 3, 2019 | Luke 4:21-30**

## The Brow of the Hill

Jesus spoke after reading from the prophet Isaiah, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The stunned silence was broken by one sneering villager who wondered, “What makes you so special?” (The Israelites claimed God was only on their side.) The villager asked, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town,” said Jesus. “The Gentiles are not to be denied: They are not created to fuel the fires of hell; Elijah sought out lodging with a widow of Zarephath and Elisha cleansed Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy.” For praising the Gentiles, the good people of Nazareth were furious. They led Jesus to the brow of the hill, but he passed through their midst to launch his ministry.

## February 10, 2019 | Isaiah 6:1-13

### Isaiah's Vision

Holy, holy, holy! The Lord of hosts  
was seated high on a throne above the smoke.  
My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.  
He set his eyes on me. And then he spoke:

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: The nation fell away.  
The evil, godless people did not obey the Lord.  
The people laden with sin had their day.  
But now the nation is humbled by the sword.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

The Lord declared: This nation can't be saved.  
Because they stop their ears and shut their eyes,  
the people are doomed to lose the life they craved.  
From the smoking ruin, a nation of faith shall rise.

*Who shall I send? Who will go for me?  
Here I am. Here I am, send me.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

## **February 17, 2019 | Luke 6:17-26**

### Beatitudes (Updated)

Seeing the crowd, he climbed the stage  
and took a seat.  
His close advisers joined him there.  
He opened his mouth  
and began to speak.

Blessed are the rich;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who celebrate their good fortune;  
they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the arrogant;  
they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for power;  
they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the ruthless;  
they shall be treated with respect.

Blessed are the pure in ideology;  
they shall see God.

Blessed are the warmakers;  
they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are you when people praise you  
and honor you  
and speak all kinds of flattery  
about you on my account;  
rejoice and be glad  
for your reward will be great in heaven.  
This is how the rich and powerful  
were treated before you.  
God bless you and God bless America.

When the speaker finished these sayings,  
the crowd was astonished  
for he spoke to them as one who had authority  
unlike all others who had come before.

## February 24, 2019 | Psalm 37:1-12, 41-42

### The Good Life

Put on the armor of gentleness.  
Defend yourself with gentleness;  
stand your ground.  
Attack with gentleness;  
confound your foe.

Do not envy the self-indulgent.  
Self-indulgence  
is a basket of perishing fruit.  
For the self-indulgent,  
setting out to live  
is entering into death.

Refrain from anger;  
leave rage alone.  
Put your trust in the Lord—  
your heart will be at peace.

Always show your love!  
Only shadows  
that cast images  
of interleaving aimlessness  
are real  
in a world without love.

**March 3, 2019 | Luke 9:28-36**

## Stay Awake

Jesus is on a high mountain, deep in prayer. Simon Peter and the brothers James and John are on the edge of falling asleep.

As he prays, Jesus' face begins to change and his clothes shine as bright as a lightning flash and the men are shocked to suddenly see the strange

sight of Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus about the road ahead to Jerusalem and the cross. Imagine if you are there in the company of Jesus.

Are you tempted to lose the plot? Would you suffer the loss of seeing the great hinge of history in the making as Jesus prepares to follow in his way of the cross?

The disciples witness glory by staying awake. Jesus is on the mountaintop and so are you. Stay awake! and testify to what is true.

**March 10, 2019 | Romans 10:8-13**

## Grace for All

The prophets Isaiah and Joel assure us  
that the matter of Law and achievement is flawed.  
Zeal for the Law of Moses won't save us:  
the word of faith is the way to God.  
This is echoed by the Apostle Paul.  
The end of the Law is grace for all.

Legalism is with us still. It is sad  
to see justification as a joyless chore  
for someone measuring good vs. bad,  
wishing and hoping for a plus score.  
Listen and learn from the Apostle Paul—  
the end of the Law is grace for all.



**March 17, 2019 | Luke 13:31-35**

## Unrequited Love

I admired a worldly woman  
with children in her loving care.  
I made my plea for love;  
rejection was swift and sure.

I wanted to gather her children  
as a hen protects the brood,  
desiring to set their path  
for destiny great and good.

Her friends and close advisors  
convinced her I was a fraud  
because, they said, I flouted  
the Law and disrespected God.

I offered a transformation,  
but now it is time to leave.  
Her house is left to her.  
With a heavy heart I grieve.

However, I shall return  
when people with one accord  
declare, "Blessed is the one  
who comes in the name of the Lord."

**March 24, 2019 | Luke 13:1-9**

## The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

In nature's design, the rule of life is clear.  
The useful thrive, advancing from age to age.  
They manage to master time's turning page.  
The useless take up space for a while, then disappear.  
In God's design, uselessness is a grave offense.  
If we're not bearing fruit, what good are we?  
This is the lesson of the barren fig tree:  
If you take sustenance from the soil, you must produce.  
Unlike the natural world, in God's design  
there may be room for hope and a second chance.  
To achieve your promise, you might be granted grace.  
But even the patient planter draws the line.  
Take advantage of your one last chance  
before he orders the gardener to clear the space.

**March 31, 2019 | Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

## Jealousy

Your father's love is certain. This you know.  
All that is his is yours. You know it's true.  
If you are safe and sound in your father's love  
and all his blessings still belong to you,  
why resent the feast for the prodigal son?  
Why the sudden anger? Why the scorn?  
Your brother once was lost, but now is found.  
Your father must rejoice with love unbound.  
Your father cares for you: What has changed?  
All his goods are yours: What has changed?

For us, this tale is one we understand.  
We may be safely wrapped in our father's love.  
We may enjoy the gifts of his generous hand.  
But a rush of jealousy can make us doubt his love.  
We need to stop and ponder why we doubt.  
Why the anger? What is this about?  
Our father's grace extends to every child.  
It pleases him when all his children are reconciled.  
Our father cares for us: What has changed?  
All his goods are ours: What has changed?

**April 7, 2019 | John 12:1-8**

## You Do Not Always Have Me

The flowing lake is always filling,  
but is never full.  
Once there was a true sense of fullness—  
of which all that now remains  
is an empty print and trace.  
The lake strains for completion  
with waters around it—  
seeking in things that are not there  
the help it cannot find  
in those things that are.  
Instead,  
there is a chronic ache  
that comes from feeling incomplete.

## **April 14, 2019 | Psalm 31:9-16**

### Rescue Me

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Whenever my actions come to naught  
and I feel as useless as a broken pot,  
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Whenever I sigh and waste in grief  
and flutter to earth like a falling leaf,  
you rescue me.

My times are in your hand, O Lord.  
Make your face to shine upon me;  
let your loving kindness flow free  
to rescue me.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**April 21, 2019 | 1 Corinthians 15:19-26**

## The Ballad of the Sheaf of Corn

*Easter Sunday*

Bombs were falling all around  
in the darkest hour of the war.  
Bombs were falling in London town;  
death was in the air.

Within the city, there was a parish  
where the people soldiered on.  
The harvest festival was a time to cherish;  
the work of the church goes on.

The church was decked with local fare  
on a fateful Saturday morn.  
The smells of autumn filled the air.  
In the center—a sheaf of corn.

