



## Poems for Lent-Easter

Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

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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 small group 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: Poem by Rev. Sarah A. Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)

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## The Gospel According to Mrs. Farnell's Pre-K Class

In Pre-K the whole class gets an invite to Tommy's birthday.  
He places the paper invites in our cubbies. There's a helter-skelter sticker  
sealing each one, proof that tiny hands did the work. So we,  
the members of Mrs. Farnell's Pre-K class, arrive at the park on Saturday.  
We arrive whether or not we've ever built a sandcastle with Tommy.  
We arrive whether or not we've ever shared half of our PB&J at lunch.  
We arrive at the park on Saturday, with pigtails and balloons,  
because we were *invited*.

And together we play tag, and we eat birthday cake, and we run barefoot in the grass.  
Together, we sing *Happy birthday to youuuuuu*, so excited we can barely stand still.  
Together, we momentarily forget that Chloe never gets picked for Red Rover and that Quinn cried in  
class last week, because the park is not the playground and everyone was invited.  
And when we load into our cars at the end of the day, with grass-stained knees, chocolate frosting  
on our faces, and the awareness of inclusion, we say to our parents, *This was the best day of my life.*



## Start With a Wedding

*Inspired by the Gospel of John's celebratory beginning.*

When it comes time to write my obituary for the local paper, please do not start with my résumé. Do not start with my career or my worldly accomplishments (*however small they may be*). Do not take up space writing about my alma mater or outlining the entire family tree (*we know who we are*). Instead, spend your precious little word count on how beautiful it all was. Write about the dinner parties and the fireside chats. Write about the evenings we spent on the front stoop counting fireflies. Write about summers in the mountains and the garden that we grew. Write about the seasons we cried out to God, and the prayers that God answered. Write about the nights we danced, and the days we laughed. When it comes time to tell the story of my life, please take a lesson from the Gospel of John, and start with a wedding. Start with a miracle. Start with the fact that all of it held joy.



## “They’re Out of Wine”

They kicked off their sandals when the dancing began.  
Everyone flooded the floor. He was there,  
head thrown back, laughing at the stars.  
Everyone could see it was joy and hope in the air,  
the kind of love that makes it impossible not to dance.

So the whole community spun and twirled, jumped and clapped,  
pushing back the pain of the world for a night.  
Reveling in the fact that two people could stand to  
build something beautiful in this fractured world.  
But before too long, a tug on his sleeve.

I wonder if Jesus stopped dancing when he heard the news.  
I wonder if he looked out over the crowd of happy people.  
I wonder if he could see their joy poking through their fragility.  
And I wonder if he knew, in that moment, that joy was holy,  
that joy would sustain them, that joy was a form of resurrection,  
so he turned water into wine and the dancing did not stop.

## If God Lived Next Door

If God lived next door,  
I'd drop off a loaf of bread.  
I'd use my mom's best recipe.  
I'd wrap it in parchment and ribbon  
and place it on the front stoop.  
If God lived next door,  
I'd leave a note with my phone number.  
*Call anytime you need anything!*  
*I'm always happy to help!*  
If God lived next door,  
I'd keep sugar on the shelf,  
just in case she needed a cup.  
I'd put a picnic table in the front yard  
and begin taking my coffee there.  
Whenever God passed by with their gaggle of rescue dogs,  
I could say, *Want to sit for a moment? Want to rest your legs?*  
I'd keep a jar of dog treats and water by the mailbox  
and change my doormat to one that says:  
*All are welcome here.*  
I'd invite God over for dinner.  
She'd bring bread and juice.  
I'd host a block party,  
so that everyone could meet her.  
I'd start a community garden  
so that the kids could run between rows of squash and tomatoes  
while we adults put our hands in the dirt.  
We'd share stories while we weeded,  
and eat harvest meals at the end of the season.  
If God lived next door,  
I'd want to build something beautiful.  
Then again,  
who says she doesn't?

## Surely, This Must Be It

Everyone has a job. I wash the potatoes, filling the sink with slivers of potato peel. You brine the turkey, hovering by the oven all afternoon. Someone sets the table, taking care to fill a vase with asters and marigolds, sprigs of holly and shoots of evergreen. We play music while we prepare. “*What The World Needs Now is Love*”<sup>1</sup> comes on. We can’t get it out of our heads. We whistle along to Dionne all afternoon. And eventually, the doorbell rings.

You’ve invited the neighbors, the grad student who sits on the second row at church, the widower in the choir. We add seats to the table. We go around the room and share one thing we’re grateful for. Eyes well as we create a laundry list of beauty. The kids get squirmy, but we’re grateful for that too.

And then we eat! We scoop whipped potatoes and crisp green beans with fresh garlic. We pass the bread basket, leaving crumbs all over the table. They are tiny reminders of communion in our midst. And at the end of the night, when we walk our guests to the car and carry sleeping children to their car seats, our neighbors say, *What a holy moment it all was*. Surely this must be what heaven feels like. Surely we *can* create it together.

