

St Edward, King and Martyr, Cambridge

**A Poem a Day for Lent with Malcolm Guite**



*Margot Krebs Neale*

Part 2 from Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March  
to Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> March

*Front cover image courtesy of Margot Krebs Nealte*

**Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> March:** yesterday's poem 'The Pilgrimage, by George Herbert, introduced a Lenten theme of journey, and search, reflecting the journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness, and Jesus own forty days in the wilderness. Our poems this week develop that theme a little further, beginning with this extract from one of John Donne's satires. This poem uses the same image of truth on a hill, indeed it may be one of the sources for Herbert, who knew Donne well as he was a great friend of Herbert's mother. The wider context of this satire is Donne's difficult and perplexed search amidst the many controversies that vexed the church in his day, for a clear understanding of Christ and his church. Here he realises that around about way, considering the same thing from different places and angles may be the only way to ascend to truth, but he also recognises the need for resolve, deliberation and energy in the search.

### **From John Donne Satire III**

...though truth and falsehood be  
Near twins, yet truth a little elder is;  
Be busy to seek her; believe me this,  
He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best.  
To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,  
May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way  
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;  
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will  
Reach her, about must and about must go,  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.  
Yet strive so that before age, death's twilight,  
Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night.  
To will implies delay, therefore now do;  
Hard deeds, the body's pains; hard knowledge too  
The mind's endeavours reach, and mysteries  
Are like the sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes.

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March:** *even though formal, outward and visible pilgrimage had been forbidden in England after the reformation, Sir Walter Raleigh, writing in the Tower on the eve of his execution, dares to revive all its traditional catholic imagery, but applying it, in his Anglican way to the inward and spiritual journey, and particularly the journey to heaven through the grave and gate of death which he was preparing to make. He believed himself to be the victim of a miscarriage of justice and the beautiful turn at the end of this poem in which Christ becomes the King's attorney to plead for all is particularly poignant.*

## The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage By Walter Raleigh

GIVE me my scallop-shell of quiet,  
My staff of faith to walk upon,  
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,  
My bottle of salvation,  
My gown of glory, hope's true gage ;  
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.

Blood must be my body's balmer,  
No other balm will there be given ;  
Whilst my soul, like a quiet palmer,  
Travelleth towards the land of heaven ;  
Over the silver mountains,  
Where spring the nectar fountains :

There will I kiss  
The bowl of bliss ;  
And drink mine everlasting fill  
Upon every milken hill :  
My soul will be a-dry before ;  
But after, it will thirst no more.

Then by that happy blestful day,  
More peaceful pilgrims I shall see,  
That have cast off their rags of clay,  
And walk apparelled fresh like me.  
I'll take them first  
To quench their thirst,  
And taste of nectar suckets,  
At those clear wells  
Where sweetness dwells  
Drawn up by saints in crystal buckets.

And when our bottles and all we  
Are filled with immortality,  
Then the blessed paths we'll travel,  
Strowed with rubies thick as gravel ;  
Ceilings of diamonds, sapphire floors,  
High walls of coral, and pearly bowers.  
From thence to heavens's bribeless hall,  
Where no corrupted voices brawl ;  
No conscience molten into gold,  
No forged accuser bought or sold,  
No cause deferred, nor vain-spent journey ;  
For there Christ is the King's Attorney,  
Who pleads for all without degrees,  
And he hath angels, but no fees.

And when the grand twelve-million jury  
Of our sins, with direful fury,  
'Gainst our souls black verdicts give,  
Christ pleads his death, and then we live.  
Be thou my speaker, taintless pleader,  
Unblotted lawyer, true proceeder !  
Thou giv'st salvation even for alms ;  
Not with a bribed lawyer's palms.  
And this is my eternal plea  
To him that made heaven, earth, and sea,  
That, since my flesh must die so soon,  
And want a head to dine next noon,  
Just at the stroke, when my veins start and  
spread,  
Set on my soul an everlasting head.  
Then am I ready, like a palmer fit ;  
To tread those blest paths which before I  
writ.

