

THE PIEDMONT EPISTLE

PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS BY WORD AND DEED

May 2018

The other day, I caught an interview on NPR with Tracy K. Smith, the United States Poet Laureate. The interview began with a discussion of poetry and how many of us were taught poetry badly in school. We were introduced to poetry in a way that made poems out to be obscure word puzzles that we have to “solve” in order to discover the “meaning.” Because of this, we often think of poetry as some rarified art form, something which frankly we don’t much need in our everyday life. Yet, as Smith insists, “poetry lives everywhere.” Poetry isn’t about making pretty lines that rhyme. It’s about how words, what we say, teach us to pay attention to the world, help us to see, to understand the deeper meaning of our lives, and give voice to our experience. They summon us to recognize the reality beneath the surface of our lives and to live beyond the superficial.



Now, I read a lot—commentaries, theology, ethics, sociology, history, science fiction. I know I should read poetry, but I just can’t seem to get into it. It’s not that I haven’t tried. High school and college instructors offered the required doses. I even have a few collections in my library. But I have to acknowledge, the way I typically think is linear (poems aren’t), my schedule is full (with important, and sometimes unimportant, things), my reading agenda is already booked (with prose). But when I hear discussions of poetry like this interview, I feel that I should make more of an effort to read poetry.

Maybe a bit of me wants to be cultured and insure that others know I am sophisticated enough to read poetry. But there is a vocational motivation as well. As a writer and preacher, word-craft is important, and I know poets can teach me about words. Even more important, though, is my desire to understand Scripture. Since over sixty percent of the Bible is poetry, I know I’m missing something that God thinks is important. And as Eugene Peterson points out, the poet is a friend of those interested in spirituality.

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Peterson is a pastor, a professor, a poet, and the author of such books as the popular paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*. In one of his other books, *Reversed Thunder*, Peterson describes the challenge of reading

poetry. “We do not have more information after we read a poem,” he writes, “We have more experience.” Like most people, I value facts, knowledge, information. I enjoy the process of reading history or theology or social sciences while I reflect on what is helpful for me, my family, my church, my community. But poetry is different. Peterson says that a poet offers a new way of living, a new experience, a different set of receptors. In his book on the psalms, *Answering God*, he explains:

“Poets tell us what our eyes, blurred with too much gawking, and our ears, dulled with too much chatter, miss around and within us. Poets use words to drag us into the depth of reality itself. They do it not by reporting on how life is, but by pushing-pulling us into the middle of it. Poetry grabs for the jugular. Far from being cosmetic language, it is intestinal. It is root language. Poetry doesn’t so much tell us something we never knew as bring into recognition what is latent, forgotten, overlooked, or suppressed.”

So you can’t read poetry on the run, squeezing it between the newspaper and professional journals. We have to create a space. We need to get rid of our operative expectations. We need to be conscious of transitioning from one way of thinking to another.

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This sounds a lot like prayer. In fact, Peterson acknowledges the links between poetry and prayer: “Is it not significant that the biblical prophets and psalmists were all poets?”

In *Answering God*, Peterson provides his most extensive development of this relationship between prayer and poetry. “The poet,” he writes, “forces you to do something that is very important for prayer: slow down. You can’t speed read a poem. You need to shift out of your normal asphalt-driving-to-work-being-productive mentality. You need to be submissive to a reality you didn’t make. You have to read the poem three times before you start getting the hang of it. It means you aren’t in control of it. There is somebody who perceives some truth that you don’t. It’s humbling and maybe even humiliating.” What he says about poetry and prayer, is also true of reading Scripture. To understand it, we have to slow down, read it slowly, more than once, let go of control and allow it to teach us a truth that we don’t know.

If nothing else, poems remind us of how powerful words themselves are. Words can build you up, they can break you down, start a fire in your heart, or put it out. Words can make you feel like a prisoner. They can make you feel set free. They can make you feel like a criminal, make you feel like a king. They can lift up your heart to places you’ve never been, and they can drag you back down to where you began. They can wound and heal, reveal and deceive, bring us close or push us away. And that is just normal, human words. Christianity, following Judaism, acknowledges

‘word’ as one of the chief ways that God makes himself known and effects his will. It is with words that creation begins: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” It is with words (a promise) that God joins himself to Abraham. And with words that God relates to Moses what it means to live as God’s people. Throughout the Old Testament, God *speaks* to His people with words—inquiring, bestowing, forbidding, announcing, admonishing, forgiving, leading, inspiring, condemning, comforting. Words are the primary way that God reveals himself in the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament, it is Jesus, *the Word*, the Word made flesh, that gives us the definitive revelation of God. His words reveal the very nature of God and God’s Good News for us. As Christians, we have to respect words and their power to heal and to hurt and, most of all, to reveal.