It wasn't long after that  
the Luftwaffe made a call.  
The festive church was laid flat.  
There was nothing left at all.

Rubble remained in the months ahead.  
Winter turned to spring.  
Green shoots rose from the dead  
as summer was on the wing.

The people of the church could see in the growth  
of the ruined sheaf of corn  
a sign that life is stronger than death,  
a sign of life reborn.

## April 28, 2019 | Revelation 1:4-8

### What is Truth?

Imagine truth is a sea where high above  
a man can see it all, at least the surface,  
but cannot hear or smell or taste or touch.  
The pilot knows a fraction of the truth.

The swimmer knows a fraction of the truth.  
With every nerve ablaze, he bodysurfs  
selected waves on a favorite patch of sand.  
His choice excludes a billion miles of beach  
and vast unfathomable truth that lies between.

And kneeling by the tide, a poet holds  
a chambered metaphor that seems to say it all.  
The poet speaks a fraction of the truth.

A Roman governor asked, perhaps in jest,  
“What is truth?” He did not wait for an answer.  
Like him, we often ask and do not wait.

We cannot know the truth, the whole truth,  
and nothing but the truth by ourselves.  
But we of faith have a fact witness. We put  
our trust in Jesus, the faithful witness of the truth  
of God, who is and who was and who is to come.

**May 5, 2019 | Acts 9:1-20**

## Brother Saul

Ananias of Damascus was minding his own business when Jesus spoke to him in a vision: “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.” “Wait, what?” said Ananias. “Lord, many of your followers are forced to hide from this evil dude. The last I heard he was muttering threats against the saints in Jerusalem, and now he’s coming for us here in Damascus. This guy is nothing but trouble.” The Lord said to Ananias, “Go, for Saul is an instrument I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.” Ananias pushed back, then relented. Against his better judgment he went to Saul, laid on his hands, and said, “Brother Saul.” Because of him, Saul’s sight was restored. Saul got up and was baptized. After that, Ananias is out of the story, but think about it: where would we be today without such courage?



**May 12, 2019 | Acts 9:36-43**

## Holy People, Different People

What is a saint? The Gospel word “hagios” is often rendered as holy, but the root definition of the Greek word is different, meaning the Christian is set aside from all others. God chose

at first the nation of Israel to do his service, to be his holy people, different people. The plan foundered because proud people forgot that service, not honor, was the purpose.

We are different not because we deserve greater honor. That is not the reason. We are the least of persons. We are chosen for a greater service to God. We are saved to serve.

## May 19, 2019 | Revelation 21:1-6

### Hope

John of Patmos imagined a transformation  
of the first heaven and the first earth  
into a new heaven and a new earth;  
but little has changed since the emperor Domitian.  
Advances in personal comfort are commendable.  
We've seen great progress by the peoples of earth  
in science and engineering and in public health,  
and yet the masses are still expendable.  
Egregious wealth for the fortunate few  
contrasts with millions who lack a home.  
It was just like this in ancient Rome.  
Write this: these words are trustworthy and true.  
When most of the people are trying to cope,  
when most of the people live without hope,  
John proclaims the Christian ethos  
that life is good: God is with us.

**May 26, 2019 | John 14:23-29**

## Why Things Happen

What is our aim in life?  
Snowflakes have a noble aim:  
to melt.  
But first,  
they cloak the world in white.

The beach is bare.  
The perishing sun is lighting up  
the bottom half of thunderheads.  
The day is done,  
and Earth depends on us again  
To electrify the night,  
To cheer the globe  
with love's outrageous light.

A multi-colored young life died  
so we could see  
the whiter-than-white,  
sun-white face of God.

## June 2, 2019 | Acts 16:16-34

### Annoyed

Paul was annoyed.  
A slave girl with divination powers  
followed him around in Philippi,  
crying out, “These men are slaves  
of the most high God,  
who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”  
She was mentally ill,  
but her ability to foretell the future  
made a lot of money  
for her owners.

She annoyed Paul for many days.  
Finally, he said to her spirit,  
“I order you in the name of Jesus Christ  
to come out of her.”  
The spirit left her immediately  
and she was healed.

Her owners were annoyed  
because she was healed.  
She lost her powers  
and no longer made them any money.

The authorities in Philippi were annoyed  
when the annoyed owners  
dragged Paul and Silas before them  
for the crime of robbing them  
of an income.

Everyone was annoyed  
except the imprisoned Paul and Silas,  
who prayed and sang hymns  
throughout the night,  
and the grateful slave girl,  
no longer imprisoned  
in mental darkness.

## June 9, 2019 | Psalm 104

### All We Have

#### *A Setting for Choir*

Clothed with honor, wrapped in a robe of light,  
you stretch out the heavens like a mighty tent.  
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters.  
You ride the gliding clouds on wings of the wind.

You make the land; the earth shall never be shaken.  
You cover the earth with water like a cloak.  
Waters stand above the highest mountain.  
But then the waters flee at your rebuke.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

At the sound of thunder, the waters take to flight.  
They roll down to the valleys designed for them.  
You set the boundaries that waters may not pass.  
Never again will waters cover the earth.

Springs pour out of the ground. Rainwater falls  
for the animals and birds and every wild beast.  
These waters enable grass and crops to grow.  
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle in the field.  
You grow the plants so people can bring forth  
food from the earth and wine for cheerfulness  
and daily bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly.  
Birds build their nests in the cedars of Lebanon.  
The stork finds his home on the highest branches.  
Wild goats are free to roam the mountains.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

You made the ivory moon to tell the seasons.  
The sun knows its time to rise and set.  
You made the night when all the forest animals  
come creeping out and return at the break of day.

The young lions seek their food from God.  
When the sun rises, they lie down in their dens.  
People go out to their labor until the dusk.  
In your wisdom, O Lord, everything is arranged.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

Our world is full of the disparate things you made.  
Yonder is the vast expanse of the emerald sea,  
filled with living things both small and great.  
The Leviathan is playing. Ships go to and fro.

All creatures look to you to give them food.  
You open your generous hand and they are filled.  
When you hide your face, they grieve. When you take  
away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

May the glory of the Lord endure to the end of time.  
May the Lord always rejoice in his wondrous works—  
he who looks on the earth and it trembles,  
he who touches the mountains and they smoke.  
I will sing to the Lord for as long as I live.  
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

*O Lord, all we have comes from you.  
In death, all we have returns to you.*

**June 16, 2019 | John 16:12-15**

## The Kindly Tutor

“I like history,” said the boy to the tutor.  
“I think it would be nice to know everything  
that ever happened.” The kindly tutor

looked up from his computer. “Everything?  
Why?” “When someone has a question,  
I could answer without a lot of thinking.”

“My friend, the study of history is a progression.  
History is always being revised  
and you can’t learn everything all at once.”

The tutor held up a thumb drive.  
“Suppose we put every truth  
of history we know for certain on this drive

and downloaded the contents for you  
into your brain. You still must look  
at everything and work your way through

all the data—just like reading a book.”  
The tutor added, “All the information  
is there right now for you to take,

but you’re not ready for everything. Education,  
whether it is history or anything else,  
is one long process of revelation.”

