

TWENTY-THREE

Centering and Mr. Kind

Hollie could hear Mr. Ironbout snoring in the study. It was 10:45 a.m. About an hour earlier, Mr. Ironbout had told her, “I feel a little knackered after the excitement of yesterday. I think I’ll take a wee five-minute nap.”

Hollie thought aloud, “Oban must really like the feather pillow Sister Ravena gave him for his birthday. He had said, ‘I want to break it in straightaway.’”

She turned to Trip, her new faithful companion. “You could sure use a new pillow, too, couldn’t you boy? Why didn’t I ask Goodwin to get one for you on the mainland?” She looked at her watch and remarked, “He should be boarding the Estillyen ferry by now.

“Fun party, hmm, Trip? Lots of people—and new friends for you. Mr. Statter said now that The Point’s opened up, he’ll come around with Tiptoe and Spook.”

She thought about how well the party had gone—and how much everyone enjoyed being up on The Point. Prominent in her mind was the image of Mr. Ironbout seated at the table looking up at the mirror and her gift, *Worth at Midnight*. She was thrilled to see Mr. Ironbout so happy and welcoming toward the guests.

Hollie opened the screen door and stepped out onto the porch with Trip. She carried a manila envelope, a pair of sunglasses, and a few dog biscuits. The two moved along the front of the porch and descended down the side steps. Hollie leisurely walked across the lawn in the direction of the grave plot. Trip scurried back and forth, carrying a stick in his mouth.

“The place has certainly changed a good deal in the past two weeks, don’t you think Trip, with all the planting of flowers and sprucing up?”

Hollie looked in the direction of the grave plot and thought, *I just love the way the ivy has replaced that old black chain of death. And Goodwin’s find of the cool-looking garden bench over by the cliff is so much nicer here in the lawn.*

“Come on up, Trip; there’s lots of room. You could sit four big human beings

on this great old bench,” Hollie said, as she pulled up a green-metal lawn chair to use for a footrest.

“That’s better. It’s so tranquil this morning. I’m flopping off these shoes, but I’m watching you, Trip—no running off with my flats. That’s it; just lay down. Good boy.

“Well, let’s see what we’ve got in the envelope. It’s the final *Redemption* reading. You’re supposed to read it, Trip, when you’ve time to center, to settle. I know that’s not easy for a border collie. Let’s give it a try, though. You go ahead and nap, and I’ll have a read.”

Silently, Hollie began to read the message. Trip lay on the bench beside her with his eyes closed, while Mr. Ironbout snored away in the house. A soft breeze filtered through the garden. Occasionally, Hollie would pause from the reading and glance at the plot, with its three markers.

Hollie remembered the day Mr. Ironbout stood in the plot and, with a worn, wretched expression on his face, said, “I’m a wounded man; can’t you see, I’m ruptured?”

She was still in awe. “He’s absolutely transformed,” she said aloud. “The change is like a miracle.”

More than once, Hollie lifted her green eyes from the page to gaze beyond the garden at the majestic beauty of the cliffs—as she allowed the monks of Estillyen to reach through to her with their final message of Christ’s love.



A Reading, Crafted Collectively by the Monks of Estillyen:
Centering in Christ

READER: Voice, St. Paul once sent a heartfelt prayer to followers of Christ in Ephesus. It was a prayer to ponder. Through time, the prayer has moved and mattered. Now a few lines have found their way into this Estillyen reading. Shall I read you the prayer?

VOICE: Yes, please. I'd like to ponder it, as well.

READER: Okay, Voice, but first just a few words. Please know that these thoughts so long ago expressed were strikingly new when written. Quite reform-ist was the prayer. St. Paul speaks of power in the inner being, of God's love being multidimensional, of love rooting in the heart. The apostle's words focus on Christ as being the One on which the heart centers.

Listen now to St. Paul's ancient words. Listen as if you were there and had just received his letter.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

EPHESIANS 3:16-19

Robust words, don't you think, Voice?

VOICE: They are. Will you kindly read that one line again, the one about grasping?

READER: Certainly. "To grasp how wide and long, and high and deep is the love of Christ..." Is that the one you mean? *VOICE:* Yes, that's it. It's the word *grasp*...grasping love—such an idea. It is, as you said, something to ponder.

READER: The apostle says this love surpasses knowledge. Did you catch that bit?

VOICE: I did. Yes, I did.

READER: When St. Paul traveled to Ephesus, he was taken to a place called the Areopagus, where he gave a speech.

VOICE: Areopagus—what's that?

READER: The Areopagus was an Athenian council, a local legislative body. It was allowed to function under Roman democracy. That's not so important to our reading. It's what the apostle said that matters. During his speech, St. Paul did something quite remarkable in selecting his words.

VOICE: What did he select?

READER: He quoted a line from an Athenian poet. In doing so, the line became scriptural truth. St. Paul was challenging his audience to consider the true nature of God, who God is. That's when he plucked the line from the poet. Concerning God, the poet said, "We are his offspring." That's it—a little line of words with which St. Paul concurred. A pleasant idea, don't you think?

VOICE: Yes. Offspring...it sounds rather wholesome.

READER: The Athenians were very much preoccupied with grasping the latest ideas. It was, for them, a sport. They loved to spend time talking and debating. When the apostle came along, they told him, "You are bringing strange ideas to our ears."

