

Voice 2001

EDITORS

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The Cover: The Cosmic Egg

Hildegard's complex understanding of Scripture as the flame which enlightens the universe and of music as a kind of cosmic glue for this enlightened universe grows out of her experience of sung Biblical texts as sustaining both social interaction and, indeed, life itself. Hildegard's Cosmic Egg is an image revealing how scripture functions in the universe, as can be seen from this twelfth-century rendering of Hildegard's vision, the colors added later to a photographic copy of a now-lost manuscript.

Margot Fassler,
Director, Institute of Sacred Music

Voice

2001

*Speak your mind...
even if your voice shakes.
Margaret Kuhn*

Editor's Remarks

Tanya Atwood Hoover
Noelle York

Sitting on the rug of Noelle's den, reading the ideas, musings, prayers, and emotions of our sisters in the Yale Divinity School community, we were struck by the overarching theme of being on the threshold of possibility. It becomes clearer and clearer the more these voices are heard, the stronger the voices will become, that the women around us and within us are expanding the boundaries that have attempted to confine us for so long.

We invite you to read the powerful words within these pages and reflect on your own voice and the voices of women in your life. Are they loud? Are they stifled? Are they breaking down walls and transcending boundaries? These pieces are contributions to a conversation, the fruit of which will ripen into the heightened acceptance of women's beautiful voices.

Acknowledgements

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“Won’t you sit down and eat with us?” As soon as the words left my mouth, I knew I had made a mistake. Elizabeth, serving the three of us at the table, froze for just an instant. Her husband, John, seemed to search his mind for something to say, and my mother gave me a look across the table. It was more than just the slight awkwardness of inviting a hostess to sit down in her own house. I had crossed some invisible line, trod on some unexpected social taboo.

I was in Burma with my mother, an Episcopal priest, visiting a seminary classmate of hers who was now a bishop. We had arrived early that morning, sleepy and smelly from 19 hours on a plane. My brain was cluttered with all the new information it had absorbed that day: the circles and curls of the Burmese alphabet; the *longyi*, long skirts that both men and women wore; the oxen and water buffalo that share the main highway with us as we traveled into the country. So full of all this extravagant difference, the presence of so much exotic and new, I had missed some more subtle cues of culture around the dinner table in our hosts’ home that night—cues that would have warned me to keep my mouth shut.

My mother explained to me, as we tucked the mosquito netting around our hotel bed later that night, that Burmese women never eat at the table with their guests. They serve, and will hover throughout the meal, offering more beef or refilling the soup bowl, but they take their meal later in the kitchen. Such a custom seemed strangely at odds with what little I had read about Burmese women in my guidebook. According to that source, women in this part of Asia were relatively independent. They marry relatively late, keep their names at marriage, and are likely to receive equal education and pursue interesting careers. Certainly, Elizabeth and John seemed to follow that pattern. They both received the highest level of education in theology one could get in the country—a college degree—and spoke excellent English. While John attended to his many ecclesiastical duties, Elizabeth ran a preschool, a job training center for women, and taught part-time at the regional bible college. Like so many couples in the U.S., they juggled responsibilities in raising their young daughter.

As my week in Burma progressed, however, I saw a more complete picture. Certainly, many women are educated and accomplished. But independence and respect does not mean equality or power. That reality confronted me visually the very next day, as staff and clergy conference at which my mother and I were to speak convened. We looked out over a room of men. Of the 30 or so participants, five were women—and all were lay people, silent in the last row. Although their education was similar, their jobs were limited: Mothers Union coordinator; teacher of Christian education. They became more invisible as the week progressed, sitting silently in the back of the hall, never asking questions.

When we took a group picture the last afternoon, they knew instantly where the should be: kneeling in the front row, as the male lay workers and clergy sat and stood behind them.

My mother and I were *sitting* in that picture, honored chairs at either side of the bishop. We didn't fit into Burmese categories of gender that week. Certainly, we were women; but no women were priests, no women sat at the table instead of in the kitchen. I was reminded of *The King and I*—in which the teacher Anna is called “sir” because no woman could be as bold or outspoken as she. Where were our loyalties supposed to be?

My early, mistaken question haunted me all week. Won't you sit down? How could I invite these women to the table? I took Feminist Theology and Ethics last fall; I was supposed to know what to do. I wanted to share the dining room table at which I ate and the lecture table from which my mother and I lectured each day. I wanted to offer a seat at the metaphorical table of shared power. But how to do so without offending? As much as I knew that John and Elizabeth were supportive of change—John had, after all, invited my mother and I into a country that does not yet ordain women, offering us positions of equality and power—I also knew they loved and valued their own traditions. I could envision no move, no overture, no way of addressing the women that would not be seen as the kind of culturally ignorant blunder that I had made that first night.

I found myself almost desperate on the last night of the conference. Time was running out for me to do anything, to connect with these women who sat so remotely from my chair at the front of the room. The bishop said a closing prayer, and the participants picked up their papers and began to move out into the night. In a post-colonial Burmese tradition, a brass band struck up a march. I was seized with a moment of inspiration. “A picture of the women!” I hollered over the din of the tubas and the growing chatter. “I want to get a picture of all the women here!” My translator began to rephrase my request in Burmese, but he didn't need to. Five women were there in an instant, excited beyond words. It was as if I had handed them the moon.

After the pictures were done, they crowded around and introduced themselves. I realized, with a little embarrassment, that they had only been waiting for a welcome from me to do so. We talked for a long time. The next day, my mother and I visited the bible college where one of the women taught, and she showed us around the buildings and her small dormitory room. She offered us peanuts, and we stood together under a shady tree and ate. We talked, in slow, broken sentences, without a translator but with, perhaps, more understanding than if we had had one. It was better than sitting at any dining room table.

My belated offer of a picture and some quiet conversation was not enough.

But it was, both for me and for the women I met, a beginning. I had named them as women and, at the same time, as important. I had refused to let them remain invisible. What is next for us? I am not sure. But I know I have some great pictures I want to send to a few women in Burma. And I know that when I return I will not be the only one hoping and believing the world can be different.



Photo by Anne Turner

Mysterious Other

Mysterious other,

I lost a sense of where are the shores of your island
as a fluid self
flows in and out of my ability
to dock, surely, my skiff of conclusion.

Light fog lifts now and it becomes clear that while I see you,
I know not what I see.

I know so little.

Of how you thrill
to the life you hold.

Of where your cragged rocks
may catch my craft off-guard.

Of which waves
cause you most to fear suffocation.