As a writer and preacher, I am dependent on words. But it’s not just me. I believe everyone—whether administrator or parent or technician or neighbor—is dependent on and affected by our language’s use and misuse. If we were to read poems as regularly as we read advertisements and memos and newspapers, perhaps our language would be more redeemed, more useful. This is work that Peterson ascribes to poets:

“Poets are caretakers of language, the shepherds of word, keeping them from harm, exploitation, misuse. Words not only mean something, they are something, each with a sound and rhythm all its own. Poets are not primarily trying to tell us, or get us, to do something. By attending to words with playful discipline, they draw us into deeper respect both for words and for the reality they set before us.”

As believers in the Word, we know how words are not just for naming, persuading, selling, manipulating or coercing. Words are a kind of incantation, the form of a spell, which like magic brings into being a reality that wasn’t there before. Think of the reality that is called into being with such words as “I love you,” or “You’re fired,” or “I forgive you,” or expletives like “[Forget] you!” To use another analogy, words, when they are used rightly, as a poet uses them, are like the “hyperlinked text” you see on webpages, the highlighted texts that when you ‘click’ on them, send you to another page. They’re like this because words are not superficial designations we use to communicate facts and get things done. They “link” us to the deeper reality the words signify.

Poetry reminds us of the power of words, of the jugular-grabbing, reality-revealing capacity of words. So, as we set into the summer, and you begin collecting your summer reading lists, I encourage you to add a book of poetry to your stack. You may just find your prayer life, indeed all of your life, changed by the experience of reading poetry.

Yours in Christ,

W Terry Miller

Wade in the Water

One of the women greeted me.
I love you, she said. She didn't
Know me, but I believed her,
And a terrible new ache
Rolled over in my chest,
Like in a room where the drapes
Have been swept back. I love you,
I love you, as she continued
Down the hall past other strangers,
Each feeling pierced suddenly
By pillars of heavy light.
I love you, throughout
The performance, in every
Handclap, every stomp.
I love you in the rusted iron
Chains someone was made
To drag until love let them be
Unclasped and left empty
In the center of the ring.
I love you in the water
Where they pretended to wade,
Singing that old blood-deep song
That dragged us to those banks
And cast us in. I love you,
The angles of it scraping at
Each throat, shouldering past
The swirling dust motes
In those beams of light
That whatever we now knew
We could let ourselves feel, knew
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—
O Tree—O Gun—O *Girl, run*—
O Miraculous Many Gone—
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—
Is this love the trouble you promised?

From *Wade in the Water* (Graywolf Press, 2018). Copyright © 2018 by Tracy K. Smith.



Often my word for my morning meditation and prayer is Abide, inviting God in and “pruning” what needs to be gone. In last week’s Gospel and today, Jesus says, “Abide in me, and I in you.”

Abide for me happens when I come to worship. I have come home to be with God and Christ, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to hold my hands up to receive the Bread of Life, to be held in the arms and prayers of the Body.

Abide for me happens when Carolyn and I gather to spend time in the Spirit, planning a lesson whose only focus is to introduce or grow our children in Christ and His love for them and nurture their spiritual foundation and identity as Christians.

Abide for me means sitting in Barbara’s House with those who have nowhere else to turn for a place to abide, a place to rest and renew. Abiding with them as I hear their story is a joy and prunes a place for me to tell them mine, to share with them the Gospel and the love of our Lord!

Abide is what Christ asks of the disciples at Ascension and abide is what the Holy Spirit does with them and with us, so that on Pentecost, “all together in one place,” the disciples, and us, can be sent out in to all the world, proclaiming:

**One bread, one body, One Lord of all, One cup of blessing which we bless
And we, though many, Throughout the earth, We are one body in this one Lord**

On Pentecost, like the early Christians, join to celebrate in worship the birth of our church, the new life in Christ of Rowan Mark, a butterfly garden planting, and the spreading world wide of the Good News in Christ Jesus!

*Come Holy Spirit, come,
Deacon Kathryn+*

Summer Shepherd's Way

- Shepherd's Way ends for the summer on May 20th with our Pentecost celebration
- Bev Young will be leading an exciting VBS based on King David. Please call her to volunteer and for more details.
- Relaxed lessons and activities will be provided for our worship hour throughout the summer for our youth. Please see Deacon Kathryn or Catechist Carolyn to volunteer. Everything that you need will be provided!
- The Prayground is open for the summer and nursery care will be offered. Invite a friend with "Little Lambs" and let Elizabeth Maloney know if you could volunteer to shepherd!
- Shepherd's Way starts again with a Fall celebration on Sunday September 9th. Please pray about how you might be involved in joining our youth in their walk with Christ! Let Catechist Carolyn or myself know!

Grace and Peace,
Deacon Kathryn+

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Loose Plate Offering

The Loose Plate Offering (cash) that is collected on the fourth Sunday of this month (May 27) will be given to Deacon Kathryn's Discretionary Fund, for use to assist needs in the community that are made known to her.

Festival of Pentecost

The Church feast, which commemorates the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, on Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ, will be celebrated on Sunday, **May 27**. The custom is to wear red on this day.

Baptism

As part of our celebration of Pentecost, we get to welcome Rowan Okoye Mark, daughter of Alex and Synda Mark, and newest grand-daughter of Norris and Kay John. In the sacrament of baptism, we will receive her into the household of God as she is made Christ's own forever.