The boy acknowledged what is best:  
allow the miracle of revelation to play out  
and let his tutor lead the way.



**June 23, 2019 | 1 Kings 19:1-15**

## Elijah Blues

A mighty wind was blowing, but the Lord wasn't there.  
An earthquake shook the mountain, but the Lord wasn't there.  
I am zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts.

Fire followed the earthquake, but the Lord wasn't there.  
In the sound of utter silence, the Lord was there!  
I alone am left; they seek my life.

The Lord is not the wind, the Lord is not the quake,  
the Lord is not the fire. But listen to the quiet:  
I AM WHO I AM, the God of hosts.

**June 30, 2019 | Luke 9:51-62**

## Make America Great Again

*Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

When the Leader puts his hand to the plow,  
insisting on steering while looking back,  
he cannot plow a straight furrow.  
The result is row after crooked row.  
Our Sacred Honor is under attack.  
Every patriot needs to know  
the Leader is conning his credulous claue:  
the good old days won't come back.

## July 7, 2019 | Galatians 6:1-16

### Family of Faith

Welcome to the family of faith.  
Listen up: these are the rules.  
The Holy Spirit is the boss.  
Got that?  
Your job is to pay attention  
to what the boss has to say.  
When the boss encourages you  
to do something, you do it.  
Always do as you are told.  
There may be times you think  
you have a better idea,  
but, trust me, that never works.  
You are just asking for trouble.  
In the family of faith,  
we bear each other's burdens.  
When someone slips up,  
you need to do what you can to help out.  
Don't be judgmental; we are family here.  
Respond with a spirit of gentleness.  
And don't take comfort  
in that person's misfortune.  
No one is perfect—not even you.  
Be humble.  
Your time could be next.  
Each member of the family  
has strengths and weaknesses,  
and we have unique responsibilities.  
Don't fall into the trap  
of comparing yourself to others.  
The boss takes a dim view of that.  
Do you understand?  
You may think you are doing good work.  
Even so, you could probably do better.  
Right?  
Be mindful of that.  
We are playing the long game here.

We won't grow weary in doing what is right  
because we hope to reap at harvest time  
if we don't give up.

Whenever we have an opportunity,  
let us work for the good of all,  
and especially for those  
of the family of faith.

OK, are there any questions?

**July 14, 2019 | Amos 7:7-17**

## The Plumb Line

With a plumb-line, the wall of Israel was erected  
with closely-fitted, well-joined stones.  
These perpendicular stones were the very bones  
of a great nation, but a careless people neglected  
their promise to the Lord. They failed to stay the ruin.  
And now the Lord is holding a line and plummet  
against the wall. It is used for building up;  
the line is also used for tearing down  
as the demolition crew decides how much to raze.  
The Lord bears long, but the Lord won't bear forever.  
The herdsman Amos foretells the coming days  
of desolation for an errant nation who lost its way.  
The bowing, bulging wall is put to the measure;  
by the sword of justice, the edifice is swept away.

**July 21, 2019 | Amos 8:1-12**

## You Trample on the Needy

Someone once said, “There are no second acts,”  
but here I am. I am the prophet Amos of Tekoa.  
I walked the earth one hundred generations ago.  
Because of you, the Lord brought me back.  
The most devout nation in the western world,  
I am told, is America. I find that hard to believe.  
Do you really think the Lord is that naïve?  
You offer thoughts and prayers, but your hearts are cold.  
Nothing has changed: the rich and famous are greedy.  
You have the power because you have the wealth;  
you have the wealth because you have the power.  
Nothing has changed: you trample on the needy.  
Your actions deny that persons are created equal,  
and for your callousness, the Lord will lay you low.

## **July 28, 2019 | Colossians 2:6-15**

### Keep It Simple

You don't need all this extra stuff.  
You were buried with Jesus Christ in baptism,  
and you were also raised with him  
through faith in the power of God,  
who raised him from the dead.

That's it.

You have people telling you  
that the simple truth preached by Jesus  
and preserved in the Gospel  
is not enough.  
They want you to add  
an elaborate system  
of pseudo-philosophical thought  
and accept a system of astrology  
in addition to Jesus.

Then you have another group  
seeking to impose circumcision  
and all sorts of rules and regulations  
in addition to Jesus.

People, you don't need special knowledge  
and you don't need a badge of the flesh  
to be faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.  
Keep it simple.  
Ignore these distractions  
and trust in the Good News.

**August 4, 2019 | Luke 12:13-21**

## The Parable of the Rich Fool

He who dies with the most toys wins,  
a rich man said.  
Today he is dead.  
What do you win when death begins?

When death steals you before the dawn,  
what is the measure  
of stored up treasure?  
Who honors you when you are gone?



**August 11, 2019 | Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

## Defining Faith

The world we live in was once a lightless void.  
Out of nothingness, the Lord created the world.

From things not visible, the Lord made the earth.  
From a divine spark, the Lord gives us birth.

We live on the edge from dust to dust again,  
yet by our faith, we understand there is a plan.

The patriarch Abraham of Ur was promised a place  
where he and his seed could live at last in peace.

Obedient Abraham never doubted his descendants  
would grow to be as many as the stars in the heavens.

He never touched the soil of the promised land.  
He died in faith before enjoying his claim.

Hope is looking forward with wistful longing.  
The outcome is unknown when fate comes calling.

Faith is looking forward with absolute surety.  
Faith is a hope that has turned into a certainty.

**August 18, 2019 | Hebrews 11:29–12:2**

## Dialog Between Athlete and Coach

A duet: Athlete (alto or tenor) and *Coach (bass)*

I ran my best, but failed to place.  
My legs were dead the entire race.

I don't have wind. I don't feel strong.  
Tell me: What am I doing wrong?

*Unless you change, you'll never win.  
You are running races with the weight of sin.*

*The weight of sin drags you down.  
A change of heart wins the crown.*

I like the pleasures that come from sin.  
*Unless you change, you'll never win.*

*Defeat or victory is yours to choose.  
The life you live is yours to lose.*

(Speaking to the congregation in unison)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

## August 25, 2019 | Jeremiah 1:4-10

### Excuses

We waste a lot of time making excuses. The Bible is full of them. Some are good like Moses saying, correctly, he is not eloquent. The Lord enlists brother Aaron to speak for him, and that is enough to do the job. But most excuses are offered out of indolence. For every Isaiah who says, “Here am I, send me,” many more can’t be bothered. Jeremiah is just a kid when the Lord calls on him. Now the Lord is a master salesman who knows how to handle every objection. He has heard them all! He tells the kid not to worry—He will provide the words to say, and will protect Jeremiah at all times. The Lord says to him, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. Jeremiah: see, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build up and to plant.” In our era, everything is totally different in every way except for the one dishonest excuse that never goes out of style, “I’m busy.”

**September 1, 2019 | Luke 14:1, 7-14**

## The High Achievers

A single mom gave everything she had to her children. She took care of their urgent needs at all hours. She worked in a stressful job to put food on the table and clothes on their backs. Because of her, there was peace and harmony at home. The day came when she suffered a stroke and died. Nothing was the same again. The children devolved into anger and bitterness. Selfishness ruled the day.