Of when you are haunted
by visitations from the leviathan.

Of what you have given refuge to.

Of what you have urged to land in the tangled mass of your branches;
Then, what you had to watch fly
overhead
so cruelly outside the reach
of your arms reaching out so fervently.

I cannot navigate a sure course around this,
this realm of you.

I do not know where to say that you end and the shaping forces begin.

They bear in on you
and you make them encounter all that you are;
the water turns into pocked waves,
as it forms the rubble on the strand in brittle, then glassy smooth
ways
the air slows and ripples.

As if the breadth of you is so easily to be seen,
to be known
and not just measured.

Were I even able to swim beneath
the contours
of this, your shell
you yet could not join me
to help me know
what it is I would see.

Do you know, yourself?

I know so little of where to begin.

Except,

as the fog settles back in
to hold you in its cover

My watch becomes part of that embrace

And,

I see only dimly what I want to know truly.

My small skiff is yet floating off your shore;

even as I hold my searching gaze,

deeply,

deeply,

toward what is this place,

this *beautifully mysterious place*

called you.

For JLM

I am born of women who fire clay and water together
on the dirt in front of the porch,
pots and mugs rising from their hands
like Adam and Eve from the hands of God,
clay and hand grown from one another—
rose petals sheltering the core,
the seed, the hot center of their spinning.

I am born of women who run life
from within it,
with two hands and a shovel,
plowing the earth,
mist lifting off the ground at midnight—
a virgin's veil before the wedding night.

I am born of mothers
knitting by the waiting stove,
waiting for their children to fall asleep,
waiting for their husbands to return home,
waiting for life to change for the better,
knitting.

I am born of goddesses walking the earth
with feet pierced by broken glass in the dirt road,
five children hanging off their necks like jewels,
bleeding when the moon is full,
moons themselves—full of life.

My mother loves the smell of manure
Imagine that
Fresh memories of growing up on a farm
In a little village in East Germany
Right after the War

I'm not perfect
Like that rack of irregular Levi's
Take 'em as is
As is
As is

Sophia smiles upon us
And Jesus smiles with us
As God waters, blesses, adds to, takes from
And smiles above
The manure.



The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

I didn't know what to think! I didn't know what to do! The... angel – it's still hard for me to say that out loud, but that's what he was, no doubt about it – Gabriel. The angel was suddenly there. He told me what he had been sent to tell me – that I... somehow... though I wasn't married and was still... you know... I had never... Anyway, that I would have a son, with all these incomprehensible titles, who would reign forever, who would be called the Son of God –

And I said, "I am the Lord's servant; let it be to me as you have said," hardly knowing what I was saying, but knowing it was right. And then, as suddenly as he had appeared, the angel was gone. The space he left behind was huge, like a whole lot of air had gone out of the room. My ears were ringing for some time afterward, and my whole body was sort of ... buzzing. Humming with energy. But I knew that what he said was true, and that it had already begun.

Over the next week I could feel changes happening in my body, and some of the realities started to hit me – what would people say when they saw me thickening up and being sick half the time? The women who worked with me would know right away. I had already tried to explain to Joseph, who was at least kind, but I don't know if he really believed me.

And then there was my mother, the look she gave me when I tried to tell her. She didn't say anything – she's really good at making whole speeches with just the look in her eye, the way she sets her mouth or her eyebrows, the way she turns away or looks just past you. She wasn't buying this – and why should she? She had worked very hard to get me betrothed to a man like Joseph. She saw all her plans going up in smoke. Whether she believed me or not, her plans were being demolished and she was not happy about it.

I just thought, "I need to get out of Nazareth for a while." And there was only one place to go – to my mother's cousin Elizabeth. We've never been all that close – she's more like an aunt, really – much, much older than I, even older than my mother! But the angel had told me that this old woman, who had never been able to have children, was in her sixth month – and that this was somehow part of the thing that was happening to me. And I had heard that her husband Zechariah had seen a vision in the temple, and had not been able to speak since -- "For nothing is impossible with God," he said, the angel, Gabriel.

So I got ready and went as fast as I could to the hills of Judea, to the town where they live. And when I entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth, the strangest thing happened – she clutched her belly and looked like she was about to fall over, and then a peacefulness settled over her. She said, "Blessed are you among women! And blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Can you believe it? She knew! She knew! She knew what the angel had told me. I can't tell you what it meant for me to hear that. Because as much as I believed what the angel had said, and even though I could feel this new life starting to stir inside me, there was still a voice that whispered every once in awhile -- "Maybe you're just going crazy. These things don't happen, and certainly not to you."

But Elizabeth knew it too, without my having said a word! "The mother of my Lord," she called me. What is to become of us? She told me that as soon as the sound of my greeting reached her ears, the baby inside her leaped for joy! "Oh, blessed are you!" she told me. "Blessed is she who has believed what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

And I saw that she was right, that this was a blessing, not only to me, but even for the world; that God was doing something he had long promised, as long ago as to our father Abraham, that he would be merciful to his people.

And I saw that this great mercy of God extends to all those who fear him, in every generation, not just those who are alive today. God has done mighty deeds, impossible things, with his strong arm -- he hasn't chosen those who think so well of themselves in their own thoughts; no, he has scattered them and chosen a mere girl! He hasn't called the rulers on their thrones -- he has brought them down and lifted up the humble! He has sent away the rich, and he has filled the hungry with good things. Everything was going to be different from now on.

And so I also saw that this was a blessing to me -- that God had chosen me as his servant in my humble state, even though I'm not rich or educated or successful or mature. From now on all generations to come will call me blessed, because this Savior would be born from my womb. The Mighty One has done great things for me -- and holy is his name!

And what a thought -- that all this would come about through a body, my body. That God loves us so much -- even our flesh and bones and tissue -- that he will bring about such a blessing... Well, just to think of it sends me into a state of praise. It's like my whole soul glorifies the Lord, and my whole spirit rejoices in God, my Savior!

(Pause.) Well, I stayed with Elizabeth for about three months -- she was almost ready to give birth to her baby John, who was to be connected to my baby in ways we couldn't fully figure out, though we talked about it a lot. I was definitely showing by then. But I was ready to go home and face whatever I had to face. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was real and that his word was true -- and that whatever happened, he would be with me in it.