To the ears words flow, Voice. They find entrance. They winnow their way into the mind. They seek lodging. They come in phrases, throughout life's phases. Sometimes they speak praises.

VOICE: Words seek lodging?

READER: Yes, they seek recipients. They come to rest, to root. They grow. They lodge in the heart. That's how St. Paul's words functioned in the Areopagus. St. Paul placed the poet's line into his own storied mix. He went on to say that God made everyone from one man. You know who that is, don't you, Voice?

VOICE: Sure, that's Adam...if you believe the story.

READER: Do you, Voice?

VOICE: Well, yes, in a manner of speaking.

READER: I see. Concerning St. Paul's words, he argued that the human race was created by a reasoned, volitional act on the part of God. "God did this," Paul said, "so that men would seek him, and perhaps reach out for him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being."

That's something to grasp, something to ponder, is it not? These words, thus spoken, are in your ears, Voice, swirling in your mind, but in the heart will they lodge? What might these words mean to you? What might these words make of you? That's the subject of the matter now arisen. Are the words treasure or trash to you? Where might they take you? Where might they lead you?

Everyone follows someone, Voice.

VOICE: They do?

READER: Most certainly. Those who swear to follow no one follow at least one. They follow self. Self is full of words lodging in the heart. Did you ever think of your heart that way, Voice? A repository you are. Words have willed their way, winnowing through your mind, rooting in your heart. They move you. They accuse you. They excuse and abuse you. There's so much more to words, Voice, than intonation and resonance.

They come to you bearing thoughts. They clothe thoughts and make them known. Some for ill, some for good, words set out their roots. Voice, it's up to you to determine which words digress from the path wisdom professes.

Self following self puts one on a precarious path. Simultaneously self both leads and follows. Self, the guide, charts the way intuitively with words planted, rooted. Words move self. They make self.

Christ's words lodge in hearts most deeply. In their winnowing work, his words are carried along by God's Spirit. To life's essence, his words speak. "For whoever would save his life will lose it," Christ said, "but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Those words set loose have arrested many hearts.

Self is inclined to speak like this: “I’m not lost. I’m not letting go, losing life to find myself. Dear me, ask who I am. This I know. This is clear to see. All I need to do is look in the mirror. I see through and through. I speak to myself for myself. I know who I am. Can’t you see? I’m self-made. Scouring and searching for what? Winsomely I walk, with will, wit, and witty words.”

VOICE: If self leads, how does self find the way?

READER: Often by witty wit and will—wasn’t that how self worded it? Of this notion, though, self is rather shortsighted. There’s a snag within the wit, a fault line of sorts.

VOICE: Really?

READER: The snag is this: There is no self with selfless DNA.

VOICE: What’s that you say about selfless DNA? It sounds strange.

READER: You remember that wholesome word you liked?

VOICE: You mean *offspring*?

READER: Yes, that’s it. Offspring—one and all are sprung off, Voice. St. Paul claimed all offspring lead back to one. Universal ancestry is a mark of every self. Deep within each self, selves of lineage linger. All manner of inscriptions and implantations are there. They have a way of cajoling, congealing, and bending self. No matter how winsome the walk with wise wit and words, selves in self linger.

The mark of brothers’ blood gone to war, the bones of martyrs, too—they reside in DNA. Souls of sinners seeking grace...the wicked giving chase. All such inscriptions are woven into what presumption calls self. Who is it that speaks for self, anyway? Think about it, Voice. Which inscription might it be—the sinner seeking grace, or a wicked wick bearing self-prescription?

When self leads, the spirit follows. This creates all manner of maladies. Self cannot feed what the spirit needs. Self-leading is not wise. It’s otherwise. If you’re interested in being wise, look to ancient words akin to those we’re now considering.

VOICE: Which words?

READER: Choice they are. They're what you might call a prophetic prescription, an antidote to self-leading. Listen to what the prophet said: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths; ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

You now have these ancient words, albeit new to you, swirling in your mind, Voice. They are winnowing, moving. Even when you sleep, they seep. Are they trash or treasure? Will they take root? The prophet spoke of verbs—four, in fact. Stand, look, ask, and walk. They are action words leading to the path of rest.

VOICE: Do these ancient words still apply to someone like me?

READER: Yes, certainly. They're wise, not otherwise. They belong to that chosen reservoir of words that have stood the test of time. They shall stand, still, when time no longer ticks.

Ancient is good, Voice. It bears gifts from afar for the present's day. Anemic is the present without the ancient. Jeremiah spoke of ancient paths, beyond the crossroads trail. Ancient paths self cannot find by witty wit and intuition. Self must surrender. The word surrender sounds most threatening to self. Does it to you, Voice?

VOICE: I just don't know. I've never thought about it like that before.

READER: Self grasps the wrong idea. To self, surrender sounds like a chicken desiring to be plucked. There is a time, though, when all selves do surrender.

VOICE: When's that?

READER: It's when the foe of life comes creeping. Death drops in. Down is death's trajectory. It brings freeze upon the face. Self, to death, surrenders. Self may wail and weep, but in the end, life ends. Self surrenders. Self becomes ancestry, lineage, a name engraved, a testament to posterity. When death drops in, the spirit within self says it's time to go. The spirit flees.