The team was losing. The starting point guard was bringing the ball up the court and taking all the shots. His teammates were standing around watching—hoping to do something useful. The frustrated coach benched his leading scorer and put in an unselfish pass-first reserve who got the whole team up and running. Soon the team was pulling away for a win. The leading scorer sat at the end of the bench.

A major company wanted to increase its profits by reducing payroll, so they laid off thousands of competent older workers. The new people struggled to find their footing. Investors were glad when the stock price and quarterly earnings went up. But the company lost its edge and never recovered because of lagging productivity and the great loss of institutional memory that left with the severance checks.

The high achievers make things better, not worse, by their presence. Be honest: are you a high achiever?

**September 8, 2019 | Jeremiah 18:1-11**

## Spoiled in the Potter's Hand

The potter was weary of throwing ordinary pots.  
For the longest time, he sat at the potter's wheel  
crafting useful pots with a bland appeal.  
None of these pots satisfied his heart of hearts.

Each pot was slightly different, but basically the same.  
I want to make a vessel, the potter allowed,  
of the highest quality—something to make me proud!  
The potter began his masterpiece, and gave it the name

Israel. Nothing happened according to plan.  
The clay refused to cooperate. It wobbled on the wheel.  
The potter could never get the proper feel,  
and the flawed clay spoiled in the potter's hand.

The potter's fail unveiled a hopeful sign.  
He was not able to pull the perfect from the good,  
but the spoiled clay taught a lesson of what should  
be done to fully achieve his true design.

**September 15, 2019 | Luke 15:1-10**

## The Parable of the Lost Coin

Imagine a father whose child is lost  
in a busy mall at Christmas time.  
All is well when she is found.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine a wife desperately searching  
every room for a precious ring  
until at last she holds it up.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine lovers breaking up,  
but won't accept that love is lost.  
How sweet it is to reunite!  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

Imagine God's determined search  
to find the lost and bring them home.  
This is the parable of the lost coin.  
You too would say, "Rejoice with me!"

**September 22, 2019 | Luke 16:1-13**

We All Live on Borrowed Time

The road I am traveling rises  
into the arid western hills  
and vanishes,  
moving like my thoughts  
toward an unknown end.

Soldiers die or win acclaim,  
but over time it's all the same.  
Oblivion shrugs at fear and fame.

Lives who touch my life  
are tributaries.  
They empty out their names;  
in me, names are neither here nor there.

Glistening drops of dew  
are strung on strands of a spider's web:  
how quickly youth passes  
in the turning day.

They hoard the most  
who want the most;  
they lose the most  
who hoard the most.  
Contentment is knowing  
when to stop.

Like trembling leaves  
are you and me.  
Autumnal yellow is trembling,  
trembling in the wind,  
trembling, then quickly gone.

**September 29, 2019 | 1 Timothy 6:6-19**

## Godliness Combined with Contentment

We bring nothing into the world;  
we leave the world with nothing.

Whatever comes our way,  
we are renting—and never owning.

We should learn to be content  
with gifts of food and clothing.

If blessed with more than that,  
we must be tireless in sharing.

Godliness is the reverence of persons  
who never stop believing

that we live in the presence of God.  
Do all you can in storing

up treasures of a good foundation  
for the future—for life everlasting.



**October 6, 2019 | 2 Timothy 1:1-14**

## Advice for Timothy

Knowledge is the direction for action;  
action is the effect of knowledge.  
Knowledge is the beginning of action;  
action is the completion of knowledge.

Action does not flow from knowledge;  
knowledge does not flow from action.  
Knowledge and action are one.

The world does not shape the mind.  
The mind gives reason to the world.  
The mind is the source of all reason.  
Your inner light is an innate moral goodness  
and an understanding of what is good.

Be ever constant in your knowledge  
that Jesus Christ is Lord.  
Consequently, two actions are at one  
with your constancy of knowledge:  
you will never slacken in faith  
and you will never slacken in love.

**October 13, 2019 | Luke 17:11-19**

## The Alpha and Omega of Gratitude

Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.  
Gratitude is the sum of what you sense and say.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Longing for things you lack is a flawed attitude.  
Always be thankful for what you have today.  
Feeling grateful in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

Do not devalue the goods you currently hold.  
What you have today was only hoped for yesterday.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

Lust for things puts you in an anxious mood.  
You'll find your happiness in the persons you most enjoy.  
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.

The lives of those you love will increase in magnitude  
as you count your blessings and walk with them in the Way.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

The ungrateful person is one who journeys in solitude.  
Appreciation is the greatest kindness, far and away.  
Giving thanks in your heart is the alpha of gratitude.  
Remembering to offer your thanks is the omega of gratitude.

**October 20, 2019 | 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5**

## In the Company of Nonbelievers

I wander through life in the company of nonbelievers.  
My closest friends follow the Golden Rule,  
but the sayings of Jesus fall on barren soil.  
I am selling, but no one is buying a Redeemer.  
Oddly, I am less distressed by my circle of friends,  
these secular saints who truly care for the marginalized,  
than the haters who, in the name of Jesus Christ,  
selectively search the scriptures for churlish outcomes.  
We need to heal the sick, feed the hungry,  
and care for the weak among us—and always remember  
we cannot love God and hate our neighbor,  
for where our hearts are, there will be our treasure.  
Not everyone believes in the sweet by and by,  
but my thumb is on the scale for Christlike behavior.

**October 27, 2019 | Luke 18:9-14**

## The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

I'm feeling special standing in the temple.  
I'm such a sight to see!  
I lift my words to you my Lord.  
Behold: take a look at me!

Indeed, I have risen above the rest.  
Lord, you know it's true.  
Unlike these fools, I mind your rules.  
My bearing says, "Better than you."

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

Who needs to ask? I tithe and fast.  
My piety's beyond compare.  
It makes me proud to show the crowd  
how to strike a righteous air.

My public look is by the book.  
My face is pale and wan  
and I raise my hands at the proper times.  
I show the people how it's done.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

The temple is blessed to witness the best;  
it's all about the show.  
I'll close my hour on the temple floor  
with this, a truly grateful prayer:

Thank you, Lord, that I am spared  
from living a life of sin  
like that tax collector over there  
and all the others in this room.

[Chorus]

*Better than you,  
better than you.  
Lord knows  
he is better than you.*

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**November 3, 2019 | Luke 19:1-10**

## You Must Change Your Life

Rilke wrote, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, which is this command: “You must change your life.” It is a powerful and famous line, but what does it mean? Change to what? Rilke does not say.

The poet says this of the statue of Apollo: “For here there is no place that does not see you.” Is it fear and trembling in the presence of archaic numinousness? Does he perceive divinity in chiseled stone?

The imperative “You must change your life” suggests you have lost your way. To say you are lost implies you were once on the right path, but wandered off. The lost have already experienced the right path.

The Son of Man came to seek and to save the souls who were lost—those who wandered off. Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Jericho. He was a son of Abraham; he knew right from wrong.

He was rich from cutting corners and cheating the people. In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus understood that he had strayed. Jesus did not command, “You must change your life.” Zacchaeus was not

doomed or damned. He was simply in the wrong place, and he changed immediately to get right with God. On the spot, he gave half of his possessions to the poor and he made four-fold payments to those defrauded.