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<sup>1</sup> “What the World Needs Now is Love,” lyrics by Hal David, music by Burt Bacharach (Imperial Records, 1965). Dionne Warwick recorded the song in 1966 on her album, *Here Where There Is Love*.

## Unwritten Agreement

We have this unwritten agreement,  
us members of humanity.

When the toddler at the coffee shop runs round the corner,  
when her mom, at the register, looks up in panic,  
we, the adults in the room, will pledge,  
with quick smiles and silent head nods, to keep watch.

We will lean out of our seats.

We will put down our phones.

We will stand at the ready

to scoop up,  
to offer words of comfort,  
to make silly faces,  
to keep an eye on the door.

And we will do this,  
because we cannot ignore the instinct to care.

We will do this,  
because we cannot ignore the child right in front of us.

We will do this,  
because love always includes the least of these.



Fifth Sunday in Lent

the good news is... rooted in justice, mercy, and faithfulness

## The Things That Matter Most

I wrecked the family car, an old gold minivan  
that had traveled every inch of I-95. It had worn cushions  
and an old school map in the glove box.  
It held a folder full of mix CDs under the passenger seat  
and every memory of every family trip,  
and I wrecked it.

I called the tow truck while the engine  
hissed and smoked. I called my dad,  
my own apologies tripping over themselves  
to get to the front of the line.

I expected to be grounded.

I expected a “*How could you?*”

But when I got home that night,  
my dad held me close and said,  
“*A car is just a car, but you are my child.*

*The only thing that matters is that you are okay.*”

And I knew it for what it was.

It was mercy. It was love.

It was the thing that mattered most.



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## For the Sake of Tiny Resurrections

We took the kids to the beach,  
a herd of children lathered in sunscreen.  
We spent most of the day building sandcastles,  
swimming in the shallows,  
wiping sand off their eyelashes and noses.  
Things changed  
when a small fish washed up on shore.

The children saw it first—  
a little body gasping to survive.  
They cried out—  
*Quick! We have to save it!*  
We grabbed our buckets.  
We sprinted to the waterline.  
We scooped up the dying fish  
and returned it to the waves.

The kids sagged with relief as the fish jolted to life,  
a tiny resurrection in front of our very eyes.  
Full of pride, I said to them—  
*You did something good.*  
*Today, you saved a life.*  
A seven-year-old with sun-kissed cheeks  
took the bucket from my hands and said,  
*I'd like to save some more.*

He spent the afternoon patrolling the waves,  
hoping to dole out mercy to any shore-washed fish.  
He carried his bucket around all day, because  
love inspires love.  
Love will make you want to  
patrol the shoreline,  
sing *Hosanna*,  
witness a resurrection,  
save some more—  
one bucket of water at a time.



## Even Now

We ask the question a million different times  
over the course of lives.

*Do you love me even now?*

As children we ask this question  
with eyes the size of saucers  
and a quivering bottom lip.

In our teenage years,  
we ask the question by pushing people away  
and paying attention to who comes back.

As adults we ask the question by  
extending the first invitation  
and seeing who returns the kindness.

Over and over again we ask the world,  
*Do you love me even now?*

The thing I've learned about God  
is that, no matter what comes before "even now,"  
the answer will always be yes.



## If You Hear Nothing Else, Then Hear This:

You can make a fool of yourself.  
You can bet on the wrong thing,  
lose it all, unravel people's trust.  
You can laugh at a funeral,  
curse in a church, say the wrong thing  
at the wrong time, *every time*.  
You can lose yourself in a bottle,  
a relationship, a false sense of security.  
You can uncover prejudice  
and wrestle with the shame of it all.  
You can withhold an apology,  
blame it on someone else,  
tell yourself it's not your fault.  
You can trade in love  
for a bag of coins.  
And even then,  
even still,  
even now,  
Jesus will love you enough to  
wash your feet.  
If you hear nothing else in the gospel,  
hear this.

## Love & Love & Love Again

If you back a cat into a corner  
she'll arch her back,  
show her teeth,  
hiss in your direction.

If you back a human into a corner,  
we'll raise our fists,  
raise our voices,  
throw words of hate in your direction.

But when we backed Jesus into a corner,  
he said, *Forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

He turned and looked at Peter, love in his eyes.  
He offered grace to the criminal hanging beside him.

When we backed Jesus into a corner,  
he loved and loved and loved again.

In this war-torn world,  
we could do the same.

We could ground the bomber planes,  
empty the gun cartridges,  
unclench our fists, soften our jaws.

They say it can't be done,  
but don't believe them.

In this war-torn world, we could try—  
love and love and love again.



## Birdsong

Every morning the sun rises,  
majestic and steady.  
She is greeted  
in all her strength  
with the joyous cacophony of birdsong.  
I like to believe  
this holy chorus  
is the birds telling each other—  
*I'm here.*  
*We made it through the night.*  
*You're not alone.*  
*What good, good news.*  
I think the resurrection is a bit like that.  
God is here.  
We made it through the night.  
We are not alone.  
*What good, good news.*



## 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](https://www.instagram.com/writingthegood) | [writingthegood.com](https://www.writingthegood.com)