VOICE: Where does the spirit go?

READER: The spirit trails away, traversing the distant paths self availed. At that

point, it's too late to sort out digresses from what wisdom professes. You see, Voice, the spirit has needs. It feeds on various seeds. Christ said, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" Christ cherished words, and he loved that line, "It is written."

The spirit feeds on grist from mills that grind words into storied mixes. The spirit feeds, while within the self it waits. There it resides, living longingly, or lapsing into lethargy. The spirit intuitively knows there is more to life than self. The spirit senses the eternal, implanted deep within man and mate. Jeremiah's prescription is offered to aid the spirit as it feeds.

The spirit, led by self, is fed from other troughs. The requisite of being self-made demands it. Relying not on divinity in self's realm of humanity, self enslaves the spirit. Without wisdom from ancient paths, the spirit lunges, plunges, feeding on what self avails. Bespoke the spirit is made—a hybrid of thoughts formed from all manner of wordy mixes.

No illusion should be held. A bespoke spirit can become quite unwell—bound, enslaved, and contorted. The unrepentant thief hanging on Golgotha's hill—was not his spirit ill, soured by self's incantations? So near to Christ he hung.

The thief's spirit would not kneel; self would not allow it. He repelled the figure at his side. He despised his words.

What was it St. Paul said there in the Areopagus, Voice? "God is not far from each one of us," that's what the apostle said. In Christ, God has come near, so very near. Into the scrum of humanity he has entered. Into the heart he seeks to dwell.

Spiked in crucifixion agony, the hardened thief would not surrender. Self had enslaved the spirit. They became one, inseparably defiant. The spirit had been caged, and true to self the spirit was. Like a bigot to bigotry, a brute to brutality, the spirit showed its unrelenting defiance of divinity. Though it realized the end for self was near, the spirit would not recant or repent, so enslaved it was.

To follow the footsteps of Christ, self must surrender. Self must relinquish its grip, let go of the helm, pick up an oar. Self must stoop down and carry a cross. Self must diminish, get lost, get out of the way, in order for the spirit to find its way.

Lost is good, Voice, most desirable.

VOICE: It is?

READER: Yes, Voice, indeed. Once you're lost, you can be found. This you find when lost you are. Lost, the spirit longs and listens for eternal echoes. The echoes lead. The mysterious harkens. This, too, is good, most desirable.

Along the journey's twists and bends, the words of Christ do not renounce their call. It was Christ who said, "Come follow me." His words led to rest. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life," Christ said.

Being centered in Christ is about more than belief and knowing, Voice. It's about Christ dwelling at self's center, in the heart, changing self in ways self cannot do. St. John wrote, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

VOICE: Wait, if you would, Reader. The idea of Christ dwelling on earth I see, but now you speak of the heart. This is challenging to grasp.

READER: You're very right, Voice. It is mysterious. So too was Christ's earthly dwelling. How do you explain it? God in human form, begotten not made. In all of eternity, nothing is its equal. The One who dwelt on earth can equally dwell within the heart. By faith it is so. By the Spirit of Christ, it is possible.

The Spirit of Christ occupies the heart's center, filling it with Christlike characteristics. The apostles once described themselves by self. "I'm a tax collector. I'm a fisherman. I'm neither; I'm his brother." They all became something else when to self they died and surrendered. They became new. Not just spruced up or a little changed—new characters they became. New dreams they held. New life they possessed.

Upon Christ they centered. He became their life, their calling, their sense of doing, their experience of being. His words they spoke, not self's witty wit. His image they bore, not their own. Into the crossroads of life, the apostles stepped, paused, and stood. They looked, listened, and dared to ask. They walked, but they also followed.

As Christ came strolling by, there were many who chose not to follow. The apostles might have joined them. Clung tight to their sails. Mended their nets. Kept fishing for fish. Posterity never would have revealed Sts. Peter, James, and John along with all the others filling the Gospel story.

On Christ's path the apostles chose to tread. The more they lost, the more they found. The cost was high. All that self possessed had to be redressed, let go. There were crosses to carry. The apostles' crosses, though, stilled self's claim. In following Christ, the apostles became who they were meant to be.

St. Paul, too, was a follower who died to self. In so doing, Saul became Paul. It was with utmost confidence that St. Paul wrote about being rooted and estab-

lished in the love of Christ. This brings us back, Voice, to the very heart of our reading.

VOICE: That's good.

READER: Professed faith in Christ begins the journey. It opens the gate to the path of rest. But the journey is long, Voice. The Ephesians, for whom St. Paul prayed, were believers. The apostle's prayer was about grasping the full measure of Christ's love. His words pressed directly on that point.

The Spirit of God works with power in the inner being. Working deep within, the Spirit gets to the heart of all those implantations, sorting and rooting them out; pulling them down, lifting them up.

St. Paul's forte was to admonish and to lift up the supremacy of Christ. He was a master at it. He saw Christ dwelling in space and time, but equally in the heart. The heart is where the spirit, soul, and mind mingle. They mix and match storied mixtures. The heart chooses its embrace.

In this vortex, the Spirit of Christ dwells: stilling the storm, quieting the gale, rendering rest. The dwelling of Christ's Spirit shapes the sensibilities of the spirit.

