

***Rising to Grace***  
***May 29, Ascension, 2022***

He was one of us  
    *Son of Man*, child of Mary,  
    A human being,  
        made of flesh and bone,

Feel your hands  
    His were just like yours

Had a heart beating within his chest  
    A heart that warmed and raced and broke,  
A mind that soared and pondered  
    And eyes that sometimes could not stop weeping  
        Like ours this week.

He was blessed, tempted, befriended, tormented.  
Who knew tenderness, and savagery and practiced forgiveness.  
    He taught us  
        To love ourselves  
        To love our neighbor  
        To love our enemies  
        All as God loves us  
            And to lay down our lives for one another

And then he did  
    Rather than take back what he'd taught us  
    Rather than to deny the Christ within him.  
        To renounce those who said there was no God  
            but Caesar, or corrupt religious power,  
            both who proclaimed  
                God lived by their limits.

Death might have ended Jesus' life  
    But not the Christ within him.  
    Christ arose.  
        On Easter morn  
            And then, once more and finally  
                according to both Matthew and Luke.

Luke gives us two accounts of the ascension.  
    The one David read  
        And again, in the

Book of Acts of the Apostles.

The Risen Jesus, still bearing the scars of his mortal life  
Has been appearing among his followers  
On the 40<sup>th</sup> day, the disciples asked him:

*Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom?*

Still hoping it seems for what Judas and the rebels wanted  
for that kingdom of Israel  
to rise again in glory and power.

Jesus was always speaking of the Kingdom of God.  
And he does, again:

“Yes, you will receive power  
from the holy spirit  
to be my witnesses”

*Mou martyres in Luke’s original language:  
my martyrs*

*the holy spirit will give you power to bear  
the cost of following me.*

And then he is raised up.

The scarred, resurrected one,  
becomes Divine light and grace  
his human journey ended,  
enfolding into the pervasive presence  
Of the Eternal  
Jesus becomes Christ for the world.

Here is a poem by Anglican priest and poet Malcolm Guite,

*We saw his light break through the cloud of glory  
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place  
As earth became a part of Heaven’s story  
And heaven opened to his human face.*

*We saw him go and yet we were not parted  
He took us with him to the heart of things  
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted  
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,*

*Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,  
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,  
Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness  
And sing the waning darkness into light,*

*His light in us, and ours in him concealed,  
Which all creation waits to see revealed.*

His light in us  
We enabled by the power of the spirit  
To be his martyrs, his witnesses.

His light in us  
seems deeply concealed this week  
And our readiness to be his martyrs, his witnesses  
challenging.

I wanted to hear the voice of a victim  
And found Taylor Schumann, who was shot through a door  
By a young man with a gun at her college in Virginia,  
bullet fragments lodged in her eye.

Taylor is an evangelical Christian  
And this is her witness:

I believe in the power of prayer deeply.  
And I think when we pray about gun violence  
we are not always open to hearing what God has to say.

Are we really willing to be used to reduce this violence?  
If God's answer to our prayers requires personal sacrifice,  
are we willing to hear that?

Every single year, 40,000 image-bearers of Christ  
are taken from this earth by these acts,  
If we are truly pro-life, must we not speak for life?

40,000 image bearers, including all those children

What happens when we think of one another this way?

When our understand of Christ for the world  
Means Christ in all?

Caryll Houselander

was on the underground train in London,  
A crowded train in which all sorts of people  
jostled together

Suddenly, she says

*I saw with my mind, Christ in them all.*

*Christ in every one of them,  
living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them,  
sorrowing in them*

*I came out into the street and walked for a long time in the crowds.  
It was the same here, on every side,  
in every passerby – Christ.”*

*I had long been haunted by the Russian conception  
of the humiliated Christ,  
the lame Christ limping through Russia,  
begging His bread;  
the Christ who, all through the ages,  
might return to the earth and come even to sinners  
to win their compassion by His need.*

*Now, in the flash of a second, I knew that this dream is a fact . . .  
Christ in us*

Alright, we say, but what do we do with those who commit such  
Horrible crimes, surely Christ is not in them.

*But Yes, she says, their sin is in reality their utmost sorrow  
Christ is suffering in them.  
Even in those sinners whose souls seem to be dead.*

*Because Christ  
Who is the life of the soul, is dead in them.  
They are his tombs,  
yet from such tombs he can rise.*

The Christ weeps in those  
    who have no mercy  
        these angry, broken, manipulated  
            sick, and likely grieving men.

    pleading: Stop, stop, stop.....

But Christ, there, too, in that classroom of holy innocents  
    And in their teachers, their holy mothers  
        spreading their arms like angel's wings  
            that they would know God's love in death.

Christ dwelled in them,  
    And they rose with Christ  
        Each elder, each child, each teacher,  
            rose to light, to grace upon grace.

And we, we here in this room  
    With hearts that beat, and minds that ponder  
        And hands fit for work

We have been given power by the holy spirit  
We, says the risen Lord, not the kingdoms of the earth  
    **We** have been given power to become Christ witnesses,  
        Christ's martyrs.

Paul says to the church at Ephesus:  
    *God will give to you,  
        A spirit of wisdom and revelation  
            So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened  
                You may know what is the hope  
                    to which he has called you.*

Let us feel the Christ within our bones  
    Within our tears, within our voice.  
        Let us bear witness  
            To the Christ within  
                In Jesus' name. Amen.

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