

*Mustard Seeds  
and  
Dandelion Weeds*

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## AT THE HOSPITAL

Leaving the room,  
I see how far I get  
Before that wistful sensation

Catches me  
As I recall  
My stumbling, tentative steps

Across the boundaries  
of privacy  
Wondering if where I

Shouldn't is where I  
Must step  
In necessary intrusion

The choice, always  
a crap shoot  
Sometimes a violation

Other times an opportunity  
For healing intimacy  
The risk being

That "healing intimacy"  
May or may not  
Be an oxymoron

In any given situation  
Sometimes I just  
Play it safe and superficial

Truly caring, but  
Truly shallow  
And leave wondering

If I have disappointed them  
While knowing that  
I disappoint myself

Other times I  
Reach through the veil  
And make contact

Giving what I have-  
Precious little -  
Wishing I had more to give

Maybe a miracle,  
A "rise up and walk"  
or a banishing of pain

Wishing that I really knew  
Whether offering hope means raising  
Expectations or lowering them

Giving what I have -  
An honest prayer  
The touch of a hand

Then I leave the room  
And see how far I get  
Before that wistful sensation

Catches me

*journal*

## PREMEDITATION

I have sung before  
of singing  
Now I write of writing

I have come out  
into one of those  
domesticated patches of wildness

Called parks  
I have listened to honkers  
dispute territory

And F-4's fly maneuvers  
I have sat  
on beaver-fallen trees

I have grasped at them all  
In my mind  
Longing to devour them

To pass them through me  
And excrete them digested  
As poetry

Be the means, I plead  
Be the means of my redemption  
Let words of you justify my being

And they do not resist  
Neither to they assist.  
The irrelevance of my quest

Does not even occur to them  
They sense not my anxieties  
They accept my existence

I am but one more  
Watcher  
From the trail

Filling my niche  
In the local ecology  
They care not

Which tax base protects their habitat  
They simply live in it  
While it is there

And the grass rustles  
In the wind  
unabashed by my staring

Not caring  
That I chew it in my mind  
Like a cud

*journal*

## 3/4 TIME

They have called me  
As their pastor  
The call indicates three quarter time

It is an arrangement  
Of financial origin  
For them

For me, it is the price  
Of being a pastor  
Not to say that in desperation

I was willing to accept  
Less than full measure  
Rather, it was three quarter time

That teased me into consideration  
Of a profession  
That always asks too much

I figured that  
Three quarters of too much  
Might border on sanity

So I gave it consideration  
Which has led, in turn  
To a consideration

Of the relationship between  
time and  
calling

Which turns out to be  
A bit  
Obscure

I mean  
If  
During my "free" time

My time "off"  
I read a book  
Or make a contact

Or a meditative reflection  
That enriches or focuses  
Or expands my ministry

Do I count that moment  
Toward the three-quarter time  
That is my congregation's due?

I have acted out  
this contractual burlesque  
For a year and a half, now

Regularly wondering if I  
put in enough time  
Or too much. I mean

Does obsessiveness count toward my time?  
or if obsessiveness is counterproductive,  
Then should detachment count?

Should I be given credit  
For time when I  
Let go?

I have been told by pious commentators  
That good pastors have  
No need to keep track

Which is an interesting thought  
To be sure  
But may unwittingly open the door

To uninvited corollaries  
Since that thought  
Fits well with my own reflection

That in a world caught up  
In doing enough  
Or at least putting in enough time

There should be some  
Whose vocation is simply to  
Be

A position  
That necessarily would have  
No need to keep track

That would even  
Be disqualified  
By keeping track

I believe this to be  
A valid vocation  
But also acknowledge

That, much like that of the true prophet  
Such a vocation  
Would inevitably go unfunded

So much for that digression  
Useless to one like me  
Who has bought into the institution

For its benefits and securities  
Which I do get enough of  
At three quarter time

What I have come to realize in practice  
Is that 3/4 time can also mean  
three-four time

Not so much setting a quantity  
As establishing a rhythm  
Which may be why I have always

Been a bit puzzled  
When people ask me  
What I do with my “other quarter time”

There is no other quarter  
The beat is only missing  
To those who need to march

And now it makes sense  
That those who have  
spoken of me as “waltzing” through life