VOICE: I hear you, Reader, and all that sounds extremely important. Yet it is so mysterious, I can hardly take it in. I'm not sure how to put it. The word in my mind is *worth*. That's the idea—you know what I mean? It's so incredible to think that this could happen to simple homo sapiens, fascinating.

READER: So simple we're not, Voice. Mysterious is this dwelling, imparting Christlike changeability from Spirit to spirit. There are those, many such, who choose to shun the spiritual quest. Don't want it; don't feel they need it. They prefer God distant, considered only at a glance, if at all.

Their feet tread not the ancient paths. There is no walking, listening, or seeing. Blurry distance is the desired position. Too much of seeing threatens self.

The mysterious truth of Christ dwelling in the heart is embraced by faith. There is no other way. This is what you must comprehend. The mysterious is to be welcomed, not pummeled and pounded for proof, like some shank on a slab. Who wants everything in life explained? Do you, Voice?

VOICE: Well, we've gotten so immersed in this flow of thinking. Yes, I've been,

or tend to be, more the pounding type, I suppose. Maybe I should take a break, clear my mind. Please, no offense.

READER: Is that what you wish—to take a break?

VOICE: Well, not really...I don't think so, anyway. But it's a little scary, this denial of self, this surrendering. The words flowing from this reading are not normal. How shall I put it? They're not bound by rudimentary thinking concerning the makeup of man. That's it.

READER: Do the words scare you, Voice?

VOICE: This whole matter of swirling vortexes and the Spirit of Christ dwelling—it's a lot to grasp. This vista of human worth is appealing, though, I must admit. It's just new for me, sort of scary.

READER: Were you scared before you were born, Voice?

VOICE: What kind of a question is that? Scared before I was born! Dear me... maybe I should go. You're so, I don't know...

READER: Where will you go?

VOICE: Don't know. I'm resourceful. I know a lot of storied mixes. I'll pick and choose, a snippet here and a snippet there. Before you know it, I'll have a mountain of wisdom to quarry.

READER: Will you quarry out a story?

VOICE: I might. I've been known to string a few lines together. I like words, always have.

READER: What if the words you choose to quarry your story don't like being fashioned and fitted together? They might start stinging each other, like wasps fighting bees.

VOICE: I suppose that could happen, couldn't it?

READER: Quite likely. What part will you play in the story, Voice?

VOICE: I'll be myself. Plot the plot. Sign the script. Speak my voice. I'll be the lead character.

READER: I see. You'll need prayer, I would think. Why don't we return to the ancient one rendered by St. Paul?

VOICE: Well, I guess we could. I hope you don't ask me any more crazy questions—like was I scared before I was born.

READER: Okay, I won't. But were you?

VOICE: Didn't you hear what I said? Are you insane or something?

READER: I heard you, Voice, certainly I did. With every respect, I abide your words. But this is not another question; it's one and the same.

VOICE: All right, just to make you happy—the answer is clearly No! How could I have been scared before I knew anything of knowing? I knew nothing before I came to be.

READER: You knew nothing, you say? So you're not self-made?

VOICE: Of course not. How could I decide to make myself? I'm an offspring.

READER: I'm glad you have professed that point, Voice. No one is actually self-made. Before you knew yourself, you were known. You are a vital character in God's storied mix.

VOICE: I am?

READER: Yes, indeed. You can quarry your own story, if you want. But you needn't do so. You're in the story of which St. Paul spoke, just as surely as he stood in the Areopagus quoting the poet.

I like you, Voice.

VOICE: You do? Why's that?"

READER: Because you're honest. You speak of worth. Life is so much more than rudimentary elements. Pursing worth is the right idea. Christ offers depth, imparting life spiritual. Into Christ's Spirit, the spirit of surrendered self cocoons. This truth is not a simple token, simply taken. It's mysterious, full of wonder. The spiritual quest is unending. Into eternity it folds. Forevermore it lives.

St. Paul was not shy on this subject of mystery. "I know a man in Christ," Paul wrote, "who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows, was caught up to paradise. He heard things that man is not permitted to tell."

This man, so caught up, was Paul himself. Sifting the mysterious out of Scripture greatly impairs the storied mix. Scripture, from beginning to end, is lacquered and layered with mystery. Pitching the miraculous out of Scripture, yet clinging to a few verses promising passport to heaven, is not compatible with wisdom. God is exceedingly mysterious. Why not let the miraculous be, let God be God?

The inexpressible things St. Paul experienced in heaven's realm no doubt had an enormous impact on all he wrote, taught, and preached. The apostle's striking prayer about the expansive love of Christ arises from this backdrop.

Let's consider rightly those words of St. Paul. To grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, that's how the apostle put it. The love of Christ is where faith is centered, Voice. It's where the soul finds rest and peace finds its pillow.

To grasp the dimensions of Christ's love is to grasp the Father's love. The Father's love is seen in the giving of his Son, in letting go. The Son's love is seen in going, dwelling, and dying.

VOICE: Do you understand this dimensional grasp?

READER: In part, yes. You never fully get it—you know what I mean, Voice? It's a revelation that keeps revealing. An epiphany dawns...and then another.

VOICE: I think I understand.

READER: You go on grasping, perceiving, seeing as the love of Christ dwells in the heart. The spirit needn't be bound by self's paltry center. God's love is

towering far above a world of words and more, which come and go, saying this and meaning that.