Healing

A scar
Rips
Down your side
Your body
Struggles
To cover and heal
But smooth
Tender
Inside
Remains exposed
The rest of you seems
Unscathed
Unaware
Of the injury
Which reaches nearly
To your roots
I touch your hurt
Caressing
The velvety
Wound
Wishing I had the power
To heal your hurt
Correct your scar
Nurture your health
But I am powerless
My touch fails
I am only able to
Admire your perseverance
Watching you prosper
Not in spite of
Or because of
But merely with
The scar of the terrible pain
Once and always
Endured

Do not leave me
Hold me close, in the fold of your bosom
Nurture me there
With your soft, gentle skin
And your warm, loving breath
For it is in the fold
The fold of you bosom
That I am closest to God



Photo by Noelle York

It is about what it is all about.

It is that time of year, it is all about pressure, and it is all about choice
It is about entering that part of the house of pain and divulging what until now has been kept successfully in the dark
It is about reaching out and making a conscious decision to share and to trust, because anything short of that would seem made up and in fact, it would be made up.
It is about realizing that there is nothing left to loose because everything has already been lost and that which is being held on to is nothing but an illusion anyhow
It is about taking a risk and knowing exactly what is being risked
It is about growing in pain and being able to acknowledge that pain for what it is
It is about acknowledging a call to ministry and knowing just what the options are and understanding just how your life fits the bill
It is about fully relating to your understanding of Hosea and his instruction from God to marry a particular type of woman to demonstrate a particular type of union to a particular group of people at a particular time in a particular set of circumstances --- all of this is the period at the end of the idea
It is about marrying outside of culture, living securely in one's own culture and trying to communicate outside one's culture
It is about finding opposition to all that is taken for granted as being so and seeing someone else that it ain't so with It is about knowing that with good reason – this is not what they are or who they pretend to be and struggling to understand while trying to preserve the progeny and be true to the call of God – it is all about that
It is all about suffering years of sexual abuse and verbal abuse and finding your strength where it should be-- in God
It is all about not wanting to let go or vicariously throw away those gifts that God has given.
It is all about living life in an artificial world created by substances of abuse and finally after years of sobriety seeing the world as it was seen before the extended vacation – waking up and realizing the mess that has been made and trying to salvage what is left of the life the was given --- in faith, love, and sacrifice
It is all about reconciling all of these things and feeling not only the desire but also the need to give back the love, faith and sacrifice to the source
It is all about embarking on a four year journey to yet a different world and realizing that it could to slip out of your hands – because a choice was made that would not allow for the recovery or supernaturalness that one has become accustomed

in the middle of finals week at Yale University

It is about the uneasiness of knowing that ministry to women in prison is where one is called because one's life only falls short of their situation by a choice one did not make and that was to risk incarceration in order to deal with the pain

It is all about learning to be successful juggling all the responsibilities and having additional items thrown in the midst of the process and trying to keep them all in the air while making the adjustments spontaneously

It is about being given a chance and knowing the end is near for completion and realizing that according to the rules – you have blown it in good fashion

It is about needing mercy and praying for grace – for yet one more time

It is about repentance – it is about realizing that no badgering to do something else when one should have been keeping one's eye on the prize should have swayed one from the ultimate responsibility

It is about realizing that pleading may not be enough and feeling a sickness in the pit of one's stomach and a darkness creeping in over one's soul – and smiling because it is Christmas time

It is about one more time allowing someone to convince you that what you are required to do can wait, because they want attention from you and you have things to do that will not get done without you – your children are depending on you, the Christmas shopping has to be done, I will not go on my own, you really are not doing anything anyway, why are you reading yet another book --- these things must be done --- it is Christmas time – finals, what are they? I never attended elementary school – you always seem to get these things done – let us go

It is about giving in, giving up, falling short, and once again needing forgiveness and mercy

It is about facing all the unresolved conflicts and finding out that the problem was the weakness of the individual in the circumstances, not so much the circumstances –

It is about holding the key to the cell, opening the door and stepping further back into the cell into the darkness and waking up to realize the horrible mistake that one has made and crying out from the dark corner for a flashlight so one can find their way back to the doorway – this is what this is all about.

It is about reading this spewing forth, wanting to be invisible and realizing, that it is too late.

It is all about being frustrated, anxious, and scared.

Wheatfields

"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat..."

Excerpt from "The Little Prince" By Antoine De Saint-Exupery

As the longest day draws near, the sun casts it's rose hue upon the clouds to the west. I think of you. The color of the setting sun upon the clouds have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of the dark red sun. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The setting sun, which is also the color of your hair, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to see the sun at the end of each day...

I saw the first fire flies of the summer tonight. Their light fell far short of the brightness or intensity my memory recalled. The light of the fire flies have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have eyes that reflect the brightness of fire flies. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The fire flies, that cast their lights upon the darkness, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to see their twinkling in the night...

The pink roses on the trellis over the back door are in full bloom. Their petals pale in comparison to how I imagined them to be in the past. My disappointment hangs heavy in the afternoon air. The roses have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have skin that is the color of the roses. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The roses, which also glow, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love the very sight of the roses...

The sage, the thyme, the rosemary and mint, chamomile and lavender . . . all filling my garden full to overflowing, yet their fragrance escapes me. Their very essence have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you exude the fragrance of herbs ripe upon their stems. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The herbs which are also fragrant, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to breathe the essence of the herbs...

The trees rest
Naked now
Unabashed
Their dignity
Untainted
By their nudity
With integrity
Their limbs
Reach
Delicately
Toward the powdered sky
The noble ones
Once glorious
With golden flaming hues
Now reveal
Gnarled
Splendor
Aged wisdom
All the trappings
Of the exquisite
Exterior
Crumble
The great, black earth
Swallows them
Leaving
Trees
Softly wavering
Unfettered
Unadorned
Yet
Graceful
Stately
Elementally beautiful

Book Review: Things Seen and Unseen: A year lived in faith by Nora Gallagher

I found this book to be a wonderful witness to life in an Episcopal parish church. It explores a year lived in faith in Santa Barbara, California. I found that Nora expressed in words many of the fears, doubts, joy and wondrousness of faith that I feel at times in the community of the Episcopal Church. Her journey started with an occasional Sunday, a "tourist's visit" to a local church. Eventually Nora entered into a year long journey to discover her faith and a relationship with God, using the Christian calendar as her compass. This book describes this journey through things that are seen and those unseen.

It's easy to relate to the goings on in her church. We've all been there too. But she puts it succinctly into words. Trinity Church in Santa Barbara, California is in the midst of change and growth. They are in the process of calling a new Rector. They struggle with the issue of how to encourage new members without alienating the stalwart, faithful old members. They struggle with issues of human sexuality, feeding the homeless and the safety of the employees and parishioners in the midst of attempting to care for the marginalized members of our society. She reminds me that we cannot take ourselves too seriously and must honestly face our prejudices and prideful attitudes about people, places and things.