Have used the word  
As an accusation  
And an epithet

Now I realize  
That I have been wrong  
In defending myself

For I do waltz  
It is the meter of my life  
The tempo of my spirit

It is the signature  
Of many of my ballads  
For it lends itself to telling stories

Yes, I am waltzing through life  
Not even marching  
To the beat of a different drummer

No drummer at all  
No cadence count  
Yet my life is not without its rhythm

And order  
Though some have obviously  
Found that order to be offensive

Or at least unfitting  
In a culture  
On the march

So unfitting that it took  
A crippled congregation to call me  
Even as it wondered at my style

In a way it has been a good match  
But as their wounds heal  
They grow restless to rejoin the march

They are concerned that  
I will leave them  
But it is they who are already leaving me

For I am waltzing  
And will continue  
To waltz

And though they will regain  
Their missing quarter  
I must continue in three-four time

*journal*

## NEW CHURCH

People talk of how mergers  
That talk about mission  
Are merely the consolidation of attrition

History seems to say it's so  
At least, the odds seem  
To favor that end

And so some anxiously insist  
On some kind of structural insurance  
To match the rhetorical assurance

That we will beat the odds  
So, through alignment of  
divisions or allocation of staff

The mechanisms of mission  
Are beefed up and fueled up  
To at least compensate for

Momentum inevitably lost in the administrative  
Process of merging.  
Not a bad idea, but insufficient

For it is not technicians of mission  
That we need  
But poets of the Spirit

For though the Word surrounds us  
It takes an artist  
To help fish perceive the water

And Psalms, stories, and icons  
Are not merely illustrations for sermons and theologies  
Quite the opposite is true

*journal*

## BRINGING UP CHRISTIANS

I suppose it was because  
I had already had a long day  
And had a Lenten service yet to do

But whatever the reason  
I didn't have the patience  
To ride herd on my confirmation class

They were too busy being what they are  
Not so much disrespectful  
But maybe too young jaded

And I only have the question -  
An unusual thing from someone  
who uses questions as

Rhetorical prefaces  
To his latest theories -  
But I have only the question

And it becomes more  
Urgent  
As my bride battles morning sickness

Is it possible to raise children  
Into the Gospel?  
And if so, how?

*journal*

## PARISH PASTOR

When I was in  
Eighth or ninth grade  
I came home from Bible camp

Wanting to be a pastor  
I think  
My motivation

Was that anything worth doing well  
Was worth doing zealously  
And I was into righteousness

But times changed  
And I became disillusioned with institutions  
They didn't meet up to my standards

And I wandered  
For several years  
Looking for something or someone

That could  
A lonely search  
That bore bitter fruit

But times changed  
And I became disillusioned with my search  
And myself

Admitting that I didn't meet up to  
My standards  
Either

So I capitulated  
Sold out  
And went to seminary

Not because I had regained  
Any pastoral vocation  
But because I was good at theology

And four years of seminary  
Was four years of  
Not having to explain what I was doing

But finally that time ran out  
And for lack of anything better to do  
I let momentum carry me

It carried me to Nebraska  
To a church as crazy as I am  
A church I secretly disdained

Not because it was crazy  
but because it was a church  
And I didn't see myself as

A parish pastor  
But I had bought in  
And in my own way

Entered the fray  
With all the zeal  
Of an anxious impostor

Careful to try and meet  
Expectations as much as possible  
Lest my cover be blown

All the while  
Resenting it  
And looking for a way out

But the grass does not  
Look greener in other fields  
Not really

I may move on to other pastures  
But may need to first find  
Happiness as a parish pastor

Lest my restlessness  
Follow me  
Like a shadow

*journal*

## RIGHTEOUSNESS

The uneasiness lingers  
And festers.  
If there were a scab, I would pick at it

How hard it is to receive disapproval  
However mild  
However uncontrolling

No anger there  
Just a need to note  
Dissatisfaction with a particular

Change in routine  
Just a loyal supporter  
Letting go of an irritant

Yet, I am thrown off balance.  
I leave disturbed  
And chew disapproval like a cud

For I must be right - always  
And always choose wisely  
And rightness ought to be known

By its pleasingness to those affected  
But choices are never pleasing to all  
And rarely are they clearly right

Rather, they are always choices:  
Judgment calls, compromises, gambles  
Reaping harvests disturbing to the righteous