God's words have no ulterior motive or malicious intent. From on high, like rain and snow God's words come down. They moisten seeds for sprouting; they impart life for living.

The psalmist writes, "I lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Up is the direction, beyond the bickering, brokering, and bothered press of the day. Up is the way, with eyes peering beyond terror on screens appearing. Up is the way, beyond minutes of time ticking and death tolling its daily tallies. Up with eyes of hope, to worth not wanting, pulled down, wrestled to the ground by self.

The selfless love of God is lifted up.

VOICE: Where?

READER: On a cross spiked, that's where. Christ is there, beaten and bloodied for the world to see.

VOICE: But I was recently told not to look.

READER: By whom?

VOICE: Relevance. Relevance said that's all over. That Christ was taken down long ago. Said it was time to lighten up.

READER: Lighten up—on the one lifted up, you say? Does that sound right to you, Voice?

VOICE: Well, I have the feeling you don't think so.

READER: Why is it you speak of me to sort your feelings?

VOICE: I don't know. Maybe it has something to do with those words you spoke. Swirling as they do, winnowing their way.

READER: To the cross you do not have to look, Voice. It was God lifted up. He gave you sight. Look away. See not the dread. It may pierce your heart. It may not.

VOICE: No, I'm not afraid to look. It is, as you say, an ancient story gifting the present.

READER: Taken down, Christ surely was. That's true, yet eyes of enlightened hearts fail not to see him there. The one taken down is forever there. The medium and the message of God are indistinguishable upon the cross. There they embrace. They overlap. They hang together. They speak together. They intersect. They form a sign, a message whole for the world to ponder.

To look away does injustice to the message. It strips meaning from the story. With eyes lifted to the cross, the height of God's love is seen. Look around. Find some other figure of hope. Does it appear more comfortable, more salient? Do you like what you see? The apostle spoke of eyes within the heart as a way of seeing. Eyes of the enlightened heart see by faith.

Where does my help come from in order to see? It comes from there.

VOICE: Where?

READER: Where the Son of God hung, suffered, and died. God knows pain. God heals pain.

VOICE: So, should I look?

READER: Would you not, what might you lose?

VOICE: I do feel inclined—sort of drawn.

READER: All right, then—look. A lonely hill it is. See there in the distance. Christ hangs. Campfires 'round about are burning. See the smoke—how it lifts and lingers in the thin chilly air? Smell it?

VOICE: I do. You're right—this is a lonely place. It's actually morbid. It's like a fresco, but then not at all the same. And to think a world of art has come from this. So, too, all those musical compositions arise from this scene. I'm spellbound. What is it I see? What is it I hear?

READER: The words being spoken are somewhat hard to grasp. Listen—did you hear that shout, those moaning cries?

VOICE: What's that quirky sound?

READER: That's the sound of soldiers laughing. This is not a silent night for Mary's Son. It's a night of terror, torment, and treachery. The scene is savagery. Look, the Son of God has opened his eyes again. He's looking down at the crowds staring up at him and shouting, with their shaking fists. There are even children in their midst.

Let's move closer. Are you okay with that?

VOICE: I'm sobered. I feel speechless.

READER: From the bottom up, take in the cross. Inspect it. Do you see how the crimson stain has soaked into the wooden base? Christ's feet are spiked, his torso ripped.

VOICE: What's that dripping from his chin?

READER: It's blood. This is a sacrifice, you see, Voice. Look fully upon this panorama of pain. There's much for enlightened eyes to see.

VOICE: I'm looking up beyond the cross. I have to look away. I'm not sure what it is I see. Now it's gone. It looked like eyes peering down. And that, did you see that? Again, I'm not sure. It looked like angels, with wing-covered faces.

READER: Look on the ridge over there.

VOICE: Those are women watching.

READER: They're all weeping. With eyes streaming, see how they stare at the central cross. They gaze at grace. Mary, the mother of Christ, is there. Her offspring is dying. God's offspring is dying. Crucified, he is dying. Mary watches the mockers mock. She sees it all. How can she bear it? Price, price, price, paid! So costly is the price of redemption.

With eyes perceiving, for just a moment, peer out over the haze, Voice. Look up toward the hills for help in seeing. Above the smoky hills, the stars sparkle, do they not?

VOICE: Yes, they do.

READER: See them twinkling across the moonlit sky. Ponder them hanging there. Consider their origin. Were they not hung by the one hanging there in the center of Golgotha's hill?

VOICE: It must be so.

READER: It's true, Voice. The one in the shadowy hues hung them there. High is the love of Christ, lifted up for enlightened hearts to see.

Wide, too, is this dimension of love. Stretched out are his arms; wide is this exhibition of eternal love. It's inclusive, not exclusive. There is no qualifier concerning scope. No "We'll have to see. Who do you know? We'll have to check."

Consider Christ's reach. The invitation is to all who surrender. The psalmist David spoke of God's reach. "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?"

"Where can I flee from your presence?" You spoke of fleeing, Voice. Do you still want to flee?

VOICE: No, I don't think so. My feet do not feel flighty. I'm somehow held captive by what I see and hear.