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> March:** *Holly Ordway's contemporary sonnet brings us back from the seventeenth century to our own fast-moving, wi-fied, online times, and calls us sharply to look up from our screens and be more truly oriented.*

### Maps a sonnet by Holly Ordway

Antique maps, with curlicues of ink  
As borders, framing what we know, like pages  
From a book of travelers' tales: look,  
Here in the margin, tiny ships at sail.  
No-nonsense maps from family trips: each state  
Traced out in color-coded numbered highways,  
A web of roads with labeled city-dots  
Punctuating the route and its slow stories.  
Now GPS puts me right at the center,  
A Ptolemaic shift in my perspective.  
Pinned where I am, right now, somewhere, I turn  
And turn to orient myself. I have  
Directions calculated, maps at hand:  
Hopelessly lost till I look up at last.

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March:** *we may go on pilgrimage, or wander in the wilderness in pursuit of a vision, but it is usually also a vision, or the glimpse of a vision, the apprehension of 'something more' the half heard voice that seems to call to us, that starts us on our journey. Yeats's song of he Wandering Aengus expresses this perfectly for me.*

### The Song Of Wandering Aengus By: W.B. Yeats

WENT out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread;

And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And some one called me by my name:

It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;

And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March:** *It's good that this call to journey and pilgrimage in Lent usually comes in spring and the turn of the year. For many of us winter is dark an difficult. It was particularly so for me in the winter of last year as I coped with a broken leg. This poem, written to celebrate my first walk outdoors alludes to psalm 51 the great Lenten penitential psalm with its prayer t ' make me to hear of joy and gladness that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice'*

## **First Steps, Brancaster**

This is the day to leave the dark behind you  
Take the adventure, step beyond the hearth,  
Shake off at last the shackles that confined you,  
And find the courage for the forward path.  
You yearned for freedom through the long night watches,  
The day has come and you are free to choose,  
Now is your time and season.  
Companied still by your familiar crutches,  
And leaning on the props you hope to lose,  
You step outside and widen your horizon.

After the dimly burning wick of winter  
That seemed to dull and darken everything  
The April sun shines clear beyond your shelter  
And clean as sight itself. The reed-birds sing,  
As heaven reaches down to touch the earth  
And circle her, revealing everywhere  
A lovely, longed-for blue.  
Breathe deep and be renewed by every breath,  
Kinned to the keen east wind and cleansing air,  
As though the blue itself were blowing through you.

You keep the coastal path where edge meets edge,  
The sea and salt marsh touching in North Norfolk,  
Reed cutters cuttings, patterned in the sedge,  
Open and ease the way that you will walk,  
Unbroken reeds still wave their feathered fronds  
Through which you glimpse the long line of the sea  
And hear its healing voice.  
Tentative steps begin to break your bonds,  
You push on through the pain that sets you free,  
Towards the day when broken bones rejoice

**Sunday 16th March:** *as we saw last week all Sundays are exceptions to Lent for every Sunday is a commemoration of the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, and so really part of Easter. We should see Sunday's as little islands of vision in the midst of Lent. Last Sunday we enjoyed RS Thomas's poem the Bright Field, I read this poem of Heaney's also about a moment of vision, as a companion piece:*

### **Seamus Heaney Postscript**

And some time make the time to drive out west  
Into County Clare, along the Flagggy Shore,  
In September or October, when the wind  
And the light are working off each other  
So that the ocean on one side is wild  
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones  
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit  
By the earthed lightening of flock of swans,  
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,  
Their fully-grown headstrong-looking heads  
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.  
Useless to think you'll park or capture it  
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,  
A hurry through which known and strange things pass  
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup>:** *today is Saint Patrick's Day and all the Saints days in Lent, like the Sundays are little Islands of resurrection joy. Here is a very recent sonnet of mine for saint Patrick.*

### **Patrick**

Six years a slave, and then you slipped the yoke,  
Till Christ recalled you, through your captors cries!  
Patrick, you had the courage to turn back,  
With open love to your old enemies,  
Serving them now in Christ, not in their chains,  
Bringing the freedom He gave you to share.  
You heard the voice of Ireland, in your veins  
Her passion and compassion burned like fire.

Now you rejoice amidst the three-in-one,  
Refreshed in love and blessing all you knew,  
Look back on us and bless us, Ireland's son,  
And plant the staff of prayer in all we do:  
A gospel seed that flowers in belief,  
A greening glory, coming into leaf.