MESA Food Donations

Please bring a can, bag, bottle, or box of non-perishable food item to give to the MESA food pantry.

WEEKLY CALENDAR

Sunday 9:45 a.m. Shepherd's Way (Sunday School) (Through May 20)
 10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite II
 11:30 a.m. Fellowship Hour in the parish house
Monday 7:00 p.m. Adult study group at the McDowell's home
Wednesday 10:00 a.m. Community Book Discussion
Thursday 7:00 p.m. Bible Fellowship – parish house

If you know of someone who is unable to get to church, but would like to receive communion, please let Father Terry or Deacon Kathryn know and they will arrange for a visitation.

PRAYER JOYS & CONCERNS

We offer prayers of healing for friends and family:

Melvin Amos	Lisa Gardner	Susan Mowchan
Corey Barker	Cynthia Gerstner	Dorothy Mudd
Emily Begovitch (Kathy Henken's niece)	Carrie Gilles	Susan Muston
Fran Bowers	The Gleason family	Amanda Paff
Jean Brashears	Griff & Vera Griffin	Sara Parmenter
Max Brown (Sue Burnett's friend, 4-y.o.)	Stanley Griffin (Vera & Griff's son)	Beau Puryear
Jane Camerer	Reggie Hall (Barbara Straightiff's brother-in- law)	Maria Rosenberg
Doris & Roland Chapman	Luke Harbert	Myia MacKenzie Shifflett
Sandra Clore (Waltine Robinson's niece)	Sue Lam	Lorraine Sandifer
The Cox family	Ted and Rene Hinds	Jacqueline Smith
Harley Cronk	The Hitt family	Matt Tsun
David Cronk	Ren LeVally (Dink's son)	Robert Ulrich
The Filmore Family	Keira & Brendan Miller	Bernie Valdez
Patrick & Sean Fohner	Rosalie Mow (Doug's mother)	Donna Whitman (friend of the Griffiths)
James Gardiner		Augusta Woodward
		Jeff Yowel

We pray for peace and the restoration of people's safety and dignity in Philippines, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Iran, Sudan, West Africa, and the Congo. We pray for the victims of violence in Beirut, Baghdad, Kenya, Paris, and San Bernardino.

We pray for the men and women in the armed services, especially Mike Butterworth, Patrick DaSilva, Graham Davidson, Sean Hegg, R.E. Hutton, Nathan Kinkey, Alex Gochenour, Jeffery Mainwaring, Todd Mainwaring, Anthony Mark, and Clay Puryear, and for our first responders. We pray for our presiding bishop, Michael Curry; our bishops, Shannon Johnston, Susan Goff, Bob Ihloff, the churches of the Diocese of Virginia, and for our 70 million brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion.

We pray for the families in Barbara's House; for the work of Madison Emergency Services Association, Madison Free Clinic, Literacy Council of Madison County, Boy's and Girl's Club of Madison, Senior Nutrition Site, Madison County Education Foundation, Boy Scout Troop 116, and Madison Strong.

We pray for our youth in college: Nick Bader, Josh Good, Izzie Hansen, Ben Landolt, Sam Landolt, Paul Jackson, Jacob Young, & Nathan Young.

We give thanks to God for all the families in this blessed Piedmont Church, and especially for the work God has done in the life of Peter Bank, in his recovery from surgery. Gracious Lord, guide, preserve and protect your servants as they create for your glory a holy family of love. May their love for each other be a sign of your tender care.

Graves Chapel News

Our next Evening Prayer Service will be Sunday,
May 27, 2018--at 4:00pm.

Everyone is welcome! Bring your neighbors, and
any additional friends and/or guests...

Should you have special prayer requests or needs,
please feel free to contact our Lay Preacher
Susan Bagby.

Additionally, Susan can offer you spiritual
direction. She is a counselor and is certified as a
spiritual director. There are no fees associated with
her professional services however she does
request a donation be made to Graves Chapel.

Please feel free to contact Susan at:

Susanhbagby@gmail.com or,

Telephone---434.978.1627

Graves Chapel is located at 104 Bluff Mountain Rd.
Graves Mill (Madison), Virginia.

Church Service Volunteer List May 2018

	May 6 th	May 13 th	May 20 th	May 27 th
Lector	Reggie Dale	Nick Spencer	Briarley Rogers	Sue Brown
Intercessor	Kathryn Thomas	Sherry Spencer	Eve Bargmann	Norris John
Acolyte/ Crucifer	Amanda & Thomas Dale	Jim Landolt	Beth Roireau	
Chalice	Kathryn Thomas	Bob Nowak	Eve Bargmann	Norris John
Usher	Briarley Rogers	Nick Spencer	Dink Kreis	Colt Puryear
Vestry Person	Hardie Newton	Dink Kreis	Margeaux Majewski	Jim Landolt
Social Hour	Carolyn Stanley	Pat Roberts And Sherry Spencer	Susan Good	
Altar Care	Molly Sanford and Dink Kreis			