everything [in] between

Meeting God in the midst of extremes

Poems for Lent-Easter

Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

There are a number of ways to utilize poetry in your ministry. You might print and distribute these prayers to members in your community, or read them aloud to open and close study sessions. In worship, you could offer a poem as an opening reflection, a meditation during the sermon, a moment of reflection after the sermon, or as a written prayer printed in the bulletin. However you utilize these poems, please include credit as follows: Prayer by Rev. Sarah A. Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

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ASH WEDNESDAY

everything [in] between **intention & action**

Both, Please

It's one thing to speak of love. It's another
to hold a newborn in your arms,
to sing someone to sleep,
to lean down and listen for their breathing.

It's one thing to speak of faith. It's another
to press your forehead to the floor,
to cry out in prayer,
to ask the hard questions and still
thank God for the meal.

It's one thing to speak of the Divine. It's another
to walk under a tunnel of wisteria,
to stand barefoot at the edge of the sea,
to hear the birds sing as the sun returns
and whisper, *Thank you, thank you, thank you.*

It's one thing and another, so I pray,
Give me both, please. Show me both, please.

Never Met a Stranger

When we talk about God, we say
she's never met a stranger.
She makes friends at the airport.
She waves to babies in the check-out line.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll leave the porch light on.
She'll have warm bread in the oven.
She'll have all the time in the world.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll look you in the eye.
She'll love you as you are.
She'll call you by your name.

When we talk about God,
we never have to talk about
which side of the road she might walk down.
Wherever you are,
that's where she'll be.

Wildfire

I can picture it—salty sweat, accumulating in her bangs. The scent of toasted sesame seeds, crushed oregano, sumac, and cumin. Flour on her hands, painting streaks of white in her hair when she ties it back. The sweet date she samples—the way it stretches and clings to the back of her teeth, leaving the taste of honey in her mouth.

I can picture Martha in that kitchen, plating meals, eager to see their eyes close. Their heads nod. To hear the swell of approval that rises from their lips. And I can picture her sister. Brows scrunched. Fingers fidgeting, wishing for a pen, for paper, for a way to write it down. I can see her mouth part like a fish in the air, questions forming and reforming on her curious lips. I can see her lean in, knees tucked, eyes bright. I can see her imagining the world he dreamed of.

And I can picture how,
for generations, this story of two brazen women in scripture, a story of two women so close to Jesus, may have felt like an untamed wildfire. I can picture the way we put these women in boxes. I can imagine how people saw their full hearts, their untamed energy, and decided to label that as good and bad, better and worse. I can imagine how Martha's questions were interpreted as nagging, or the interruption interpreted as needy.

I can picture how it happened,
but what if it was all more beautiful than that? What if these sisters discovered a ministry of cooking? What if they discovered the faithfulness of learning, the kind of friendship that allows you to ask questions, or something in between?
I can imagine it. Can you?

Slow Growth

There's a vine in the South that covers everything.
It chokes out the light. Grows up to twelve inches per day.
In a matter of years, it will blanket a forest.
If you saw it from space, you'd marvel at its reach.
If you saw it from the passenger seat, you'd weep at what it covers.
Those looking for fast shade plant this invasive vine.
Who can blame them? We're all impatient.
But if it's fruit you want—
the tart cherry,
the sticky sweet kumquat,
the soft side of a peach,
the crisp bite of an apple—
then bless the rain.
Thank the sun.
Put your hands in the dirt,
and wait.

The Good Shepherd

Jesus said, *"Who among you wouldn't leave the 99?*
Who among you wouldn't look for the one?"

Someone in the crowd probably rolled their eyes.
Someone squirmed and looked at their palms.
Someone sighed and thought to themselves,
"This man doesn't understand the business.
What fool would leave 99 to look for one?"

But maybe God was not talking about us.
Maybe God was talking about
her own reckless love.
Maybe God was talking about
her own willingness
to turn the world upside down
for me.

Righteousness & Mercy

As children we were taught to tell the teacher.
(Justice was dealt when we spoke up.)
As children we were taught to always be kind.
(Friends were made when we spoke love.)
As children we were taught that Zaccheus climbed a tree.
(But we cut that tree down a long time ago.)
So what are the rules for this day and age?
Can we turn black and white into shades of gray?
Do we call each other out, for righteousness sake?
Do we call each other in? Do we grab something to eat?
As always, love is somewhere in between.

Call Me In

You could call me out.
You could hang me out to dry.
You could list my sins.
You could shrink me down to size.
Or, you could call me in.
You could grab my hand.
You could show me what I missed.

If You Really Listen...

In the city you'll hear horns, the clatter of the subway,
mothers calling to their children, saying, "*Take my hand before we cross the street.*"
You'll hear church bells, Salvation Army bells,
people asking for spare change, while others ask for directions.
You'll hear the whistle from the traffic cop,
the exhaust from the bus,
that *a train is arriving in two minutes.*
You'll hear mothers selling fresh mango,
theater kids selling tickets,
and religious groups selling ideas.
But even with all that shouting,
even with all that noise,
the birds still sing.
Against all odds,
thanks be to God,
the birds still sing.

Power Like a Seed

In a world that wants power like a machine gun,
power like a bomber plane,
power like a gated fence to keep the hungry out,
I want power like a seed—
power that will crack me open and grow something good;
power like an open door,
an invitation that says, *"Come on in;"*
power that feels like a strong spine with a soft heart.
I want the power to listen, to lean in, to ask follow-up questions.
But more than anything, I want the power to bring us together, to lift you up.

There are different kinds of power.
One will build a wall.
One will plant a garden.
We should know by now, only one will bear fruit.

I've Been the Thief

I want my own miracle.
I read about the blind man and the woman who touched his cloak.
I read about Lazarus and the little girl who got up.
I have seen love after loss
and recovery after addiction,
so I want my own miracle.

And if it helps,
I'd be willing to beg and barter for it.
I'd be willing to kiss the floor,
to sell a portion of my days,
to press my knees to the ground,
to live with this ache.
I'd be willing to pray all night,
to pray until my voice is hoarse—
Save yourself, and us, or just,
Save yourself, and me.

But eventually, my demands soften.
Eventually, the edge in my voice smooths.
Eventually, time wears down my insistence,
and *Save yourself and me* will become:
If you're there,
just don't forget me.
Please, don't forget me.

In the Direction of Hope

I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden;
I will be there soon.

I'm not the fastest runner,
Lord knows that,
but these legs are moving.

I suppose I could blame my weary spirit for the slow speed.
I could blame the grief I've shoved into my pockets and
laid around my neck.
I could blame my own hesitation to hope,
a hesitation that clings like mud.

But I don't know that Jesus cares about my speed.
So tell God when you see them—
I am on my way.
Wait for me in the garden.
I will be there soon.

About the author

Rev. Sarah Speed, *Founding Creative Partner of A Sanctified Art*

Rev. Sarah Speed *(she/her)* is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Social Work, and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary. Sarah loves to combine her love of all things creative with her passion for God. She believes that the Church has a responsibility to open every door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities. Sarah feels called to live her life welcoming people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world. Writing is her most beloved spiritual practice. You can find her daily poems on Instagram and Facebook: **@writingthegood** | **writingthegood.com**