Disturbing  
Those who expect righteousness  
And those who need to be righteous

*journal*

## LOOSE CANON

So  
You have a Bible  
on your desk  
or in your pocket  
or at least in  
the nightstand of your motel room

Maybe so  
But what a scholar would say  
Is that you're packing a canon  
That is

A collection of books  
Endowed with authority

That much all scholars agree on  
But it gets more confused after that

For some scholars defend a "closed canon"  
Scripture locked up tight  
Secure against  
Intruders  
Revisors  
And late breaking contributions

Thus we are shielded  
from Gnosticism, Islam, and Latter Day Saints  
while Jews are shielded from us

But it is embarrassing to find  
not one "closed canon"  
but several: Roman, Orthodox, Protestant

And what about the Coptics?  
For sometimes we forget  
They're still out there, too  
Some scholars speak of a "canon within the canon"  
Making some parts of scripture more equal than others  
Respecting the authority of the canon

De jure  
While, de facto  
they redact  
By selective and hierarchical reading

Some scholars assert an "open canon"  
Promoting the radical thought  
That the one who once spoke  
Still be permitted to speak

What an interesting thought  
But there never was just One speaking  
and trying to sift epiphanies  
out of the cacophony  
can give one second thoughts on the matter

Of course  
I am no scholar  
but permit me to speak  
of a "loose canon"

A play on words  
At once humorous  
and grim

Reflecting the fact  
That what we most desire  
when we reach for our canon  
Is fixity

For a fixed canon  
is useful for firing broadsides  
at problems or people

While a loose canon is most dangerous  
to those who wield it as a weapon

I find the Bible to be just such a loose canon  
One that makes me hesitate  
to take aim with it

A canon loose enough  
That I can't help but engage with it  
Jumping into the middle of its arguments  
Siding now with Paul  
and later with James  
about the righteousness of Abraham

Consulting with Hagar  
and then Moses  
about the visibility of God

Questioning the unquestionable  
As did Job  
No blasphemer, he  
But one who dared to call even God to the witness stand

Yes, I have found a loose canon  
so let me grapple with it  
Wrestling the unbeatable  
As Jacob did at Peniel

That in wrestling with it in its looseness  
I might be uncertain  
whether I am engaged with scripture  
Or God themself

A thought you might find blasphemous  
And so erect a screen  
To shield God from this infidel's touch

But you of fixed and little faith  
Must never have truly *tackled* scripture  
And found yourself with a tiger by the tail

How petty is the idol you surround and protect  
Your protectiveness itself  
Reveals your apostacy

For anyone who would protect the Word  
from the grit and grunt of engagement

Can never have known  
the thrill of imminent domination cut short  
by that crippling touch to the hollow of the thigh

And no one who has known that touch  
And so been renamed  
Would deprive another of such sweet defeat

And no one who has known that touch  
Would even consider  
Protecting scripture from the bout

Knowing that the Word is a moving target  
and a changeling  
Alive and strong  
And not adverse to making and breaking rules  
as it goes along

Maybe not inerrant  
or even infallible  
but certainly incorrigible

So give me a loose canon  
So full of tensions and ambiguities  
That I can never pin it to the floor  
That in the struggle with it  
I will always know that my soul  
and my God  
Are both alive

*journal*

## CONTROL

I don't much like myself  
'Cause I'm not keeping  
On top

Of all the things I ought  
You see  
The church building is rather torn up

For repairs and improvements  
And this is the last week  
Of Lent

And I should be in control  
So that things will be ready  
for Easter

Then there's the funeral to be done  
That I'm supposed to do  
But I haven't heard much about it

And I need to control things  
So that the family doesn't choose  
To have the funeral

At this torn up church  
That doesn't even have  
Entry way steps

Up which to bring the casket  
And I need to be able  
To control the daycare center

That meets in our basement  
To make them all go away  
During the funeral and reception

So much to control  
(most of it not even mentioned)  
So much to control

And I cannot do it  
And I'm not sure I want to  
I don't want that role

But if not me, then who?  
God?  
?

