

# Reflections

*“...Our destiny is to live out what we think, because unless we live what we know, we do not even know it. It is only by making our knowledge part of ourselves, through action, that we enter into the reality that is signified by our concepts...”*

*“...Thought is formed and guided by objective reality outside us. Living is the constant adjustment of thought to life and life to thought in such a way that we are always growing, always experiencing new things in the old and old things in the new. Thus, life is always new.”*

*--Thomas Merton, “Thoughts in Solitude*

*The following are some reflections that I’ve written as I’ve been living and working in Appalachian Ohio. None of them are finished. They represent some of my “adjustment of thought to life and life to thought”:*

## **Community**

Community is a much-needed mirror into ourselves. We need each other, yes, and we need each other to reflect ourselves to one another—to elucidate what we see in each other in order to grant assurance, reprimand, and self-understanding.

Without this mirror, we are wont to go one of three ways: the way of pride, the way of self-deprecation, or the less active way of self-ignorance—of un-assumedly missing out on the beauty, goodness, and faithfulness of ourselves.

So, we must reflect one another to each other. To *encourage*, I mean: to stand in front of and declare, in edification, the truth that we see. Surely, this is a main role of community. This is iron sharpening iron. This is me being a mirror to you in order that we might grow closer to, and become more like, Christ.

And it is to the loss of all when we refuse to be this mirror. Obviously, it is to your loss when I refuse to mirror you to yourself. You do not gain the edification that comes from a brother speaking into your life.

And obviously, the larger community misses out. The community misses out on a level of vulnerability, trust, love, and encouragement that lends to the furthering of these same things. It also misses out on the opportunity to love another through learning more about them, reflecting on it, taking it in and agreeing.

Finally, it is to my loss when I refuse—be it out of unkindness, laziness, a lack of boldness, or whatever—to mirror you to you. I miss out on giving the gift, and I miss out on the joy and edification that comes from being the instrument of God.

And so, we must “spur one another on.” We must “encourage one another.” Yes, in an age that constantly tells us that we’re not worth it and with natures and minds that

are continually misled, we must be mirrors to each other—we must encourage one another unto, and because of, Christ-likeness.

### **No Man is an Island**

No man is an island, entire of itself.  
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were,  
As well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.  
Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.  
And, therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls:  
It tolls for thee.

-- John Donne

### **God of our Fathers**

Ineffable. Inexpressible. It is good to be reminded, and to reflect upon, the true nature of God. Holy, holy, holy Lord; God of power and might; who was and is and is to come. But our words fall short—hitting only the edges of the work of God and pointing to how God relates to us. But to His Being, to *what* God is, our words completely fail us. Mysterious, Unintelligible, Is: the incomplete understanding of a mortal mind.

But it is good to ponder these things. It is good to remember Who we pray to, worship, and trust with all history. Though it can be frightening, it is good to know that our God is Inexpressible, Ineffable, and the like: who else would we want to trust with the destiny of humanity?

And this lack of understanding, lack of knowing the Unknowable, is no excuse for a lack of trying. Instead, our theology gives us the language, the form, and the structure with which we may begin and continue to know God. It is the study of the work of God in attempt to ascertain the person of God. It is the observation and reflection of what God has done and is doing—His creation and redemption of humanity—in order that we might attempt to understand and worship the One behind the work.

And so our inexpression and incomplete knowledge become our worship, as we bend our knees to the One who is above all else, as we bow down in submission, and lift up in prayer all of our lives. As we seek to know fully and to be fully known.

### **The Kingdom of God**

The human heart longs for something to move it, stir it, wake it. The human heart longs for beauty—longs to see humanity in action and say “Wow.” And so this often happens as we allow our hearts to walk in circles of “poverty” and “homelessness.” It is often amidst the *people* that comprise these categories that we use to frame them that our hearts are stirred at the sight of beauty of a life *lived*. As we see our neighbors struggle and sacrifice for those around them; as we contemplate the lengths our friends are going to; as

we see their stories of perseverance; as we rub shoulders, share food, exchange stories: our hearts bend in humility, as we realize we've just learned something.

So it often is when we "come to help the poor." Often—hopefully—it does not take long before we realize that there is something very mutual going on here and that we realize how much it is that "we" have to learn from "these people."

### **Groceries**

"When do you wanna go shopping?" she says, as I pick up the phone.