One of the main themes of her book is that God is not too good for anything. She says, "I learned something about faith, its mucky nature, how it lies down in the mud with pigs and the rabble... God is not too good to hang out with jet-lagged women with cat-litter boxes in their dining rooms, or men dying of AIDS, or, for that matter, someone nailed in humiliation to a cross." The parish had a soup kitchen for most the year in which the story takes place. For Nora the kitchen shows her first hand that not everyone has a nice car, warm house and a good health care plan. "The road to the Sacred is paved with the ordinary", she writes. When the soup kitchen has to be moved during a renovation of the church building Nora worries, "How will we learn what we need to see."

In a nutshell, this wonderful book describes Nora's faith and why she goes to church. She says in an interview about her book in 1998:

"Many of the books about going back to church tend to be factual, but not inspiring. Many books about the spiritual life try to be inspirational without many facts, or they are written for people inside the beltway who understand religious language much more than the average reader. Often the latter use a lot of beautiful words and phrases that don't, in the end have much weight. In many books, the most sentimental aspects of psychology have joined together with the most sentimental aspects of religion to create something, not surprisingly, sentimental; what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace. Faith is neither about an abstract ideal nor a belief in something irrational or a blind connection to something unreal. It's about a gathering, an accumulation of events and experiences of a different order. These experiences are gradually convincing enough, or you have paid them so much attention, they reach critical mass".

This book is a good read; deeply faithful, very timely and it moves right along, too! I recommend it highly.

After a mission trip to La Romana, Dominican Republic, I brought back a suitcase loaded with images, some which are burdening and some which are life-giving. I will share some of my images of our Sisters in La Romana and the surrounding villages.

- ❧ A young woman trembling in fear and pain as I held her head in order for the mission dentists to extract rotten teeth.
- ❧ An elder woman bent over from years of childrearing and hard labor without restitution.
- ❧ A teenage girl with a hope and dream to become a doctor and the motivation, despite conservative views of women, to realize it
- ❧ A woman holding a baby with a man's hands wrapped around her neck threatening death. She had accused him of not caring for her child and asked if he would prefer that she sent the baby home with the "Americans." There were people there to save her at the moment, but what would happen when they returned home?
- ❧ A woman who asked an 18-year-old man from the United States if he would take her son home with him. "I cannot provide for him here, but I know that you could take care of him," she explained with hopeful yet tear-filled eyes.
- ❧ Women of all ages singing a praising God as they sat on "their side of the church" with hankie-covered heads. They swayed and danced on work-callused feet. They waved arms that helped hold and comfort children. They held hands that bore the weight of poverty, of impossible conditions, and yet that expressed solidarity, shared love, and Sisterhood.

As I approached my children's schoolyard, I was delivered a moment of pause and observation; my headway foiled by a truck that had wedged itself in an unyielding position. Ahh, the glimpses of grace and inspiration to be had unsuspectingly! As I strained to see if my youngest child was one of those screaming voices unleashed at recess, I recognized an 8-year-old child whose trauma at birth and subsequent "limitations" were well known in the school community. The shape of the playground dynamics took form and I became riveted to a game that included choosing sides and a relatively small in stature Barbara. As the captain selected those strongest, most abled bodies amidst a flurry of multicolored sleeves, I noticed the urgent, insistent look on Barbara's face as she yearned for invitation. Her clubbed and twisted arm beat insistently on the tummy of her jacket as she desperately called for the captain's attention and welcome. I could not hear her words above the din of vaulted frenzy, but imagined that they might have been, "Pick me...include me...*see me.*" In that second of awareness, blessed by grace, her strength and determination was alarmingly embodied.

And I saw, despite that truck, I saw. Beyond my mundane thoughts, I saw.

Oh so clearly and relentlessly, I saw;
an image of God's illuminated call for inclusion and embrace of all revealed.

A word formed from
And of
And is
The One who's not within our words
But whose Word
Is.

And when this One
Places self within the Word
CREATION IS.
Light is.
Sky is.

Sun Moon Sea Earth
Created all
Each

Everything
within the Word finds being
and birthed from sound comes forth.
All beasts and bugs
Birds and trees
Are born of Word.

The One whose name shall not be spoken
Said *Let There Be*
And so We are
From and of and in the Word.
Blessed
True

Breathe in and hear your being named
Breathe out in Word your name to be.
Breathe in and hear your being named.
Breathe out and hear your name in Word.

(In memory of George Herbert)

Crystal strikes the stone: a libation poured
To fill the dear begetter's trust:
Can such based craft bear thy oblation, Lord,
Not profaning? Thou transforming must,
So cupping, exalt this coarse dust.

An earth'd vessel, thy chalice, leaden an' grav'd,
Crude vehicle, divinely graced:
Thy indwelling assent from abasement saved,
Raising from tomb to hallowed space:
Else all lost to th'mortal embrace.

What thou hast inbreathed, with thy Word, breathe out:
Pierce the adamant chamber's cold
From within, decanting a living draught,
So clear at the feast all may behold
What passion'd colour the chalice hold.

I learned things don't last
when I waited for that big yellow monster
to scoop me up all those years ago.

I learned things don't last
when I waved good-bye
as my mother's car
slipped out of sight
and I turned,
looked at a desk covered with unfamiliar books

I learned things don't last
when I felt love for the first time
and felt rejection for the first time

I learned things don't last
when I whispered good-bye
as my mother lay still and cold.

I learned things don't last
when I cried, screamed, perspired, and pushed
a new life into the world.

I learned things don't last
when I begrudgingly handed over that tiny being
to another while I pursued a living.

I learned things don't last
when I watched her disappear into a building
with many others and start her day while I
went about mine.

I learned things don't last
when I said I do, I will forever
and knew the truth.

I learned things don't last.
I learned things do not last.
They don't last.

Beautiful Responses

Why must I always
Weep
At beauty?
Why do tears gather as I
Gaze
At glory?
Is there not a more
Appropriate
Response?
To dance
But my limbs are clumsy
My feet and hands, awkward
To sing
But would be noise
Breaking the sacred symphony
Already sounding
To clap
To beat my breast
To jump
To shout
To write
To compose
To paint
All seem wrong
Interruptions
Shallow attempts
Perhaps I weep
Because I see more than
Beauty
I see the way life
Could
Should
Would
Might
Be
I see
Beauty
Possibility
Despair
Anger
Glory
I weep

In the in
between of the before and
after of sacrament and word,
absolution.
The blanket of guilt lifted
but over my head again
before I can breathe free
or say amen
or utter a word with no subversive meaning.
It must be like
what Hagar felt
when she saw and, with audacity, named God
before she threw her boy
God hears *Ishmael*
into the bushes and wept.