READER: Think, Voice! Ponder the scene. Many run to quarry stories from witty words. They reject faith. They do not find. They are not found. They find not their place in the ancient story gifting the present. There the Word of God hangs. With eyes of faith, look! The scene is a sign signifying what God means, what God wants to convey. Before the scene was, God thought it. There's far more on that hill than witty words.

Down the Via Dolorosa Christ walked, with criminals on each side. Among thieves he hangs. His arms to them are stretched. That's where God chose to die, Voice. Thieves left and right. On one side is rejection; on the other side acceptance. Arms stretched to both signify the enormous reach of God's love.

Human love can tend to be so tenuous in comparison. Often it draws away and disappears. Once it might have been there, reaching, embracing, caring. Suddenly it's gone. When it should hold fast, it lets go. Bitterness and pain may push it away. Self may will it away. It may be wooed away. Somehow love is lost. It's gone, retrenched.

God's love is not that way. It never retrenches. God is "loving toward all he has made," the psalmist said. There is no prejudice or injustice. Broad and inclusive—that's the image of God hanging there. There's no clenched fist, no hint of spite, at humanity marred by sin.

The price of recompense has been paid by God. From the cross grace extends. The scene on Golgotha's hill also signifies the depth of God's love. Look again. See the cross, anchored in the ground from which man was formed.

VOICE: What about the cross itself, its composition—should this be considered?

READER: Why not? It's made of wood. It was once a tree. It was felled, and now it's dead. Birds once perched in its branches. Those were the days when the wood was rooted and alive, before it was fashioned into planks for death and dying.

Look at the planks; all semblance of life is gone. No branches, no leaves, no fruit, nothing to eat. The planks are barren. They offer no shade. They bear no beauty.

The planks are implements of torture. They're awkward measurements of weight. When the heavy planks were hoisted and dropped, they proved their heft. They thudded to the ground. Death was calling. The planks' pull is death's gravity. From them, life's blood drips.

VOICE: What do you suppose Christ thought when he heard that thudding sound?

READER: He thought the end was near. Look closely. See the planks' swollen grains? The planks have all been splintered by spikes from others who were crucified. They're used, abused. Still their grains tightly grip Christ's spikes of infectious rust. The grains sponge and soak the warm crimson stain. That's what has created all those splotchy patterns. In the act of man's inhumanity to man, the depth of God's love is seen.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Did you hear that cry through the deathly air? That cry, rising from this crucible of suffering, is unparalleled. Sin's foul and death's dank have come to meet. They have come to stomp out the light. This is the deepest of valleys. Yet therein is God's love.

The words of the psalmist quiet the heart: "Yea, though I walk through the

valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

VOICE: I like those words.

READER: Many do fear evil, knowing nothing of rod and staff or words such as these. Human history is a journey long through valleys of shadowy death. The shadows vary from one valley to the next. Up and down the canyon floor, one can hear the rumble of war and rumors of wars. Peace comes, and then puff, it's gone. People suffer. Strange words appear. Collateral damage, it is said.

VOICE: Why is it called that?

READER: Yes, why? The heart, you know, can break with burden. All feeling seems to be below the ankles. The brokenhearted shuffle and drag their feet.

King David knew such burden. Listen to his words. “I am feeble and utterly crushed: I groan in anguish of heart. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.”

Unrelenting such sighs seem. Was there no air of promise? King David discovered there was. He would live to sing again. Beneath his despair, God's love was deeper still.

Eyes of the heart look to the cross and see that God is present, not fleeing. God pierced with pain is the image God has rendered. It is not a human fabrication. It is not an application. God supplied it. Consider it, Voice. For you it is rendered. The image speaks to the depth of God's love. In this cross-shaped depth, God binds up the brokenhearted.

God knows pain. The psalmist says, “Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people.”

From the psalms, ancient words also speak to the length of God's love. “The Lord will keep you from all harm, he will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

“Forevermore” is a word with a wonderful disposition. Not just forever, but more than forever: forevermore. In perpetuity, infinity is the sense of meaning conveyed. The psalmist's refrain rises: “Give thanks to the God of gods; his love endures forever.”

Not fading or dissipating but enduring is God's love. Beyond time's ticking and the world's whirling, God's love never fades. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me." This is what Christ came to say. God's love never fades. It is like Christ's words. "Heaven and earth will pass away," Christ said, "but my words will never pass away."

Never-fading words—how can they be described? They are the cornerstone of eternity and forevermore, these words of promise, these words of hope.

VOICE: The cornerstone of eternity—is there one?

READER: Yes, Voice. The stone the builders rejected will hold eternity together. You know, Voice, as we've moved along, upon your ears have fallen a collection of ancient words. Do you know what that means?

VOICE: Yes, they're swirling, winnowing, in my heart and mind.

READER: That's right. They are God's thoughts clothed in words. Ponder, grasp, if you wish. It's for you to determine if they digress from wisdom's way or reveal it. Let me leave with you these lines before we part. King Solomon wrote them. He is said to be the wisest man who ever lived.

"Remember your Creator, before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

Voice, my reading is near its end. It's been great to be with you, but I've got to go. Know this, though: Christ will not change or flit away. He is as he was and will always be.

Rest for the soul is not an illusion, Voice. Look to ancient paths. The good path is found by way of the valley. In the valley, eyes of self will not do. One needs eyes of faith to see. There, deep within the valley's gorge, is a cleft. The eyes of faith will see its light streaming through. This is where rest is near.

