Until the Dawn

ACTIONS FOR THE WORK OF ADVENT

POEMS for Advent–Epiphany

by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

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

The First Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn... CRY OUT

Mockingbirds

There is a mockingbird nest in the backyard.
Late into the evening,
even after midnight,
the mother will perch in the branches,
her little neck extending,
mouth opening,
chest proud,
songs pouring out.

I lie in bed with the windows open
trying to distinguish her hymns from her ballads,
each one a collection of trills and rasps,
swells and melodies.
This is how I fall asleep.

Did you know that a mockingbird can learn over 200 songs?
I never catch all of them.
But what I know is that
late into the night,
when no else is listening,
God hears
every
one.

A Multiple-Choice for Beginning

You could lace up your shoes, put on your jacket, and walk out the door.
You could pause, close your eyes, and bow your head in prayer.
You could preheat the oven, send the invites, and add chairs to the table.
You could start with seeds, add water, and place them by the windowsill.
You could add the yeast and give it time to rise.
You could make the sign and learn the protest songs.
You could hold out your hand, or link arms with mine.
You could ask the question, or tell your story.
You could put one toe in the water, or cannonball in.
It doesn't matter how you begin, but start somewhere.
Start today.

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The Things We Must Say

He waited by the door, checking his watch,
weight shuffling from foot to foot.
I watched him lean against the wall,
then stand up straight, failed attempts at looking calm.
And when she arrived, when she ran inside,
shaking her umbrella and whisking away damp bangs,
she offered him the kind of smile that you don't forget.

I don't know a lot about science,
but I could recognize the gravity.
They created their own orbit.

We'll take a table for two, they said,
keeping eyes on each other as they moved through the room.
And from my corner booth, I wanted to say,
Call it gravity. Call it sacred. Call it what it is. Call it love.

I hope, at the end of my days,
if you show up drenched from the rain,
and God is sitting in the corner booth,
that I take you in my arms and I say it out loud.
You are oh so loved.

All Along

There are parts of me that are easy to find—
the bangs in my eyes, the corners of my elbows,
the twinge in the bottom of my foot,
the thoughts swirling in my head
about to-do lists and tomorrows.
There are parts of me that are easy to find,
and then there are parts of me that I have to dig for—
excavate, summon like a talisman.

There are parts of me that I have to open all the windows
of my home for and beg to come in,
wooing with treats and promises of belly scratches.

Those are parts of me that wouldn't mind staying curled up in bed
or free on the wind, but sometimes life requires us to open the windows.

So I open the windows. I push the bangs out of my eyes.
I turn the house upside down looking for my courage,
and when I find it, I see she was with me all along.

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Still They Sing

You may have to lean your head out the window,
mute the news,
stand under a sky full of stars.
You may have to place yourself in the presence of children,
in the presence of art,
or on an old church pew.
You may have to stand,
cold and hopeful,
in front of the rising morning sun.
If you do that,
and if you listen,
if you *really* listen,
then I am convinced,
you can hear angels sing.

We drown them out with our
fighting and our noise,
but behind it all, still they sing:
Glory to God in the highest!
Have you ever heard anything
more beautiful than that?

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Reminders from the Geese[1]

I have been a pilgrim before,
feet sore,
skin freckled.
I have walked for miles with one simple question on my tongue.
I have begged the sky for answers,
shaking my fists at the wind.
I have laid against the Earth's curve and wondered
if God could find me in all this wild openness.

And in the morning,
when the song of giving up chanted my name,
God sent me a flock of geese.
They flew overhead, eyes on the horizon,
cheering each other on with
all their obnoxious honking.
And I could not help but to stand,
and clap,
and cry,
and remember—
we were never meant
to walk this road alone.

1 This poem alludes to the poem, "Wild Geese," by Mary Oliver in *Dream Work* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 14.

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Our Mother Tongue

They say the world is on fire,
and I suppose it is.
We are drowning in warships and warplanes.
We ask AI how to be human.
We listen to machines more than we listen to our bodies.
Where is the joy in all of that?

Maybe we should put down our phones and try whisking some eggs.
Add cinnamon, flour, sugar. Bake at 350.
Maybe we should throw a birthday party,
right here in the middle of winter.

Maybe we should teach our children songs like
"This land is your land, this land is my land"[2] and
write down every beautiful thing that happens today.

Maybe we should wear bright colors, paint the walls of our house butter yellow,
spend way too long hugging one another during the passing of the peace.

Maybe we should look for joy, like we look for four-leaf clovers.
And when we find it, *because we will*, we should tell everyone it exists.

For when the world is on fire,
joy is nothing less than a miracle.
It's oxygen at high altitude
and a baby's first breath.
It's returning to our bodies
and remembering our mother tongue.
When the world is on fire,
joy is the insistence that despite it all,
we will keep going.
So keep going
and going
and going.

2 "This Land is Your Land," words and music by Woodie Guthrie. Copyright 1956.



About the Author

Rev. Sarah Speed

Founding Creative Partner of A Sanctified Art

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

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