Turnabout was more than words—it was backed by deeds to guarantee sincerity. You must change your life! Once again, Zacchaeus took his rightful place as a generous, obedient child in the household of his Father.

**November 10, 2019 | Haggai 1:15–2:9**

## America in Decline

*Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?  
How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing?*

It's like the air went out of our balloon  
in 1989. The last time  
we were this self-absorbed  
was during the Hoover presidency  
before the great depression.  
The stock market crashed  
and there was a national failure  
of imagination for three years.  
FDR rallied our spirits  
and asked us all to pull together  
for the greater good.  
Meanwhile, in Europe,  
Hitler was on the march,  
invading his neighbors.  
He rounded up the Jews  
and others who were not members  
of the Aryan Master Race.  
He sent innocents to death camps  
and stole their properties.  
When he threatened  
to crush Great Britain,  
America quietly lent a hand,  
then jumped in with both feet  
when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.  
Everyone served,  
one way or another,  
in this national emergency,  
and we won a two-ocean war.

After the war,  
we helped to build  
the enduring architecture  
for international peace.  
We did not back down  
during the ascent of the Soviet Union,  
but rose to the challenge.  
At home, a single worker  
could support his or her family.  
Company presidents and CEOs  
had modest lifestyles.  
We enjoyed peace abroad  
and prosperity at home.

America leaned into the sixties.  
Descendants of Negro slaves  
demanded equality.  
Half the population was female,  
but women—who built the weapons  
of war a few years earlier—  
were unfairly treated in the workplace.  
Asians incarcerated during the war  
were told, “Sorry about that.”  
Still, the country moved forward  
as a unit.  
We continued to have a sense  
of national purpose.

This sense of national purpose  
led us astray in the Vietnam War,  
but it also enabled us to put  
a man on the moon,  
possibly the greatest achievement ever  
by the American government.  
It’s been 50 years since that moment.  
What happened?



After a presidential resignation  
and the end of an unpopular war,  
we lost faith in our leaders.  
Some people were quick to say  
government could do nothing right.  
We elected a president to serve  
as head of our government who said,  
“Government is not the solution  
to our problem;  
government is the problem.”  
This was the national mood  
when the Soviet Union fell apart  
in 1989—the year we lost our edge.  
“We won!” was our triumphal coda.  
We bought the popular idea  
that unrestrained capitalism  
was superior to any kind  
of government planning.

So here we are today:  
the moon landing plus 50 years.  
We are ruled by a reality TV star  
who never reads anything,  
who only cares about money  
and his brand.  
His mouth is a firehose of insults.  
The common good means nothing to him.  
Congress wallows in paralysis.  
People reading their phones  
bump into each other on the streets.  
Anonymous avatars  
post their hateful messages  
on Facebook.  
The captains of industry  
reap outrageous sums of money  
while two-income families  
are on food stamps.

Does it really take a national crisis  
to bring us together again—  
another great depression,  
a war for our very survival,  
a space race,  
an ideological struggle?  
Can't we the people  
with clear minds and kind hearts,  
men and women of every origin,  
come together naturally  
for the good of the country?  
America is in decline,  
but it is not too late  
for a new, inspired zenith.

## November 17, 2019 | Psalm 98

### After the Storm

The bearded mountain  
rippled and flexed  
his enormous triceps  
and challenged  
the many-armed sea

to a wrestling match.  
Howling winds whistled  
through the trees  
and ravaged the watershed,  
rushing down ragged cliffs

to the breakers.  
Joining the fray,  
sky crackled with electricity—  
illuminating at intervals  
roiling thunderheads

and setting fire  
to tinder pockets  
of dried-up understory.  
Exhausted,  
the land, sea and heavens

turned their eyes to the judge  
of the world. Weary of conflict  
they sued for peace,  
and suddenly all was calm  
in the presence of the Lord.

## November 24, 2019 | Luke 23:33-43

### Decisions

*One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

Luke 23:39-42

#### *Penitent Thief*

if  
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)  
yes  
then  
(result: consolation, hope, contentment)  
end if

#### *Impenitent Thief*

if  
(condition: believe Jesus is the Messiah, yes/no)  
no  
else  
(result: anger, self-pity, nihilism)  
end if

**December 1, 2019 | Romans 13:11-14**

## Conversion of St. Augustine

In a little while, I'll make up my mind  
to turn away from a life of sin,  
but not right now.

I have the want, but not the will.  
I ask, O Lord, how long until?  
Why not now?

*Tolle lege! Tolle lege!*  
is rendered as, "Take it up and read it!"  
You are free

to break the bonds that keep you accursed.  
Open the Book and follow the first  
verse you see.

Not in carousing, drunkenness, debauchery,  
not in sensuality, quarrelling, or jealousy—  
put on Christ as a woman or man  
puts on a garment.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ;  
make no provisions for the flesh  
to find fulfillment.

NOTE: In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine credits this specific passage in Romans as the scripture that finally prompted him to convert to Christianity.

**December 8, 2019 | Romans 15:4-13**

## Bond of Unity

The weak in faith and the strong in faith  
and the honest skeptic are bound as one.

The Easter Christian and the everyday saint;  
the Jew and Gentile; every man,

woman, and child without regard  
for homeland, language, or color of skin:

many differences, but one in faith.  
In loyalty and love, we are one.

There is one Christ for all peoples;  
the bond of unity is loyalty to him.

**December 15, 2019 | Psalm 146:4-9**

## Our Responsibility

The Lord created the heaven and earth.  
He created the seas, and all that is in them.  
Man had nothing to do with this.

The Lord gives justice to the oppressed,  
sets the prisoners free,  
opens the eyes of the blind,

lifts up those who are bowed down,  
cares for the stranger,  
sustains the widow and orphan,

and frustrates the ways of the wicked.  
How are these things done?  
They are done by those who love the Lord,

by those who follow his commands.  
Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help!  
whose hope is in the Lord their God.

## December 22, 2019 | Matthew 1:18-25

### Passages

Passages  
from tarn to tide—  
a post-amble  
to the old transformation,  
a preamble to the new.

If I am only  
what I am becoming,  
I wonder  
what matters  
before I get there.

Assuming that God's existence  
might be proved  
through logic,  
would you and I believe  
in such an elegant God?



**December 25, 2019 | Isaiah 9:2-7**

## Long Night's Journey into Day

In former times, we toiled at night.  
We toiled in shadows from black to gray.  
But then, behold! The emerging light!  
In our long night's journey into day.

In our long night's journey into day,  
the light of the Lord is beaming bright.  
We praise the Lord and dance for joy.  
The Lord of Hosts relieves our plight.

All the boots of tramping warriors  
and bloody garments torn asunder  
are burning now in pungent fires.  
We exult like a people dividing plunder.

A child is born; a son is given;  
authority rests in Him today.  
We thank the Lord for sins forgiven  
and our long night's journey into day.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**December 29, 2019 | John 1:1-18**

## Son of Man

The son of man comes to earth.  
Like you and me, he draws a breath.  
His life is much like ours: a birth,  
a coming of age, and then a death.