Sometimes  
The "leap of faith"  
Is simply into freedom and trust

*journal*

## ADVENT - GOD THE EXPECTANT FATHER

The process has begun  
And no matter how proud  
Pappa-to-be may be  
About his performance  
He now must accept  
A role of watching  
And waiting

As he watches  
She grows  
With pregnant unevenness  
As he waits  
She changes  
Her moods swinging in time with her hormones

As one comes  
To dwell among her  
She becomes more vulnerable  
More dependent  
And she struggles  
With a pressing need  
To trust him more than she would like

He is supportive  
Tries to reassure her of his presence  
Tells her how  
He will be with her through it all

Still, he knows  
That she alone must bear the pain  
Travail is hers alone  
He can only watch  
And wait for the unfolding  
Of what he has begun

Deeply involved  
Yet, out of control  
So it must be even when God has a son

## GOOD NEWS

Talked with Mike today  
about evangelism  
Told him that the Church  
has to be about "Good News"  
or hang it up

He said that sounded good  
which reminded him that  
the part in the Advent  
dialogue of the Service of the Word  
where the pastor says that  
God's "help is near for those that fear him"  
Just didn't cut it

For a moment, I tried to  
explain away the violence  
latent in the phrase  
but had to admit  
that there's no "good news" in fear

Mike told me that  
We've got to start with  
God's love  
or forget about "good news"

And I've got to grant  
that simple point  
and not violate it  
by playing games  
of sophistication,  
irony, or nuance  
which are great in their place  
but obscene as rationalizations

Still, I cannot deny  
that much of scripture  
is rooted in fear as  
the operative concept  
basing our relationship to God

on images of one who would rather  
Burn us than make us whole

No, we must not put ourselves  
above scripture  
yet  
We must humbly repudiate  
some of what it says

For though fear of the Lord  
may well be the beginning of all wisdom  
It is through foolishness that we are saved  
the foolishness of a perfect love  
that robs us of our wisdom  
by casting out our fear

*journal*

12/31/87

New Year's Eve

I ponder the year nearly gone  
and the year nearly here  
I remember a year of rebuilding:  
Roofs, walls, lights, and such  
A year of rearranging the furniture  
and of rearranging my life

A good thing  
But too often I have been distracted  
with finding the proper arrangement:  
A place for everything  
and everything in its place  
A place for everybody  
and everybody in their place  
A Word for every occasion  
and every word in its place

Fortunately  
confirmation classes  
babies  
and building programs  
remind me that reality  
is more unruly than I had planned  
And sometimes it occurs to me that  
silence can be the wisest of words  
and waiting, the surest of actions

For something is happening  
Quite apart from me  
Quite apart from you  
A Spirit stirs us both  
A seed hides within the soil  
Buried  
it takes root  
Ready to grow  
And to embrace the new year  
as a vine embraces the trellis

*newsletter*

## SPRING FEVER

Spring has arrived  
All the plants are putting on festive blooms  
Robing themselves in  
Proper vestments for the Sundays of Easter  
Before donning the staid,  
liturgical green  
Of summer

Baby squirrels frolic next door  
Birds are nesting in the rafters  
Of the parsonage garage  
Which accounts for all those  
Oddly placed droppings, and  
Which also explains all those paw-prints  
that show up  
when I pull down the garage door

I must admit  
That I don't know who to root for  
The peaceful, family oriented fowl  
Or the predatory feline, who  
Albeit crudely,  
May relieve the Buick  
Of further indignations

Spring has indeed arrived  
And as catechism  
Impatiently lunges its way  
To a Pentecostal conclusion  
The pastor itches to touch base with the flock  
And wonders how best to go about it  
An awkward task  
For a shy man  
Who labors over whether to  
Drop in and risk intruding  
Or to  
Call ahead and seem too formal (shy people do fret over such  
a choice)

After two years of intermittent fretting  
I have decided to cheat  
And so am distributing postcards with boxes to check  
In hopes of assembling a crib sheet  
With which to embolden a cautious spirit  
By insuring that  
This stealthily stalking pastor  
will leave no  
Faux pas prints

*newsletter*



## MUSTARD SEEDS AND DANDELION WEEDS . . .

Are symbols of the kingdom of God  
The first you know from the parable  
The second you know from your front lawn  
If you don't know why the second one  
Is a symbol of the kingdom  
You probably don't know  
As much as you thought you did  
About the first one

Neither is very impressive  
Both are impossible to eradicate  
Neither is particularly welcomed by the world  
Both are assured an abundant future

The kingdom of God is like that:  
Weeds invading the lawn of our life  
When what we were hoping for was  
A big cedar  
To shade the front porch  
(Ezekiel 17:22-23)

Abundance in spite of our best efforts.