Courage?

I research rape. Actually, I do research on what helps survivors of acquaintance rape heal. Looking straight into the face of pain can be exhausting and I get frustrated when I reach my limits. To no surprise, I hit my limits more often than I like. When I hit those limits I find distractions. Today my distraction was the village tea shop. The proprietor was a gentle woman with a broad knowledge of tea. As we chatted the conversation came around to what I do. "I research rape." I hate saying that. It is inevitably a conversation stopper. I wish I had another sentence that I could add so that it gave my conversation partner a clue as to how to respond. The normal "oh, that's interesting" is seemingly not appropriate, or at least has never, in my experience, been the plesantry to follow. Today, the tea seller responded, "You must be very courageous." Is that was this is? I am feeling fairly tired by the length of this current project and courage is just not the motivating factor that gets me to my study each day. Is it courageous that I have chosen this topic with which to launch my academic career? Heart wrenching, haunting, enraging... definitely. But courageous?

I suppose I could go on sermonically about how much courage it takes to look at the effects of evil, but such altruistic waxing would lack honesty and integrity. I listen to the stories of rape survivors not so that I can learn about rape. Gads, all you have to do is listen to the news. I listen to the women because I want to know what has helped and is helping them survive. I have never been raped. My ability to empathize with survivors can be compromised because I get so angry at rapists. Aside from that, I am afraid...so afraid.... that if I were raped I would not be strong enough to survive the social, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and relational damage it would do to me and my loved ones. In awe I listen to women as they speak of healing from violent atrocities and wonder how it is that they can get out of bed in the morning. How do they watch the news? How do they live with the "if only I had's" that so often follow acquaintance rape? The stories they tell me shake me to my core. I find that I can get so angry that I want to yell at someone, or at least shame the hell out of someone. And I know that won't help.

I operate from a tenuous notion that I can do some things to completely avoid violence. I never go to the ATM machine, the grocery store, or the gas station at night. I refuse to support movies that normalize violence or see it as a way to build the plot. I know about avoiding unlit places, unknown men, and untrimmed sidewalks. And yet I know the statistics. It is not strangers who do the most harm. It's "loved ones," bosses, acquaintances, and once trusted friends. Of course that makes me sadly suspicious of many men, even card-carrying members of Amnesty International. It has effected my own relationship with my spouse. So why research rape?

I research the experience of survivors of acquaintance rape so that I can make a difference in their healing process. I know both from my research and my experience, that listening and believing survivors makes a huge difference. I listen and believe survivors of rape because they deserve at least that. I listen for myself as well. Courage? Maybe. Self-Defense? Unfortunately. Making a Difference in the life of a survivor? Thankfully.

Escape

I will
Race through the
Arid desert
Away from heavy air
Dreary things
Wild wind
Chaffing my face
And hair, music
Driving me out
Of my mind moon
Making me crazy
With freedom sand
Glistening and
Pulsating the
Earth's body
Still yet
Revolving dark
Mysterious and
Warm
Absorbing the
Beat I
Think of
Nothing I
Don't think of
You I don't
Think only
Feel
Only
Only
Alone
Not
Lonely.

Escape II

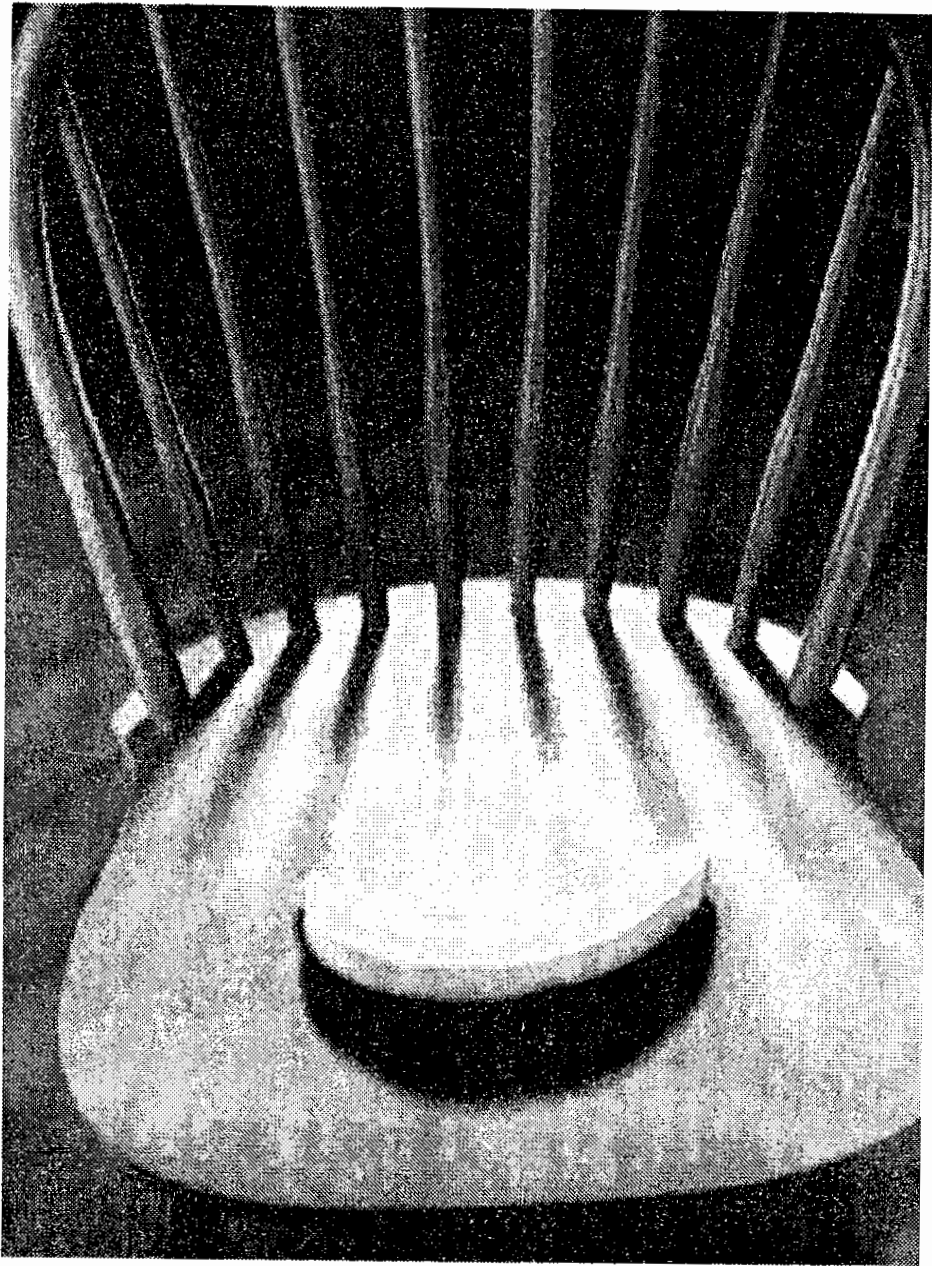
Lying in my
unmade makeshift
bed the glitter
blue dawn
seeps through
blinds not
fashioned
from wood, I
smile and
think
of smooth shapes
cloudlike and
changing,
evolving,
revolving,
spinning, and
moving
toward
something
that has no
name.