The son of man is the suffering servant.  
He shoulders sins for a world in pain.  
It is his role to lift our burden.  
He suffers, he dies, he comes again.

The son of man is the sovereign power  
to come in glory on judgment day.  
No one knows the date and hour  
our floating world will pass away.

The son of man is all in one:  
person, servant, magistrate.  
The faithful are one with the son of man.  
He governs all, both small and great.

## January 5, 2020 | Jeremiah 31:7-14

### Come Together

Come together,  
come together  
people of faith  
from all the farthest parts of earth.

Come together  
you who suffer  
and you who weep.  
A hopeful future lies ahead.

Come together  
you with child  
and you in labor.  
With consolations, I'll lead you back.

Come together!  
The young women  
rejoice in the dance  
and young men and old are merry.

The Lord who scattered  
the remnant of Israel  
is gathering us now  
as a shepherd keeps an errant flock.

Come together!  
Our old mourning  
turns to joy.  
The people of faith are one again!

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

## January 6, 2020 | Matthew 2:1-12

### Herod the Great

A popular belief was abroad in the kingdom of Judea. Scholars concluded that seventy-six generations had passed since the Creation, and that the next, the seventy-seventh, would gift to Israel the Messiah who was destined to deliver the nation from foreign rule.

A child born in Bethlehem would be the king of the Jews—as foretold by the prophet Micah. The Magi spoke these words to Herod the Great. Herod was frightened, but he feigned excitement. He said to the Magi, “Go and search diligently

for the child; and when you find him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” At the time, he was terminally ill with a hideous disease. His career was one with many bold accomplishments; it was also one of cruelty, vengeance, and paranoia,

traits in overdrive at the time of the birth of Jesus. Herod was thoroughly Roman in murdering each and every rival to his rule, including his wife and three of his sons. He murdered hundreds more real and perceived enemies in his final years

as he assured his lasting legacy in the line of succession. In the end, nothing happened to the child of Bethlehem. No one mourned for Herod, a converted Jew—the son of an Edomite father and an Arab mother—who did the dirty work for the hated Roman state.

**January 12, 2020 | Isaiah 42:1-9**

## All the Way to the Coastlands

Isaiah's camera lens is zooming out  
from a close-up shot showing the rubble and despair  
of occupied Israel to a wide-angle view,  
a cosmic view, of all the nations of the world.  
God is not a tribal deity who assures  
military mastery or material success for Israel.  
He created the heavens and stretched out the earth.  
He cares for all living and breathing creatures.

Isaiah promises a spirit-filled servant—  
not a conqueror or a tyrant. The servant is the face of justice.  
Hard power is swept aside by justice!  
The servant will persist until a sense of fairness  
holds sway all the way to the coastlands.  
Even in this hour as it endures a humiliating plight,  
Israel should look beyond itself and serve as a light  
to the world by inspiring justice in every land.

## January 19, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

### Cædmon's Vision

#### *In the Old English Style*

I ken a cross      cleaving clouds  
high in the heavens      of purple hue  
the mark of my liege      in the middle of morning  
suddenly streaming      strange ray-daggers  
fiery flames      from Wayland's forge  
burnishing war-bucklers      baring souls  
loosening artifice      from feckless lives  
who lack conviction      leaving at the last  
grim cobble-ground      the gut of groundlings  
daring discernment      on judgment day

## January 26, 2020 | Matthew 4:12-23

### Leaving Home

Jesus set out from the pinched, provincial town of Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, one of many towns near the Sea of Galilee.

A fertile region with edible fish in the lake, Galilee was a prosperous crossroads for trade.

It was also a fertile region for new ideas where opinions mingled in the heated crucible of debate.

Jesus did not look back. He began his ministry of teaching, of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and of the healing of bodies and souls for those who asked.

By his example, we know that leaving home can lead to liberating the best version of ourselves.

A hometown is more than a place: it is a state of mind.

What would it take for you who read these lines to set out to be the best version of yourself?

## February 2, 2020 | Hebrews 2:14-18

### What Kind of God?

The gods consume nectar and ambrosia on Olympus and amuse themselves by looking down on us dispassionately. Cool detachment is a sardonic business. Hellenism insists we see things as they are. For right thinking, the body and its desires are a barrier; we are cautioned to keep the mind completely clear.

Hebraism counters that the body and its desires are a barrier to right action. The Lord requires clarity of thought chastened by strictness of conscience. The principal rubric of the Law is studied obedience to the will of God. The Lord has a vertical presence—aloof except to chastise with corrective fires.

The unknown author of the book of Hebrews crystalizes the Christology of Paul by defining a different kind of divinity in which the pioneer of our salvation identifies with the human condition. Jesus is wholly man as well as divine and, thus, he thoroughly understands what it means for us to live imperfect lives.

But there is more. It is well and good to know the Lord has empathy, unlike the dispassionate pantheon or the distant God of Moses. It begs the question: what can be done about our suffering and sorrow? The pioneer of our salvation has come to earth to show us exactly what we need for true consolation.



## February 9, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

### The Way

*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the spirit.*

The way eludes the snare  
of language. It is hard to catch the wheeling birds  
scurrying up helixing stairs,

but harder still to catch the way with words.  
The heart that hangs stretched and framed  
is not the heart of hearts;

the way that can be named  
and then defined is not the way.  
The way conceals itself by being nameless.

Abundantly clear from far away,  
the mountain up close fades to shades of white;  
such vastness mirrors the way.

The patient, widening eye controls the night.  
Eventually, patterns emerge,  
defining themselves with immanent light,

suggesting a subtle demiurge  
behind a shadowy veil  
behind another veil on heaven's edge

behind the tangible veil  
of earth; for earth is the pattern for humanity,  
then heaven for earth; and through the farthest veil,  
the way spins out our destiny.

**February 16, 2020 | Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

[haiku]

planting a dogwood sapling,  
four hands pat down the compost...  
commitment

[tanka]

we are on our knees  
in the garden;  
I am weeding, you are planting...  
honey bees  
move pause move pause

**February 23, 2020 | 2 Peter 1:16-21**

## On Prophecy

How do we know if a prophecy is actually true? Peter says, “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.” The fakers flatter themselves by promoting their own private views.

The Lord uses the prophet as a tool of his trade. God is the inspired writer—the prophet, the pen; God is the concertmaster—the prophet, the violin. Trust the Holy Spirit to show you the way.

## March 1, 2020 | Matthew 4:1-11

### This is a Test

The verbs *to tempt* and *to test* are not the same. God did not tempt Abraham to sacrifice his one and only child, Isaac. For it is written, “After these things God tested Abraham.”

The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread to prove he is the son of God.

The devil tempted Jesus to leap from the façade of the temple and force the angels to cushion his bones.

The devil tempted Jesus with his biggest and best offer: the splendor of earthly kingdoms if he, in turn, would worship him; Jesus refused.

Temptations bedevil us every hour of every day as befits our nature, but do not be confused when the Lord requires your service: *This is a test.*

**March 8, 2020 | Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

## A Father's Love

A Father's love does not depend  
on good behavior by his child.  
Bad behavior does not suspend  
a Father's love for his child.