*newsletter*

## A HOT AUGUST NIGHT IN SAGINAW, MICHIGAN

Mom taking a shower  
Babe in the crib  
Dad stretched out on the bed  
Silently fighting the tides of his soul  
Waves of expectation  
Break across the shallows of his life  
Knocking him down  
Dragging him under  
All the shoulds that never could  
All the oughts never caught  
Recollections and anticipations  
Wave upon wave they come

Until he is pulled out of the seas of his mind  
By the sound of baby stirring  
He knows the drill:  
She sits and stares with eyes unseeing  
Her sluggishness a calm before the storm  
He knows he cannot sate a nursing baby  
But he can stall

He lifts her to his shoulder  
Rocking her back and forth  
Whispering into her ear the music of the seashells  
Holding off the gathering tempest  
And as he does so  
He knows that the moment is complete  
And so is he

For now he understands  
That faith is like soothing a little baby  
So that holding to one thing securely  
Is of more value than juggling many things skillfully  
And now he understands that faith  
Means being the baby held  
And receiving a peace that he cannot make for himself  
And that the tides of life cannot wash away

Mom will come soon

But Dad and babe rock peacefully  
And wait patiently  
He has saved her from her storm  
And she has saved him from his

*newsletter*

## BEGINNING

...then Wisdom took the wheat  
and ground it into flour

finely she ground it  
then added to it  
water, oil, and salt,  
mixing it in a hollow of the earth  
The dough was very good  
she thought  
but somehow lacking in....  
spunk

So she pushed into the dough  
a lump of her own leaven  
and kneaded  
pushing out  
and folding together  
till it took on a life  
of its own

man and woman  
pushing out  
and folding together  
kneading life into life  
to bring forth life  
she watched the life  
and saw that it was good

she took that life  
and set it free  
man and woman  
pushing out  
experiencing their world  
folding together  
bringing their world within  
life elaborated

she set them free  
and watched them

think through their world  
naming it  
and knowing it  
thinking it into themselves  
and she saw that it was good  
but dangerous

trying to protect them  
she warned them  
not to think on themselves  
nor to name each other

at the first warning  
their eyes lost their outward focus  
sight turned to insight  
and their countenances fell  
as it occurred to them  
that they would surely die

at the second warning  
two sets of lips sprang into motion  
but a hand stifled one set  
as the other spoke but one word:  
"Eve"

the two turned  
without looking back  
and fled their mother  
who cried  
and laughed  
and decided  
that it was time to take a day off  
and that was good

*journal*

## IN MEMORY OF RICHARD ROBERT LACY

Like a voice that makes you want to  
Clear your own throat  
Richard had a kind of awkwardness about him  
That could reach out and grab you  
As you lurched through an  
Attempt at conversation with him

He was the type that people  
Would try to draw out of his corner  
And into whatever conversation  
Was going on at the center  
But corners had a hold on him  
So he stood his watch in them  
Security guard that he was  
A man of the edges  
His own edges worn  
Frayed by the cares of life  
And dented by its obstacles  
Until finally his center caved in

He died alone at his rooming house  
But they brought him back  
So he could die a few times more  
An act of compassion  
Yes  
And one he was grateful for  
But one that set him up for round after round of institutional  
indignities  
That told him in no uncertain terms  
That he was the least in the kingdom of this world  
Nothing personal, mind you  
But that was the whole point:  
Nothing personal

But there is another kingdom in our midst  
And maybe we even helped him taste it  
Before we lost him to it  
For prayers and balloons  
(those breaths of air that tug the heart upward)

Can do that sometimes

Yes, there is another kingdom in our midst  
Which I have long sought to take by force  
But my words are too polished  
And my timing is too good  
And those surface qualities  
Distract me from the child of God within

A distractedness that will give me a certain  
Awkwardness  
When I finally stumble through the gates of heaven  
Where I may just find Richard  
Bulletins in hand  
There to usher me in

Him who had no polish  
Whose timing was off by much more than a heartbeat  
Who came up short of skills with which to master  
The callousness of this world  
Which should make him a sure and certain guide  
In the next one