simple prayer for a rainy morning

i praise You, Mother of Morning, for the opening of my eyes,
for the warmth of my blankets,
for the movement of my body.

i venerate You, Earth Bearer, for first light,
for crystalline drops on the window,
for leaves dripping clean.

i exalt You, generous Giver, for coffee,
for toothpaste,
for raincoats.



(38) It happened as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. (39) And she had a sister who was called Mary, who was sitting at the feet of the Lord listening to his teachings. (40) And Martha was over-busied concerning much service; she came near and said, "Lord, are you not concerned that my sister has left me alone to serve? Speak to her that she may help me." (41) And answering her the Lord said, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. (42) There is need of only one thing. Mary, then, has chosen the good share which will not be taken away from her."

(translation mine)

My younger sister, Kate, and I are fifteen months apart in age. We both earned our Masters of Divinity degrees during the same years at Union Theological Seminary. Then single, striving in our own ways to be disciples, we invited comparison to the sisters of Bethany. I remember a fellow seminarian pointing this out to me once. "You and Kate remind me of Mary and Martha," he mentioned over a cup of coffee in the snack area known as "the pit." By silent consensus, he and I were referring to the Lukan depiction of these two women, better known to both of us than John's account. "Which one do you think of as me?" I wanted to know.

"Guess," he responded.

"Mary?" I ventured, somewhat hopefully.

"No Julie," he pronounced, "You're Martha."

His words were an accusation. I was too busy, too frazzled, too preoccupied with a multitude of tasks, as Martha is portrayed in Luke's Gospel. And I do empathize with Martha; she, like me, tries hard. Yet most women seminarians today, I believe, are not Mary or Martha, as Luke dichotomizes them. We're both.

A woman today studying at a seminary is laden with responsibility. The median age for a woman seminarian is thirty-six. She is often married with children and, like Martha, maintains a home. Undertaking rigorous theological education, a woman in seminary, like Mary, tries to understand Jesus' teachings. Canceling out commensurate stresses of first-century and twenty-first century life, Mary and Martha seem to have it relatively easy. Martha just hosts one houseguest and has no husband or offspring to whom to tend. Mary just listens -- no exams to pass or papers to produce. The scene does not seem demanding, and yet, this is a story of tension.

The author of Luke and Acts, like all convincing writers, works hard to promote his individual perspective. He (presumably a man) illustrates conflicts surrounding Jesus that stem largely from the actions or perspectives of the supporting characters. Jesus wants to concentrate on his ministry, but is constantly diverted by those of the religious and political establishment who try to trap

him. The tension builds to the inevitable crucifixion climax as Jesus is questioned and criticized for healing on the Sabbath (6:7-11, 13:10-17, 14:1-6), associating with sinners (4:30, 7:36-50, 15:1-2), meddling with taxes (20:20-24) and promoting his own teachings (20:27-40). Even in this seemingly gentle passage of Mary and Martha, Jesus is blameless, for it is Martha who pushes him to choose the better of the sisters' roles. Jesus' fate is not his fault.

This man from Nazareth, as Luke understands him, is not a brazen radical who pushed the status quo to an intolerable limit, but the awaited Messiah who embodied Jewish prophecies. Subsequently, Luke subtly maintains that this fulfilled Judaism should be allowed to continue legally under Roman rule. Luke's emphasis effectively exonerates the Roman state of responsibility for Jesus' death, although the government alone had the power to execute capital punishment. In the wake of failed prophecies of the parousia, fledgling Christian communities realize that Christ has not come and Rome has not gone. To adjust to the mores of the Roman Empire necessitates adopting the understanding of women as markedly inferior people. Luke writes for a Gentile community seeking to co-exist peaceably within the dominant culture.

In the years 85 to 90 C.E., Luke compiled his Gospel from the writings of Mark, the Q source, and a collection of material found only in his Gospel, thus deemed "L." Much of this third source deals with women. The concentration of stories focused on female characters, more than Mark and Q combined, seductively deceives the liberationist reader to embrace Luke as an advocate of women. However, recent feminist scholarship urges, "beware."

The women in Luke's Gospel are perceptibly present but consistently compliant. Women are supportive nurturers -- prayerful (1:19), obedient (1:38), eager to serve (4:38-39), humble (8:47), grateful (13:13), selfless (21:3), and silent (10:39). Women are explicitly excluded from the list of disciples (6:13-16) and definitively prohibited from divorce or remarriage (Luke 16:18). No woman receives a commission and, in this Gospel only, women do not witness the risen Christ (24:1-10). Indeed, the male disciples here dismiss the women's proclamation of the empty tomb as "an idle tale" (24:11). Luke deftly subordinates women's roles as witnesses, disciples, speakers, and leaders in the early Christian communities. The story of Mary and Martha illustrates Luke's bias. Martha speaks -- only to be rebuked by Jesus. Mary, the sister whom Luke shows as lauded by the Lord, sits silently at Jesus' feet, a virtual tableau of subservience. Without appearing to make an argument, Luke conveys explicit guidelines for appropriate female behavior. His lesson has been well-learned by commentators. Scholar Roland Meynet praises Mary for her self-negating reverence.