A Father's love is not transactional—  
a running score of tit for tat.  
A Father's love is not conditional—  
give me this, I'll give you that.

A Father's love is never earned  
where deeds pile up like points in a game.  
He won't give up when love is spurned;  
he patiently waits and won't cast blame.

A Father's love is an act of grace  
freely given, no strings attached.  
The child is sheltered in the sure embrace  
of the gracious gift of love unmatched.

**March 15, 2020 | John 4:5-42**

## Breaking Bigotry

He broke a rule by talking to a woman.  
Women are not to be diminished!  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of gender bigotry.

He broke a rule by talking to a Samaritan.  
The woman at the well was part Assyrian.  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of racial bigotry.

He broke a rule by promising a schismatic  
Israelite the gift of living water.  
With the woman at the well, he shows us how  
to break the rules of religious bigotry.

Jesus broke all the rules  
that soured his world—and ours today.  
Breaking bigotry is job one;  
Jesus shows us how it's done.

**March 22, 2020 | 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

## God Knows the Heart

We judge our fellow humans by what we see.  
We cannot know for sure what's in the heart.  
God ignores what works for you and me.  
God knows the honest truth in every heart.

All of Jesse's sons were tall and strong.  
On looks alone, they set themselves apart.  
Samuel was sure that one would be the king,  
but God discerned in each a wavering heart.

Samuel anointed Jesse's youngest son.  
For God, David was the future still untold.  
David promised to always be at one  
with God—and return all sinners to the fold.

Create in me a clean heart, O Lord,  
and bring to me a new and willing spirit.  
Restore to me the joy of your accord.  
Sustain in me forever your Holy Spirit.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.

**March 29, 2020 | Ezekiel 37:1-14**

## In the Valley of the Ghost Christians

The hand of the Lord came upon me  
and led me on an uncertain mission  
to a valley full of ghostly shapes  
lying lifeless on the cold ground  
in the sullen dawn. When he set me down  
amid the valley, I was amazed to hear  
the Lord's voice calling me,  
"Mortal, can these ghost Christians live?"  
I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

I began to speak at the Lord's command.  
Shapes rose like twisting smoke  
with the rushing sounds of the four winds  
as bones came together and flesh  
took shape atop the bones, and skin  
covered the flesh, and the ghost Christians  
once again began to breathe.  
The sun broke through the morning haze.  
Ghost Christians shimmered in the light,  
attentive, as if waiting for instructions.  
Then the Lord said to me,  
"Prophecy to these ghost Christians:  
listen, hear the word of the Lord!"

I heard my voice fill up the valley.  
"I do not promise you a land of your own  
or sacred soil in our troubled world.  
Put aside your worldly concerns  
for living in comfort, buying and selling,  
securing your place, displacing others.  
Remember your baptism, your call to service.  
Turn your attention to those in need.  
Give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty,  
clothe the naked and welcome the stranger,  
heal the sick and visit the prisoner.



Now is the time to renew commitment  
to the spirit of Christ, which dwells in you.”

When the last echo of my last words  
settled into silence, I lowered my eyes  
from the distant mountains and witnessed emptiness  
in all directions. All of the silence  
in this rib-cage valley undergirded  
the wings and arc of a solitary raptor.

## April 5, 2020 | Matthew 27:11-54

*Palm Sunday*

### A Moment of Kindness

It was a long time ago,  
when I was young and in my prime.  
I was entering the city for Passover. Lo and behold,

prisoners were leaving the city at the same time  
for their executions. One was Jesus.  
He was weak from scourging as he struggled to climb

to the place Golgotha while carrying the cross.  
Seeing that I was a Jew,  
a Roman soldier tapped me aside the face

with the flat of his sword, and said, "You."  
Pressed into lethal service for the Roman  
state, I knew what I had to do.

"Brother, let me lift your burden,"  
I said, as I hoisted the wood shoulder high.  
Together, we walked the hill to his certain

death. I wonder why  
happenstance put me in that time and space.  
Why me? Of all the events under the sky,

why I was plucked to show some grace?  
I was in the right place at the right time.  
A moment of kindness can last a lifetime.

## **April 12, 2020 | Luke 24:13-49**

*Easter Sunday*

### Ordinary

Their eyes were opened with the breaking of bread,  
an ordinary loaf in an ordinary home.  
Until that moment, Cleopas and his companion  
only knew him as an inquisitive stranger.

They could have let him go his way,  
but, no, the men invited him to stay  
and share with them an ordinary meal.  
By inviting him to stay, they made a choice.  
You, too, are free to choose.

The communion table is not the only  
place where a meal is shared with the Lord.  
He is not just the host at the table;  
he is the guest invited into the home.

**April 19, 2020 | John 20:19-31**

## Thomas the Twin

Faith is trust in the things you cannot see.  
Love is service to the least who are plain to see.

Faith without love is life without compassion.  
Love without faith is life without a mission.

You honor the Lord by giving your best to others.  
Do all you can to help your sisters and brothers.

Walk by confident faith, not by sight.  
Trust the Lord to bring you into the light.

Faith and love inspire both head and heart.  
This is how the saints are set apart.

**April 26, 2020 | 1 Peter 1:17-23**

You Have Been Born Anew

Deep grasses choke  
the broad path  
we used to walk;  
our past is lost  
in a seamless field of green.

**May 3, 2020 | John 10:1-10**

## Job Posting: Shepherd

We have an opening for a shepherd of human beings.  
Are you tough enough for the task?  
People are not that bright. They are always leaving

the area for greener grass  
and it's your job to track them down  
and bring the bumblebees back to the home pasture.

People need to be watched: you must be around  
at all hours, night and day,  
always close to ground.

Like sheep, people wander off and are prey  
to metaphoric wolves who wait patiently  
for suckers to come their way—

you are constantly correcting for human naïveté.  
Compensation comes in the intangible of knowing  
you are keeping blameless people from carelessly

endangering themselves. Apply now:  
it's a job fit for a king  
if you have a passion for doing the right thing.

**May 10, 2020 | Acts 7:55-60**

## Mettle

Our first martyr defied the Fates.  
Stephen was not resigned and broken.  
Stephen faced his trial unbroken.  
He stood in the docket for the Christian faith.

Stephen Martyr showed his mettle.  
He spoke with courage and affirmation  
about his faith to a sour Sanhedrin.  
His face looked like that of an angel.

Stephen showed us how to cope.  
Even after two thousand years,  
we look to him to guard our fears.  
Stephen's mettle gives us hope.

No matter how your life is designed,  
mettle makes your own renown.  
Mettle is how your worth is known  
to the men and women you leave behind.

**May 17, 2020 | Acts 17:22-31**

## Perennial Philosophy

Streaming from the prism between the people and God  
are seven point seven billion slivers of light.  
A stunning diversity of color is flowing from the white.  
Each sliver is unique on the limitless color wheel.

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue,  
indigo, and violet are at one with the original whole.  
The rainbow is one continuum, like branches and the bole,  
connecting people with people and the people with God.

Extinguish the light source and the colors disappear!  
All human diversity is part of a greater unity.  
Our sense of a separate self is a functional necessity,  
but the focus on the separate self is the cause of suffering.