To the cleft climb and cleave. Follow it upward to the crest. The crest gives way to a vast plateau, a word-filled meadow, the place of rest. Move along the flowing stream of waters fresh, knowing rest for the soul is near.

A single signpost points the way. Eyes of faith will not miss it. It's a simple cross, a sign signifying that which countless souls have journeyed to embrace. This is the place to center, still, and kneel, if you so desire.

There is safety in the cross's shadow. Freely you can lie in peace, at rest forevermore.

VOICE: I like you, Reader.

READER: That's kind of you, Voice.

VOICE: You're honest, and you speak of worth. I like your words. I'm just not sure what to say. I mean...I'm just so taken by all we've been discussing.

READER: That's good, Voice. It doesn't sound like you're quite so keen to run off and quarry your own story with witty wit.

VOICE: Not now. That doesn't seem right anymore. These winnowing words may well win over wit. Instead of quarry, I'll ponder, particularly the eternal cornerstone. That's got me.

READER: Good-bye, Voice.

VOICE: Good-bye, Reader. And thanks for all you've said. I'll never see words the same.

Words matter...some forevermore.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

ST. PAUL, ROME, LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS, CIRCA AD 62



“Trip, there’s a lot of worth in this final reading, a great deal,” Hollie said. “This is the kind of thing human beings store away and then pull out again, and again. Let’s walk ’round by the cliff before we go back in. Come on, boy.”

Hollie glanced at her watch and thought, *Goodwin should be getting off the ferry any moment.*

Her timing was accurate. As Goodwin walked down the ferry's landing ramp, he noticed a young lad with a sign bearing his name. In bold letters it read, "Goodwin Macbreeze."

"Hi! I'm Goodwin Macbreeze."

"I'm Toby Blyer. My dad is the owner of Blyer's Café. I'm supposed to tell ya that you're to go to the deli to pick up the cane. That's all I'm to say."

"The cane?" Goodwin asked.

"That's what I was told to tell ya. I'll run ahead and tell Dad you're coming."

"Okay...thanks."

On the way to Blyer's, Goodwin walked up the road running alongside Grims Park. He thought of the lunch he and Hollie had with Mr. Kind. How delightful and curious the time was, and how charming Mr. Kind had been!

Goodwin thought, *It seems like at least a year has passed since that lunch. I honestly don't feel like the same person who sat in the park that day, telling Mr. Kind how Hollie and I were on a journey of sourcing. Estillyen has changed everything.*

As he neared Blyer's, he looked up at the front of the deli. In the center of the store's plate-glass window, he saw what he thought to be Mr. Kind's cane. Three strips of wide masking tape held the cane fast against the glass. A prominent handwritten sign was taped beside the cane; it read, "Cane for Goodwin Macbreeze." Intrigued, Goodwin stepped into the deli.

"Hello, I'm Goodwin Macbreeze."

"Aye, Toby said you was coming. Feller left this cane for you—what a deal. Was here a couple of weeks ago or so and asked if I would do him a favor. I said sure. He insisted on compensating me for the trouble.

"Wasn't no trouble, I said, but he said he wanted to 'rent the space,' as he put it. He said we could call it window lodging for the cane. I told him I'd never heard of such a thing. He said, 'You've heard of lodging, ain't ya?' I said, 'Sure.' He said, 'Well, this is lodging without the lodger—just the lodger's cane.'

"You know, it began to make sense. I thought it was like storing luggage for a traveler. So he pulled out three rare coins and asked if that would do. I was shocked. I started thinking maybe he had escaped from an institution or something. But, no, that couldn't be; he was way too dapper. Full of cheer he was, whistling and chatting with everyone.

"He sat right there at the center table and made that sign. I offered him my sharpest knife. Said you would be coming today, but he wanted to put the cane up to show he was here for the original date. Then he said he was glad you was

late, because you had very important work to do on Estillyen. Then he started singing-like while he was taping up that sign.

“He climbed up on the chair. I tried to help him, but he insisted on doing the taping himself. Said he’d had the cane for ages. Started singing a little tune, ‘Oh, the more you lose, the more you find; the more you find, the more you lose...’ that kind of thing. Don’t know if the slender old fellow was a bit off his rocker. Asked him what line of work he had done, and he said he was into restoration. Suppose he meant antiques.

“Say, that cane is old; everybody’s been looking at it. Marsh from Burker’s Auction House looked at it—he collects ’em—and said he’d never seen one like it. No one can make out the wood. I’ll tell you this, though, that’s the best advertising I’ve ever done, even though I didn’t do it.

“You have no idea how many people have come in here asking about that cane and Goodwin Macbreeze. It’s the curiosity factor. When I tell them the cane’s just lodging, it only stirs up more curiosity. Then, when they go over to the window and see that little envelope taped to the back of the sign with the word *Note* written on it, they can hardly stand it; they want to open it.

“Now that you’re here and the cane’s coming down, I’m gonna have a sequel. I’m gonna tape a purse in the window and make a sign saying, ‘Purse for Gloria McDaniel.’ I’ll tape a little note on it, just like the fellow did for you.