Mary is in the only position which suits her, at the feet of Jesus, in the position of a disciple. She does nothing, she says nothing; she is seated and she listens. She forgets every-thing else. She forgets herself. She only has eyes and ears for Jesus and his Word. She also, she especially, receives Jesus, in the best

way. Luke's intention succeeds.

Like Meynet's depiction of Mary as a disciple, other attempts in recent decades to interpret this passage in favor of women often do so at too great a cost. Jesus is extolled in some commentaries for allowing a woman to learn from him, offered as a contrast to ancient Jewish custom. Leopold Sabourin explains, "In a significant way, Jesus encourages her (Mary) to listen and learn, something that the rabbis did not easily permit women to do in the religious sphere." Eduard Schweizer agrees. "One sat at the feet of teachers, only a proper rabbi taught no woman." These scholars contrast Jesus to the rabbis in this time, forgetting that Jesus was a rabbi in this time. They, like others, veer toward an anti-Jewish slant; pitting Jesus against Judaism when he was a Jew.

The New Revised Standard Version tries to raise the status of women through this periscope. The editors of the New Oxford Annotated Bible offer this surprisingly interpretative commentary after verse forty-two:

With delicate ambiguity Jesus rebuked Martha's choice of values; a simple meal (one dish) is sufficient for hospitality. Jesus approved Mary's preference for listening to his teaching (thereby accepting a woman as a disciple) as contrasted with Martha's unneeded acts of hospitality (the more usual woman's role). Martha is occupied with diakonia, a word translated more often in the New Testament as "ministry," than "serving." This translation of "many tasks" maintains ambiguity regarding Martha's activities, yet the note plunks her in the kitchen, preparing many dishes. The text itself offers no culinary or "dish" reference. After the editors establish Martha's location in the domestic domain, they subtly berate her "unneeded acts of hospitality." Since when is hospitality unneeded? Not only is Martha insulted here, but all women who labor to support men are told that this "more usual woman's role" is less than Mary's acting as a disciple (the more usual man's role).

Jesus, according to the editors, is not "welcoming," "valuing," or "needing" Mary as a disciple; he is "accepting" her. He "approves" of her. Yes, the editors call her a disciple, but only after embracing Luke's paternalistic ideology. After paying the price of silence and sisterhood, Mary gets her Pyrrhic victory.

Feminist hermeneutics then leads us to conclude that these women friends of Jesus are both berated. Previously known to us as women close to Jesus, Mary and Martha seem taken from us as role models. Does this story relegate women readers to roles we may not choose? Does it take away our right to vocal discipleship? Are we, the sororal spiritual successors of Mary and Martha, robbed of a liberating word? Even here the word of God does not fail us. As frequently occurs in the Bible, the spirit of God lives not in the letter, but in our ardent reading.

Throughout the scriptures, and certainly in Luke's Gospel, we encounter scenes that are profoundly disturbing to us modern readers, although such dis-

sonance was not the writers' intent. We ignore Jesus' invitation to walk on snakes or scorpions (10:19). We are troubled by his bizarre scenes of exorcisms (4:41, 8:32-33, 9:37-43). We do not retaliate against the inhospitable by burning them (9:54). We disobey Jesus' instructions to forget our families (8:19-21, 9:59-62). We question these scenes instead of accepting them. Add Luke 10:38-42 to the list

Freed to inquire how Jesus' encounter with Martha and Mary, written two full generations after his death, might have really happened, we re-imagine. Perhaps it is John's Gospel that is closer to the truth, with an apostolic portrait of two astute, bold women. Perhaps if this book of the Bible had been written by an author who embraced women's roles as disciples, we would find it dramatically different. Perhaps the third Gospel's depiction of Mary and Martha passage might have taken place something like this . . .

Lucia 10: 38 - 42

(38) It happened as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. (39) And she had a sister who was called Mary, who was sitting at the table with the Lord discussing his teachings. (40) And Martha was busy with many tasks of ministry she came near and said, "Lord, do you care that there is so much work for us to do as we serve?"

(41) And answering her the Lord said, "Martha, my sister, you are so concerned and compassionate in this ministry. (42) Talk with us now; there is need of your counsel. You both have chosen to be my disciples, which will not be taken away from you."

(fantasy mine)

What I have fantasized is what we have become. We women, seminarians and scholars, hear and question the teachings of Jesus. Like two partners in a healthy relationship, we hold onto God's word, even when disagreements run deep. We love it too much to let it go.

And so we challenge musty monolithic interpretations of the Holy Book. We bring our fresh perspectives. We develop our daring hermeneutics. We probe for camouflaged biases. We assert our academic discoveries. We write and speak and share our startling exegetical insights. But we do not sit silently.

Our role, like Martha, is to articulate our needs. Our role, like Mary, is to learn about God's radical love. Our role, like Jesus, is to share God's word. Then we put forth our knowledge as part of God's brazen justice for women and all marginalized peoples. This is the role we have chosen.

And it will not be taken away from us.

disillusion

deafened by
the sound
of crashing
idols

what falls away
to the reaching ground
those things
I'd fondled

fine silk and smooth tongues
flashing lights and thunderous applause
wisdom of the aged, bodies of the young
essential icons in a self-aggrandizing cause

hallowed stations in a personal pantheon
that sanctum now, the slag heap of it all
chimeras only, positing nothing beyond
my, how the mighty fall



Photograph by Noelle York

head in hands
to silence
the din
hands in fists
to hold
within

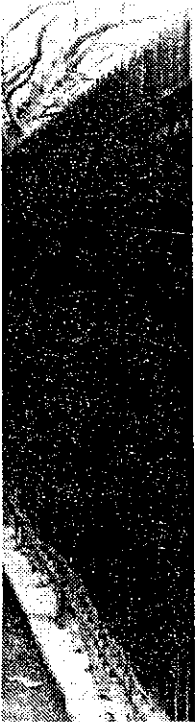
a hope I won't be
wasted in
the wait
a hope I will be
consoled in
the wait

as
disillusion decapitates resolve
to face another search
and
dawn has not yet come
to illuminate
that next golden calf
to venerate

only comes the gentle sound, so gentle it shakes the world
the sound of your footsteps, your knock
at a crumbling fortress
to weep with me
to wait with me in the dead of the night

there venus arrives
but not as I'd once prayed
not to animate the archeology
but holding pygmalion's chisel staid
brings me to into life

while
gathering in
from deep within
those things
I'd left
on the altar
for the
unknown gods



Epiphany

As I thought about how I might best explain to you the hope that is in me I decided to begin at the very beginning.