"What?"

"When do you wanna go shopping? We're gonna buy you guys some food!"

"Oh, it's the 1<sup>st</sup> isn't it," I say in a nervous laugh... "Let me get back to you."

My pride and riches betray me and present an obstacle for the poor to serve me, an obstacle for true mutuality and reciprocation in our relationship, and an obstacle for my friends—if indeed my actions still allow me to call them that—to be empowered by giving in the only way they can. My mind tells me to say, "No, I don't need your food. I have plenty." This is true. I do. In fact, I have too much as it is.

But should I say no, my heart tells me that I am robbing my neighbors and friends of the only way, other than physical service and labor, that they can serve and give to me. In this way, I risk degrading my friends and robbing them of their dignity. Would the Temple ever tell the widow to keep her mite?

Part of me is too proud to accept this gift. This is the part that says, "No, I don't need your gift." Another part of me is too overwhelmed with gratitude and honor to accept it. This is the part that says, "Who am I that I should accept this sacrifice?"

---

What happened? We had them over for dinner—their treat—and we cooked a great meal together. Bob helped me work on my car, and somewhere in between "It must be nice to have a car like this, let alone two..." and "Can you pass me the corn?" most of the things that keep "us" and "them" apart seemed to slide away. Somewhere between the bread and the cup, the categories ("us" and "them," "poor" and... "normal") society uses to differentiate and separate humanity faded.

In the process, I was reminded that our social constructs that keep the "haves" and the "have-nots" apart are detrimental to both "them" and "us"—that as long as we are content to not only let our neighbor go hungry but also let ourselves be comfortable in not knowing him, we too will remain poor. For it is in these relationships with people from "all walks of life" that we begin to see ourselves clearly, that we begin to understand our world, and that we get a taste of the Kingdom of God.

## A Funeral

As I think about the upcoming funeral of my friend, I begin to mourn the loss. But it is not the loss of my friend for which I mourn; it is the loss of humanity—the loss of purity, of life, of vitality and the end of things. It is the untold suffering of thousands: the faceless, nameless millions who daily are hungry, are thirsty, are diseased, and are dying—who are afflicted with the world and living in it. Spring is beautiful, but the flower withers and decays so quickly. It is but a moment; *she* was but moment, so beautiful. Where is that tree that gives fruit in all seasons?

But don't hear me hate the world; don't hear me accuse the Maker. Instead, I embrace the world, and I yearn for the Maker. Indeed, *all* "creation waits in eager anticipation...groaning as in the pangs of childbirth..." But as I think of my friend, as I think of her struggle—how her remaining lung has been insidiously infested with the grip of the world—I am reminded that *this* is the struggle of humanity—of something greater (humanity) struggling against something lesser.

Indeed, all mankind at all times has yearned against this reality of suffering, and an endless litany of philosophies and religions have been formed in the wake. But it is my turn to yearn, to be, as I have not yet succumbed to the totality of life's grip. Yes, it is my turn to hope, and I do not doubt that Source of hope. Thus, my friend is a gospel that reminds me of life to come, of the change to take place, of the groaning within us all that says, "There is more than this." Maranath a!

## Dying

"That'ssss jusst the wway it is," he says in his slow, disease-infested drawl. If you had an extra half and hour, "Mike" would explain to you what he means. It would take him that long to list and explain his many health problems. In his late stage of life, my friend's body is rebelling against him—telling him it is time to quit. Unfortunately, most of the time, his mind goes along with the message, as he questions: "I don't understand what the point of me living anymore is. I just can't see the point."

As I see my friend suffer and question and hobble and grimace and struggle to stand and sit and eat and talk, I am often overwhelmed by the blessing of his presence. I have no answers for him. On the contrary, I try to convince him that it is *he* who has the answers for us—answers to questions on how to live and how to...die. He reads, he prays, he questions, he thinks, and really, though it is rarely joyful, this is his gift to us.

It, *he*, is a gift that gives me perspective, that makes me slow down, that makes me question the things I chase in life. I am humbled. His questioning and suffering reveal my frivolous nature that continually takes everything for granted. As I see this lonely old man, I am reminded of how truly dependent on each other we are—and what a *good* thing that is. I am reminded of the many people around us who need someone to sit and listen to their honesty. I am made to think of the fragility in life. Most of all, I am blessed by the presence of my friend; as he sits, as we talk, it is the most honest and rich conversation I have ever had.