*newsletter*

## ON THEIR RESPECTIVE TRANSFIGURATIONS

Ages back  
The wild-eyed one climbed a mountain  
looking for order  
He had a cult following  
but had come to see the limits of leading a cult

Remembering how  
When he had held up his hands  
Israel prevailed  
When he had lowered his hands  
Amalek prevailed  
"But Moses' hands grew weary"  
So they had propped him up  
and they held up his hand  
and the puppeteer  
became the puppet

So he climbed the mountain  
Seeking some device that would free him  
From his own power

On the third trip up  
the laws were waiting  
set in stone  
set in a cloud  
shining with the glory of the Lord

Moses entered the cloud and stayed for a while  
Later, as he was leaving  
God asked a favor  
"Make me a tent, that I may dwell in their midst"  
So Moses took down some specifications  
and continued on his way

Arriving back at camp  
his face shining with borrowed glory  
He found a scene of faithlessness  
In his anger he broke the stones  
And slaughtered those who broke the law

Yet the law had worked  
So once again  
Moses climbed the mountain  
to gather the stones  
that would replace him  
at his death

There came another one  
who frequented mountains  
and had a cult following  
though he had no illusions that it could  
or would  
follow where he would go

His own advance man asked  
“Are you the one who is to come  
or shall we look for another?”

When he stretched out his hands  
the blind saw  
the lame walked  
the etcetera ceteraed  
but Israel did not prevail  
and many took offense at him

He foretold that  
He would be propped up  
His hands held up like a puppet’s  
but that by yielding so  
He would snip the strings  
of the grand puppeteer  
(who, for the record,  
would have preferred not to waste  
such obvious talent)  
Upon reaching the mountaintop  
the ancient script got jumbled up  
The cloud didn’t come in on cue  
So when the glory of the Lord switched on  
it was shining on Jesus, alone  
Then, when Moses and Elijah

stumbled in from a neighboring set,  
Peter tried to cover by ad libbing  
something about making booths  
which would have been fine  
except that the cloud finally rolled in  
with full orchestration

When the disciples pulled their faces  
out of the dirt  
all they saw was Jesus  
who told them to save that story  
until he had risen from the dead  
They all chuckled  
but not too loud  
In case he wasn't kidding

Back in town  
Jesus found a scene of faithlessness  
In his anger he cast out a demon  
and exhorted those who had not ventured on grace

Yet grace had worked  
So he had no more need to  
climb mountains  
Knowing that his death  
could replace the stones  
that Moses had gathered

It was the same  
Only different

*pastors' text study*

## IT WAS A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT....

For some unknown reason  
Maggie was wound up tight  
Tired  
But unable to go to sleep  
Exhausted  
But unable to even slow down

She fussed and cried and kicked  
Was passed from parent to parent  
And made us wonder how single parents survive  
As the standard routines failed us  
We grasped at straws  
Until we came to an old theory of mine  
That the artificial lights  
We take for granted in modern homes  
May withhold from children the natural cues of sunset  
Just a theory from the gut  
But we didn't have much to lose

Gradually, we turned out the lights  
Even turned off the TV  
But given the season  
We gave dispensation to the Christmas tree lights  
Which, after all  
Are only night-lights on a string

In the midst of that synthetic twilight  
A hush fell over the house  
Which we wrapped around ourselves like a blanket

When Maggie finally drifted off to sleep  
Kathy took her back to the bedroom  
Leaving me to ponder the tree

It struck me that there are few objects in life  
That I can just sit and look at  
Sunsets  
Waves on a beach  
Fireplaces

And Christmas trees

When I give my attention to objects such as these  
I come to rest in a way that is meditative  
Holy  
The way I try to rest at church, but fail

I find this spirituality of mine a bit unorthodox  
And I wish I were more conventional  
But I do not lose hope  
For I know of three astrologers  
Who followed their pagan frames of reference  
All the way to a small town in Palestine  
And gave their praises to a babe  
Praises  
That have been reckoned to them as righteousness

The lights on my tree echoed the stars of the Magi  
And as I took my rest in their peace  
I realized how little attention I give to such signs  
From day to day

Would I have noticed the star?  
That I cannot answer  
Will I notice the sunset?  
That question may be more important in the long run