“See yours on the back of the sign? It’s that little blue envelope. Simply says *Note* on the front. I got some little green envelopes about that size. I’ll put *Note* on it just like he wrote, but I’m not gonna write anything on the inside—at least I don’t think so.

“Anyways, let me get the cane for you. Say, did you like Estillyen? Did ya find what you was looking for? Nice place—I was there only once for one night. I suppose I’m too busy to contemplate. Never was one for contemplating. I tell you, though, this cane got me contemplating.

“Here, it’s yours. See that red purse? That’s the one I’m puttin’ up. Hey, Toby, we’ll put that up in a few minutes, so don’t run off. I want to get it up straight-away. Don’t want to waste any time. After a month, I think I’ll put up a hat, or a fishing pole. ‘Note for Cleo’; something like that. I’ve got lots of ideas.”

“Thanks, Sir. And, yes, Estillyen was a wonderful experience. More than I ever imagined.”

“Happy for ya. You gonna open the note?”

“I think I’ll just wait; I’ll stick it in my pocket for now. I want to get a sandwich and go to the park. I’m catching a train in a little while.”

“Sure—whataya have?”

“The second on the board—the spicy raisin chicken on a hard roll sounds good.”

“Sure thing—I’ll have it for you in a minute.”

“And I’ll have a fizzy apple drink.”

“Say, is that fellow a relative of yours or somethin’? He sure was keen to get you that cane.”

“No, not that I know of, but some things you just don’t know until you know ’em.”

“Hey, that’s kinda the way that feller talked. People sure looked at him with curious eyes. Everything about him was a bit different. Hope he comes back. Do you know where he lives?”

“No, I don’t believe I do.”

“Shame. Anyway, here’s your sandwich. I put a good portion on it.”

Goodwin paid for his sandwich and thanked Mr. Blyer and Toby. He walked out on the pavement and stood there for a moment watching people shuffle by. He recalled Mr. Kind’s words about hawkers and messengers running about and how people can get confused. He crossed the street and turned around.

There, in the store window, was Mr. Blyer taping the red purse to the glass, and Toby holding the sign that read, “Purse for Gloria McDaniel.”

He smiled and moved along to Grims Park, where he found the same bench that he, Mr. Kind, and Hollie occupied on the day they met. Goodwin set his sandwich, drink, and backpack on the bench and sat down. He laid the cane across his lap and lifted the blue envelope from his shirt pocket.

He opened the envelope. The note inside read, “On the back of the cane, six inches up from the bottom, you will find what appears to be a small, dark knot. It’s not. Take a sharp item, like the head of a pen, and push in on the center of the knot. The bottom of the cane will then unscrew, and you’ll find a second note from me.”

Goodwin quickly unzipped the pouch on the front of his backpack and found a pen. He pushed the knot and unscrewed the bottom of the cane. An inch of wood was all that turned. The break in the cane was invisible, concealed as one of the three ebony bands near the end of the cane. Attached to the removable end was a thin, six-inch copper cylinder.

Goodwin tapped the copper tube across the back of his index finger. A piece of papyrus slipped out just enough that he could pinch it and pull it out. He took the end section with the attached copper tube, screwed it back into the cane, and set the cane on the bench.

He then carefully unrolled the little papyrus scroll. It was upside down. He turned it right side up, and this is what he read:

Dear Goodwin,

I'm so elated you found this scroll and the brief words written herein. Your venture to the Isle of Estillyen was not by accident, happenstance, or chance. It was by providence.

You are chosen to lead—and follow. The phrasing of that last line is rather important. You may choose to not follow on in your choosiness, but I believe you have the heart of a ready messenger.

To the land of Estillyen you have gone, and there you found what you did not expect to find. The more you lose, the more you find; the more you find, the more you lose. Lose it—self, that is.

Beyond the sketch, beyond the graves, you found life. Life is for living—not for death and dying, but for living. On the path you placed your foot. You dared to take a step, then another, joined by others. A new world it is into which you've walked. You're brave.

You will never be as you were before you became as you now are.

You've witnessed life reversing, self dying, people crying. You've witnessed love. You've heard amazing words.

Determining how ardently in his steps you'll follow is now your challenge. Follow who? Who is he? The Word who dwelt, that is he. The Message A Medium of God, who spoke words not his own. That is he. He's the one to follow. Let self go; let self follow. These words of mine are not hollow.

What will you find? You will find that you have been found by the One you follow. You, I do believe, have been found, along with a troubled soul who is troubled no more, Mr. Oban Otto Ironbout. The dear fellow is now a soul at rest; peace is now his pillow.

Who am I? Not who I appear to be. I bear a cane. I find a name. I say a word about words. I'm a messenger. Take my cane, young man. I've got work to do, and so do you.

At this very hour, I'm rather far away from Grims Park, scattering a few seeds, known as words not my own.

I hope you'll do the same.

For now and forevermore,

Mr. Kind

P.S. In case you're wondering, the coins are real. A bit of lost treasure from olden days.

Goodwin slowly raised his head. He could scarcely take in what he had just read. Yet he did not disbelieve. Calmly he stared out across the park with a pleasant smile upon his face. A warm breeze gently blew, causing the small papyrus scroll to briefly flutter. Then the breeze vanished. All was still...including the young man seated in the center of the bench, in front of that broad oak tree, in Grims Park.

Estillyen words flow forth in message form, making meaning...