### **The Idolatry of Service**

It can be dangerous work serving the poor. It can be so easy to want to pat yourself on the back, think that you are essential, and assume that others think you are a saint.

This is the road of egoism (at best) and idolatry. It is the road of false love, false humility, and Pharisaical service—of listening, serving, and *doing* because you are supposed to, not because you love. This is not worship. It may look like worship, but it is not worship. These are not the actions of a heart turned over to and enveloped by love and Christ.

There is much more to say here...

### **Downward Mobility**

More and more, I continue to see how money and things are obstacles to true relationship with the poor. Mother Teresa asks, “How can we be truthful to them if we lead a different life...What language will I speak to them?” Indeed.

If suffering today is due in large part to the lack of sharing and glut of hoarding, and if I am complicit in this hoarding of resources, then how can I truly befriend—know and be known by—(thus truly loving) my neighbor.

My conversations with the poor illustrate this difficulty. I am afraid to speak of my house, my education and its cost, my paychecks, my possessions, my family wealth, how my friends send me money in order to do this work, etc. And indeed, how can I truly love my neighbor who has very little when I have very much? How can I continue in the daily regimen of silently saying “No” and continuing to hoard while my neighbor needs? How can I call this love? I cannot truly be myself. Instead, I feel as if must hide that part of me that truly separates me from “them.”

So, voluntary poverty is not a biblical mandate per se, but if we are to truly love our neighbor, to be known and befriended by the poor, I think it is essential—in some form or degree. I think I must divest myself of privilege. I think I’ll call it love.

### **Grace**

Be it the needs of another—even a close friend...even a wife—or even the funeral of a friend, I am continually reminded and surprised by my own self-centeredness. In all opposition to the man I want to become—at all odds with that man of “perfect love”—I am continually guided and motivated out of self-interest.

(It is interesting how *community*—that oft-heard word of well-meaning disciples—can reveal this self-centeredness.)

However, the wonderful irony of the situation is that, while my sinfulness is being revealed, I am drawn closer and fall more in love with Christ. Most of the time, I am blindly walking around “knowing of” grace and forgiveness—of “how great Thou art” and “what a wonderful cross.” But it is in these precious moments of the illumination of my depravity that I get a clearer picture of what “grace” really is, of who it is that loves me, and of the true depth of that love. It is then that I am drawn *in* in worship, praise and thanksgiving. I think this is the force behind Luther’s statement to “sin boldly.”

And truly, this is the grace of “convicting grace.” For it is when I sin that my helplessness is revealed. It is after I sin that I submit to God, realize His presence, mercy, goodness, intentions, and will. It is sin, and God’s convicting grace therein, that often draws me to my knees, that reveals to me how utterly dependent on God that I really am.

But somehow, for so many misguided reasons, I miss the point most of the time.

### **Happy Birthday**

Birthdays are such introspective and reflective days—full of lookings forward and backward and inward and outward. It is now my 27<sup>th</sup> “year to heaven,” as Dylan Thomas says, and—honestly—I cannot live this day but in thanks. I cannot but rise and thank the Maker. I cannot live but to give life back. I cannot breathe but to pray to Christ. After all, the birthday really isn’t about me: it’s more about, and for, my parents and my Father—a celebration of creation and the gift that has been given me. It is a day for *them* to revel with joy, and a day for me to reflect my thanks to them. It is they—it is He—who made it possible. As such, shouldn’t my birthday be comprised of gift-giving to *them*? In this vein, I think a more appropriate birthday song is the doxology:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise Him all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen.*

Amen.

### **History**

I feel like we should all know our history better. I don’t mean that we should know our *history* better but that we should know *our* history better. What kind of people is it that does not know who they are? We have been so scattered and disconnected through the decades: silence has overcome our sense of identity, so that each generation has to recreate, re-tool, re-learn that which should be handed down—the sense of me, of us.

What is a Blackwell, a Laird, a Cory? Where do these people come from, and how did they get here? These are really the questions of how on earth did *I* get here, and who am I? Who are those people who have come before me; what were their lives like; where and why did they live; how does this inform who I am?

Surely we, people who are ancestor-“less” ghosts wandering around not knowing who they are, are a minority in the world. And with each second, the collective memory grows fainter, and I grow further from becoming who I am.