And that one I can work on

*newsletter*

## REFLECTIONS OFF THE REAR VIEW MIRROR

Westbound I-80  
The last miles of two thousand  
Riding through the night  
Passengers asleep  
Coming home  
West of Des Moines  
The fog rolled in  
Until my knuckles began to turn white  
And the curves in the highway  
Began to jump out at me  
Only at the last moment

Ours seemed to be the only vehicle  
In that stretch of highway  
Until two headlights stabbed at my rearview mirror  
Growing quickly larger  
Until they were upon us  
A pair of harnessed comets  
That swept by my window  
Trailing a dazzling spray  
Of red and yellow running lights  
A show of luminary excess  
That gave the cattle trailer  
The look of a Christmas tree

As the truck glided past me  
I saw through the night's soupy darkness  
The twenty red lights that outlined  
The hind parts of its trailer  
Forming a glowing red rectangle  
That dangled above the ground before me  
As it eased back into our lane  
I realized that its bobbing and weaving  
Was showing me the way  
Where it went  
The highway was about to be for us

Yet, even as I watched

The constellation of lights  
Began to recede into the murk  
So I prodded the old Buick  
To keep pace with my guide  
Faster and faster I pressed into the night  
Holding fast to those guiding lights  
Faster than was legal  
But now sure of the path  
Faster than was cautious  
Yet prudently maintaining a safe following distance  
In case what I was following  
Was an "accident looking for a place to happen"

...I'm sure that some form of that phrase  
Was used to describe Jesus during his ministry  
For the boy and anyone who followed him were marked for  
trouble  
But as he blazed his path  
Through the dark night of the human soul  
Many of those in his wake held fast to his guiding light  
Faster than was legal  
But now sure of the path  
Faster than was cautious  
And, as for prudence  
Many found, one Friday night,  
From the vantage of a safe following distance  
That prudence is a luxury  
That faith might not survive....

Eventually, it was time to make a rest stop  
By the time we hit the end of the ramp  
Our escort was gone  
But then, so was the fog  
And soon we were gone, too  
Westbound I-80

*newsletter*

## ON HOW SIGN-UP SHEETS A CHURCH WILL NEVER MAKE

It was communion at the kitchen table for George and Marie

Marie doesn't see so well anymore  
She wears a large-print wristwatch  
And has to be pried out of the house with a crowbar  
So the wafer and the wine come in a little black box  
And though the pastor officiates in blue jeans  
His running shoes sport the proper color for the Sundays  
after Pentecost

Before and after the victory feast they talk around the table  
Conversation bouncing far and wide  
A son considers the ministry  
A score of men die to keep the railroad running  
And as they come about to yet another verbal tack  
Marie notes in the lull  
That Nita called her up the other day  
Just to say hello  
No major event  
But one worth noting

And somewhere in Montana  
Not all that far from where  
George and Marie's son  
Ponders a career as a preacher  
A snowflake falls  
No major event  
Not even worth noting  
Except for the fact  
That this crystalline bit of insignificance  
Adds its negligible weight  
To a glacier

Different day, place, table, occasion, and crew  
Same pastor

He pieces together his report to the council  
From notes on a scrap of paper  
And, poising his pencil over the one phrase  
Not yet scratched out  
He says, "Keep talking to each other"  
A phrase they have heard before  
And have a feeling they are going to hear again

No, one phone call doesn't change the world  
But then, neither does one snowflake

*newsletter*

## CREED

The utilities know where to send the final billings  
The post office is set to forward them  
If the utilities forget

Eighty dollars has reserved a  
A twenty-four foot U-haul truck  
And a tow bar to pull the pickup  
These items are certainly symbolic  
For I came to Lincoln pulling a U-haul with a pickup  
So the more things stay the same  
The more they change

I am still Gary  
And you are still Prince of Peace  
But the more we stay the same the more we change

Lyle says, "Change is progress"  
And that's a good slogan  
But Lyle knows better  
Still, change gives opportunity for progress  
And without change there are no memories  
    No stories worth telling  
        No songs worth singing  
            No creeds worth affirming

And Lord knows  
We need all the affirmations we can  
get our hands on

So, fear change if you must  
But don't flee it  
Pray your way into it  
And you'll find yourself with more creed  
Than you ever thought possible....

(Now, I'm lousy at goodbyes  
And I don't trust last words  
I just muddle through them  
That's all  
And that's it)

*newsletter*