Far away and long ago, a very unhappy little girl, who would soon be five years old, was plunked into a hot tub filled to overflowing with billowy bubbles as she loudly protested she did not need a bath, tonight or any other for that matter. Her frazzled mother, tired of listening to her daughter's protestations, and needing a "time out" herself, left the room with a vague promise to return. Alone in the tub the little girl found herself in the company of a tiny, winged bug that fluttered around her head. The tiny insect landed on one of the bubbles, which could only support it for a moment before popping. The little bug then flew to another bubble and again was able to land only briefly. Well, the little girl's imagination took over. The bug became an airplane and the billowy bubbles, tall as her head when she was sitting down, became clouds. When she stood up she was taller than the clouds, she could pretend SHE WAS GOD! The little girl became an angry storm and drowned the bug plane with a wave of water. As the bug disappeared beneath the bubble clouds she was overcome with remorse. Shaking with repentance she began frantically searching for the tiny bug in the soapy bubbles. She found the bug and, breathing a sigh of relief, she gently laid it on the side of the tub. Taking a dry washcloth she carefully soaked up as much water as she could from around the sodden, still, creature. Sobbing, she wished with all her heart that she could undo what she had done. Today had been a very bad day.

Now the little girl had always been told that God loved her and that she should pray, but God had always seemed very far away and not very real. She decided to test God and so she folded her hands, closed her eyes very tightly, and prayed, "if you are God and you are there and you care about me, show me by making this dead bug live." She opened one eye just a little and

saw a very still bug. Ha! God doesn't care!

I am convinced to this day that God knew the importance of this moment for me, the repentant little girl. I held my breath as one little wing came up and fluttered, then the other wing began to flutter and the little legs scrambled for a foothold. The tiny bug righted itself and flew away. The room seemed to be bathed in light and I felt the presence of God. Overcome with joy and awe I began to dance and shout "God loves me!" My heartfelt prayer had been answered. God had let me know I was not alone, that the tiny bug and I were cared for, individually and particularly.

When God extended this moment of grace to me it gave me a place to fix my heart and mind, "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1.12-13). This moment of grace changed my orientation to the world. I became infused with a sense of God's goodness, mercy and forgiveness. I also felt the responsibility of living a life that would please God, one that did not include the disrespect of even the tiniest part of creation. As I grew I came to understand that having received God's grace does not mean we will automatically live perfect lives, that we will have to work at being a Christian who is authentic and recognizable to the world around us. This life calls us to constantly and consciously make choices that will please God, "choosing life" (Deut. 30.19). Sometimes we slip and fall, but God is always there to pick us up, dry us off, and say, let's try this again. God promises to be with us always. Called to faith, called "to choose life," is a call to discipleship. Called to both receive and provide grace transforming our lives and the lives around us, sending ripples through all creation and bringing to fullness the good work God had begun in us. Wanting to please God does please God. And that is how the hope that is within me was born and grew.

A Celebration of Black Womanhood

A Celebration of Womanhood

I am the spirit of all Black women
I push forward
Even when you push back
I push forward
I push you forward
I will not let you down
I will pick you up

I am your spirit of womanhood
I was there when civilization was born
I crossed the ocean with you
I bore your thoughts with you
I am your spirit of woman hood.
I am present in all
Who choose
To recognize and believe in me.

I have to love myself
I have to know I am strong
Beautiful
Flawless
Because God makes me who I am
I am is beautiful
God meant it to be that way
I was born this way
So it must be true.

I love everything about myself
The many different colors of my skin
The many different textures of my hair
The different heights, weights, shapes
All of them are gifts from God
And
I am beautiful

I have remained strong in the face of change
I have remained faithful to the Lord
I have loved my children without reservation
I have survived until today
And will survive
No matter what it requires

I'm free!
I'm free!
The Truth has set me free!
No longer bound in yokes and chains
And frightful tyranny.
 To God I look at every step
 For guiding light.
 He leads me from the filth and scum
To peace and harmony.



The Anointing Woman:

An excerpt from the memorial sermon
delivered in Marquand Chapel

As Easter draws near, I remember my friend Linda who passed away February 7th of this year after having battled cancer for about eight years. Some of you may remember her, too. Linda was a student here at YDS. Linda was a Christian. She was raised as a Catholic and her life was a journey of faith.

Those of us who knew Linda well knew she was an Easter kind of person. We were used to seeing her body change from robust to frail and then to robust again depending on the treatment she was getting. A head full of blond locks became bald because of the chemicals that coursed through her veins, and then her hair would grow back again. With each change her spirit grew.

Having cancer, as Linda did, can seem like having no life at all, but not for Linda, she loved life. She loved to dance and planned many occasions for dancing. She loved good conversation and dining with friends, and she loved studying the Bible and doing research. And Linda loved all of you.

She was adventurous and ready to travel, even in her last days, she spoke of returning to Italy and further research in Jerusalem. She held on to life in spite of her illness to the very end, but she loved Jesus even more than life. She knew that there was something better coming and she was always preparing for that time when she would be with God.

Linda had a dream. Her studies were focused on a ministry of Christian living taken from the scriptures. She had begun to outline a series of Bible studies that would correlate the ancient customs of marriage, family, and the home with today's living. It was her desire to offer a corrective to the world's domestic problems one Bible study at a time. Linda focused her research on models of family living. Studying at Yale was a big part of her dream.

The one thing everyone who knew Linda remembers is that she always bought the best. She was not adverse to finding a bargain, but she always bought the best that she could afford, because she believed the best would work better and last longer. She looked at her faith in that way, as the best bargain she ever bought. Linda was a Christian and a disciple of the Christ. Linda was not afraid to be called a disciple of Christ and neither should we.

Dear God, our Mother who bore creation and all that is in it, along with Nature, our midwife who cared for and nurtured creation at some of its most vulnerable time, we ask that you be with us in these times of needed change...

In times in which we make assumptions regarding You and Your Word as told and illustrated to us by our Savior, and allow those assumptions to create hostilities between peoples and resources...

In times in which we must be willing to see all people and resources as a part of Your Divine Creation...

Help us to see that due to its birth from your womb, Oh God, that all is

Divine and should be treated as such; that we should stop allowing assumptions to rule our actions and instead should start acting out, through our faith in You, Your will and work.

Amen

Voice

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Voice is a yearly forum of writing, art and ideas published by the Women's Center at Yale university Divinity School. Submissions of poetry, fiction, sermons, photography and art are encouraged for Spring 2002. It is open to present students, faculty, staff, family and graduates.