### **Matriarchs: In Memory of My Aunt**

Mothers and daughters,  
Sisters and cousins,  
Aunts and grandmas:  
These are the ones  
Who make life  
Into living,  
Into feeling,  
Into memory.  
Who convert birth  
Into person,  
Into culture,  
Into me.  
These are the ones  
Who host Christmas at snowtime,  
Who laugh at my playtime,  
Who tell me why *we* are.  
These are the ones—  
Those matriarchs of decades—  
Who knit us together,  
Who give us direction,  
Who keep our chronicles.  
They are made in our likeness—  
Rather, we are made in theirs:  
Built to be family,  
Coursing with bloodline,  
Resembling their image.  
And so it is.  
And so it will be.  
And so it is  
That we mourn of the passing,  
That we pause in the stopping,  
The we rise with the lowering.

### **Our Friend**

Today, I have walked up a hill and seen the suffering of the hopeless. I have heard the cry of the broken. I have seen the tears of the captive. Today, my neighbor came to visit.

Community. Hope. Kingdom of God. What are these words to my neighbor who is being crushed by the world and living in it?

### *Community*

Without this, my neighbor dies. Honestly. He is completely dependent on those around him. Further, if there is to be any meaning in his painful existence, it is to be found in community. For it is only in community that he will find hope, only in community that he will find healing. And so we must do our part.

### *Kingdom of God*

I believe that part of this is a place at the table and a place in community. Honestly, from the world's perspective, my neighbor has very little to offer: he is physically wasting away. However, in the community of the Kingdom, there is a place at the table whereby WE might gain from *his* presence, words, thoughts, experience, and—yes—suffering.

But the Kingdom is not just inclusion. The Kingdom is power. The Kingdom is the active working of God in, among, and through His people—here, now, and potently. Thus, we must believe in and proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, release to the captives, healing to the lame, justice for the oppressed, the year of the Lord's favor. In short, we must believe that God can, is, and will act on behalf of His beloved Creation.

### *Hope*

Honestly, there is little of this in my neighbor. At the same time, there is hope for an end. If we are being consistent, there is hope that the Kingdom might break in and take away this pain and suffering. But also, there is resurrection. And not of a body like this broken bag. There is resurrection. Resurrection to life—eternal, abundant. There is that city where God will wipe away every tear, where there will be no more mourning.

But are these just words to my neighbor? Does he ever ponder them? Is he tired of the Christian-ese that does far less than morphine for his pain? Yes, we must do our part.

### **All Saints Day**

“...for the sake of Christ's body...the church...” –Col 1:24

“Thousands were added to their number...Aunt Marie gave her life to Christ today...Follow me...” These are the phrases of our heritage—sayings of “little birthdays” of our history.

And I say “our” here. For it is the sacrifice of Christ that has grafted us into His covenant community. It is the grace of God that has worked to redeem the world. And it is by grace that God has seen fit to create a community of worldwide believers united in faith and action under the One True God and King—united and called a “communion of saints.”

So, it is on “All Saints Day” that we pause to reflect on the goodness and work of God. And it is a day for us to remember those who have gone before us—that “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:2)—and to remember and reflect upon the fact that we stand in a long line of tradition, faith, believers, and saints. It is a time to remember and reflect upon those Christ-followers who have come before us—some renown to all, most known only to a few—and to take from their example some encouragement and edification. We do not stand alone but in a long and storied line of witnesses “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. 11:38).

Furthermore, it is a time for us to praise God for His faithfulness and steadfast love—acknowledging and reflecting upon the fact that He has borne the faith, sorrows, struggles, hopes and salvation of billions of believers over thousands of years. It is a time for us to revel in the thought that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and *us*.

So, “...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

“Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord. Grant us grace so to follow your holy saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which you have prepared for those who sincerely love you; through Christ our Lord. Amen.” (from the Book of Common Prayer)

### **Entanglement: Suffering and the Christian**

I’ve never been to a funeral where a single bouquet of flowers hid the entire casket. The casket couldn’t have been more than 18 inches long. It was cold. It was windy. It was November. The cemetery was a small clearing in the heart of rural and in the middle of hills and trees that were fall hollows of their former spring selves.