Focus instead on the infinite divine self,  
which represents true reality, and you will find  
the source of light for the life of all mankind  
beyond the prism between the people and God.



**May 24, 2020 | 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11**

[untitled]

the blacktop road  
comes to an end here  
at the edge  
of the wilderness...  
I am not afraid

looking ahead to the past  
remembering the future  
one datastream  
the road from home  
is a road leading home

**May 31, 2020 | 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13**

## You Don't Need to Be a Superhero

No, we are not characters in comic books,  
in movies, or in video games  
in which the superheroes crack the crooks,

where each character has a claim  
to fame—a special superpower that complements  
every other character in the gang's

fantastical array of tools to fight crimes.

No, we are not like that.

All our spiritual gifts come

from the same Holy Spirit—

who gives us knowledge, faith, healing, and wisdom;  
who enables miracles; who inspires the prophet;

who grants spiritual discernment to some  
and to others proficiency in speech.

No, you don't need to be a superhero to earn

your place. You don't need to preach or teach  
or do anything. Unwavering faith will suffice  
to be a member of the body of Christ.

**June 7, 2020 | Genesis 1:1–2:4a**

## Wheel of Water

Grass emerges from the winter snow.  
Blades lengthen. Flowers grow.  
Trees in the wind sway and sough.  
The summer of life is all we know!

Autumn breezes start to blow  
and all of life begins to slow.  
Brown turf is snuffed in snow.  
Life and death come and go.

Clouds roll in over the plain.  
The clouds release their drops of rain.  
The drops are lost in the narrowing drain  
to the sea. Only to rise again.

The wheel of water is an endless chain,  
an infinite loop of wax and wane.  
The land upholds this loss and gain.  
Yet the land itself cannot sustain.

Dust is molded, dust restored.  
Not even the land can say: Never.  
But for children of light who love the Lord,  
the love of the Lord lasts forever.

**June 14, 2020 | Matthew 9:35–10:8**

## When Jesus Saw the Crowds

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's pain—  
for the sick, the blind, and the troubled  
trapped in the grip of demons.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's sorrow.  
He wanted to wipe away  
tears from every eye.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's hunger.  
The tired and hungry sheep  
looked up, waiting to be fed.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt for those cut off.  
He cared for the lonely leper  
banished from the village square.

When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he felt the world's bewilderment.  
The people, longing for God,  
were given rules instead.

The people were harassed and helpless  
like sheep without a shepherd.  
When Jesus saw the crowds,  
he was moved by divine compassion.

The world has greatly changed  
since Jesus saw the crowds.  
But we still have pain and sorrow;  
we still have hunger and loneliness;

and we still have bewilderment.  
The Gospel remains the same.  
He is moved by divine compassion  
for the crowds of the dispossessed.

## June 21, 2020 | Romans 6:1b-11

### Dorm Room Bull Session

“Where sin increases, grace abounds all the more,” said Paul to his roommate, the sophomore philosophy major who offered this devil’s-advocate wager.

“I propose to you: the more we sin, the more

God’s grace shall abound. Thus, we should sin with gladness so grace abounds all the more. By sinning more, we are doing God a favor since he loves granting grace to those who sin.”

Paul frowned and countered the jest with commonsense.

“Once we die to sin, why would we stay in that condition? Why would the emancipated slave stay with an abusive master? Does that make sense?

If you were released from prison, would you go back to your cell or would you choose to live free?

The question answers itself. If you won the lottery, would you continue to live in an old shack?”

Paul’s interlocutor loved to bedevil and astound, especially in a deep discussion of sin and grace.

He said, “I just like to see you red in the face.”

Paul was laughing as they wandered out for a round.

**June 28, 2020 | Romans 6:12-23**

## Benedictine Habit

Although I wear the garments of righteousness,  
my old clothes of sin  
remain in the closet. I can always dress

as I did before. I may put them on  
and walk away at any time I desire  
and no one but God is the least concerned.

I am given a year to choose the attire—  
clothing for the path of sin or the path of piety—  
to wear for all eternity.

**July 5, 2020 | Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

## The Yoke

The yoke you wear is the load you bear.  
Who will make the yoke you wear?

The yoke you wear is yours alone.  
Will you design and build it on your own?

Will you fashion failure for your load?  
Will fear burden you on the darkened road?

Will you shoulder anger on the morrow  
or shoulder some remembered sorrow?

A worker in wood has a better way  
to lighten your load in every way.

You can trust the carpenter's son.  
He knows why and how it's done.

Jesus knows the grain of oak.  
He will make you a gentle yoke.

His heart is humble—learn from him.  
Take his yoke and walk with him.

NOTE: These are lyrics for an anthem.



**July 12, 2020 | Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

## The Parable of the Sower

He sowed the seed on the barren path.  
The seed on the path was trampled down,  
trampled down and plucked by birds,  
plucked and eaten by birds of the air.

He sowed the seed on rocky ground.  
The plants sprang up between the rocks.  
The quickening plants had shallow roots.  
They withered and died in the rising sun.

He sowed the seed among the thorns.  
The thorns grew up and blocked the sun.  
The thorns took over and choked the crop.  
No yield was there at harvest time.

He sowed the seed on fertile soil.  
Because the soil was deep and rich  
and free of weeds, the yield was good:  
thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

A sower went out to sow his seed.  
Each seed is the trusted word of God,  
but how it grows depends on you.  
How it grows depends on you.

**July 19, 2020 | Psalm 139:1-11, 22-23**

Embraced

Front and back, up and down,  
side to side—embraced in a warm wave,  
I am floating forward from cradle to grave.  
God is present in all six directions.

**July 26, 2020 | Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

## The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The kingdom of God began  
with a solitary man.

The solitary man  
was a tiny seed of one.

Growth began the hour  
Jesus revealed his power.

The kingdom of God grew  
when Jesus added two.

The kingdom grew some more  
when followers numbered four.

There were twelve until the day  
a follower fell away.

A handful grew into thousands  
and thousands into millions.

Nothing on this earth  
is fully formed at birth.

From a tiny seed of one  
a mighty tree was born.

We rose from the garden sod:  
behold the kingdom of God.

## August 2, 2020 | Genesis 32:22-31

### Hap

A lost transcript was the origin  
of a life-changing event when I hoped to go  
up the interstate to the University of Oregon.

I enrolled instead at a smaller school in Idaho.  
The break from home was my firm desire,  
but little did I know

this chance course correction would square  
the circle. I was a nobody in the kitchen crew  
at Sun Valley when the school year

closed out, and was quite sure  
my floating world would persist.  
But then, there she was, traveling through

as a guest. Fifty-seven years have passed  
since we met at the Lodge.  
Who knows which moment is meant to last?

Who knows! From the vantage point of age,  
I could be looking back with ruefulness  
at a listless river in a featureless landscape

or a hellscape of conflict or a life of emptiness  
like the wave-polished shell  
abandoned by the creature who used to dwell;  
or enjoy a different contentment with someone else.

Devil-may-care at the time of first action,  
my initial moves belong  
to a thousand-piece puzzle near completion.

We make informed decisions, but life is long.  
For happiness, there is no map,  
and often it is simply the result of hap.