The people shuffled around, kicking browned leaves, glancing at the casket, trying not to stare at the would’ve-been parents. “That’s just what He wanted baby,” the almost-mother replied to a questioning child.

The small group of relatives gathered to hear the preacher’s answers: “We gather here together on this somber occasion...As we are family...In Joey’s memory...I know you have...questions...anger...pain...Sometimes, it just doesn’t make sense...”

Sometimes, it just doesn’t make sense. Sometimes, we just can’t understand.

Against this picture stands another set of word-thoughts: “Immanuel,” “Incarnation,” “Good News,” “Hope,” “Life abundant.”

Perhaps I shouldn't say "against this picture." Perhaps I should say "within" or "alongside this picture." For, more and more, I am convinced that these words (Good News and the like) say great and deep things about our God and His response to and view of suffering. Moreover, I am convinced that we cannot fully understand the meaning of these words when we detach ourselves from suffering.

What is hope? What does "life abundant" even mean in the midst of incredible, inexplicable, seemingly-arbitrary pain and suffering? What is "Good News" for the poor, for the almost-mother, for the once-was-wife?

Sure, our classrooms, our theologians, our Scriptures can give us a veiled understanding of these answers and ideas, but it is only in the midst of suffering itself that we begin to know. (And I do not presume that I have begun to know.)

If this is true that we cannot fully understand things that are central to the Gospel apart from suffering, what does this mean? Can we know God, can we know Christ's Gospel without knowing suffering and its cousins and victims? Can we know Him apart from our poor, our broken, our crushed neighbor? Can we know Him apart from the grinding poverty of our brothers and sisters?

I'm not sure that we can. In fact, I think that our tendency—if we detach ourselves from the suffering of our neighbor—is to conflate these very words of the Gospel (Good News, life-abundant, etc.) with cultural values that are often foreign to our Lord. This is a dangerous, and idolatrous, place to be. But we are so good at avoiding suffering—ours and others.

I do not mean to be morbid here. I do not mean to assert that we enter into suffering for suffering's sake. Instead, I propose that we enter into the suffering of our neighbors for (at least) two reasons. First, we enter because God Himself did not sit idly by while this world suffered and raged against itself. Instead, we meet Him, beat Him, bury Him—*in the flesh*." Secondly, we enter because of Christ's identification with the poor and suffering (Mt. 25:31-46). Can we truly know the Lord if we do not in some way enter into the anguish of our neighbors: "love thy neighbor."

"Immanuel," "Incarnation," "Good News," "Hope," "Life abundant": the Almighty Creator of the Universe poured Himself out, leaving all behind and becoming nothing, even unto death in the most shameful and torturous manner (Phil. 2:6-11). And He calls us to a *lifestyle* that is the same—making ourselves nothing, entering into the lives of our neighbors. "Follow me," He says.

I do not suppose that I have this all figured out and to hint that I do not seek my own comfort above most other things. But I do believe that we must lay down ourselves: that we must travel down hollows to stand in the emptiness with would-be-parents, that we must stop and talk to our homeless friends on the street, that we must share tables and meals together with them, that we must—in a myriad of small and great ways—attempt to find the glory of the Lord manifested in the sacrament of the poor and suffering. In the

process, it is often that we do find our Lord, that we do love our neighbor, and that we also find ourselves.

### **The Ministry of Presence**

One of the saddest things about “Rachel” is that she is so lucid. She understands the illnesses that control her. Moreover, she seems completely aware of their irrationality. She understands that an immovable fear of strangers, open places, and leaving the safety of her apartment are gripping and destroying her life. She recognizes that it is extreme, odd, and possibly even a little absurd that she must hide in small closets to combat her fears. She cries out for release. She believes.

“The mental illness is winning,” she says through the hands and tears that cover her face. “It’s winning...”

We come and visit Rachel every now and then. We encourage her to come to the community at Friday Night Life (our weekly, community-focused free meal). She always rejoices when we come to see her. Sometimes, I think these visits are the highlights of her month. She talks; we listen: that’s the arrangement. Inevitably, we ask if we can pray with her. Her southern belle drawl exclaims, “You know I’d love it if you did!” She calls us “her family.” “More family to me than my family,” she says. She always tells us this.

The lessons I receive upon visiting Rachel are always manifold, but I am consistently surprised at the utter power of presence: “I’m so glad you stopped by; ya’ll just made my day.” Who am I? What have I done? Did I do something?

It is amazing, startling really, how many hurting and desperate people there are all around us. To lesser and greater degrees, there are so many Rachels around us. Most of them, excuse me—most of us—are really good and practiced at hiding such desperation. Most of us are too proud, moneyed, and secluded to reveal our inner woundedness.

It is equally startling how easily many of these lonely and suffering people can be impacted. This is not to forget that true relationships involve sacrifice, vulnerability, and often incur serious hits to my self-centered schedule. But all we do is sit on Rachel’s couch and listen to her. All we do is tell her we love her, tell her she is valued and has purpose, tell her we think about her when we’re not around.

And, from her responses, you’d think we’d done amazing and extra-ordinary acts. “You’re my family,” you see.

### **The Crucible of Community**

I have referred to community as a mirror that shows myself to me, yourself to you. I have praised this mirrored world as a necessary means to our holiness...It can be so easy to revel in the gaiety of reflected affection. At times though, I find that these reflections

can become as a room full of fun-house mirrors that reflect back to me images I do not want to see. It's not that the mirrors are faulty, just that seeing yourself in the mirror is not always a beautiful thing. Sometimes, I am in need of a shower. A good washing: "...Not just my feet but my hands and head too."

This is, perhaps, the crucible of community. And these are the crucial junctures of the spiritual life: do I resist in pride and stubbornness ("Take me back to Egypt!"); do I submit in humility and willingness? *Timshal*.

Often times, this mirrored crucible lasts but an instant, a day; sometimes, it prolongs itself for weeks and months. At all times, it is my flesh nudging up against the commands to lay down my life and love my neighbor. At all times, it is the grace of God that reveals myself to me that I might give it back to Him.

This is a gift of community. It is much easier to love people when they are not around; it is more possible to become like Christ when they are.

### **Who is this King of Glory?**

Ineffable. Inexpressible. Mysterious. Ever-present yet ever-hidden. Always here but never where.

The ways in which our God chooses to let Himself be known are mysterious, questionable to us, and at times agonizingly not enough. This is a God who is ever-present and ever-seen through the "masks" (M. Luther) of His self-revelation: through Creation; through us; through small and great, yet sporadic, often incomprehensible, miracles; through still small voices. Ever-hidden yet always there? Ever-seen yet not understood?

Which makes more curious, and important, the life, death (cross), and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we truly believe that Christ is "Immanuel," is God in the flesh... What does this say about history? About the God of our Fathers? Ineffable...

Meditate upon the *life* of Christ.

Teachings. Miracles. Servanthood. Humility. LOVE. Philippians 2. Matthew 5-7. Blessed are...Your sins are...Go and sin no...Before Abraham was, I am. Riding on donkeys, eating with sinners, leading those followers...Is this how we understand God?

Meditate upon the *death* of Christ.

Humiliation. Humility. Suffering. Suffering. Suffering. Nails and thorns. Mocking and beating. Bleeding and sweating. An instrument of torture. Is *this* God in the flesh? Forgive them for they know not...My God, My God...I find no fault in this man...Give us Barabbas...Today, you will be with me in...Is this the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The God of our Fathers?

The same.

In the crucified arms of Christ, we find an overwhelming love of the Triune God who's been cultivating a people for millennia. In the malice-torn flesh of Immanuel, we find an active-hot love burning in passive humiliation. In the sin-free Jesus, we find love's sacrificial reply to humanity's disobedience. This is love. That is love.

The great I AM united with humanity—the God of pillared smoke and fire, Red Seas, plagues, and greatness—allowing Himself to be pinned by hands He created and will soon die for. This is the Lord of glory?

Without consistently reflecting upon the descent of God into humanity and his suffering death on a cross, I am afraid we will continually return to (or run from) what we believe to be a God of anger, wrath, and guilt-inducing fear (or hatred). But the cross tells us something different. Christ's Calvary tells us of the incomprehensibly vast, patient, sufferable, surprising love of God. Love of God. Love of God. What kind of Creator does that? What kind of Lord is that? What kind of follower am I?

---

And, of course, the cross isn't the end of the story. There is a Sunday—a day where all history turns on its calendars, looking in an empty tomb, epiphanied to the fact that you and I will never be the same—that something's happened that will forever change what you and I are to become. We too, have empty tombs to flee from, have glory in our bones.