



# The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Kitchener

# ON EAGLE'S WINGS

April 24, 2022

Available online at [StJohn316.com/OEW](http://StJohn316.com/OEW)

## Easter Letter 2022

In 1940, Bonhoeffer wrote a reflection on Easter that was sent around to the pastors of the Confessing Church—the league of pastors doing their best to resist Hitler's influence on their communities of faith. The war had begun, and the beleaguered pastors and their congregations had already experienced hardship, failure, and a great deal of internal disagreement about how to proceed, how to resist. Many were demoralized. And things only looked to get worse.

Bonhoeffer had experienced his own setbacks, and many of his own hopes for his work in the church were not coming to fruition. One can imagine that his disappointment, and the disappointment of the other resisting pastors, was something he could hear and see in Jesus, on the cross, when he wrote:

*On the cross Jesus cried out in desolation and then commended himself into his Father's hands, that God should act toward him and his work according to the divine pleasure.*

Very few of us will have to face what Bonhoeffer, and the other pastors and their congregations, faced in 1940 near the beginning of the war. But I'm sure that most of us can relate to the way dreams are broken, the way we fail one another, the way we so often aren't the people we'd hoped to be. We too may look back at the work of our lives and see how so many things and people have passed away, and sometimes even our good work being undone.

As Jesus cries out in desolation, though, he does cry out for us, too—for all our failures, all the dashed hopes, all the unfinished business. Jesus, in representing us on the cross, takes up all that grief and sorrow and brings it to the Father for us. In this way, we die with him: in Christ on the cross, we die to sin.

*What happens to him, happens to us, for he has accepted us.*

This is no half-hearted acceptance, either. This is not like having someone over for tea, and then turning the lights out in hopes that they will leave because you're tired. This kind of acceptance is where we are borne and carried: all of who we are, all the failures, all the hopes—all of who we are, taken up in him. Jesus has *assumed* us, brought us so deeply into his life that what happens to him, happens to us too.

The resurrection, though, is God's yes to us. If Christ is crucified, and in that crucifixion we die to sin, then as Christ is resurrected, so too are we resurrected with him. The resurrection is God's great big yes. Yes, you have life, you have the life of Christ. Yes you will live, yes you will love, yes you will hope, yes you will be made perfect. Because what happens to Jesus, happens to us.

Paul's second letter to Timothy puts it this way:

*If we have died with him, we will also live with him.*

In this holy season of the crucifixion and the resurrection, may you be blessed in Christ Jesus—obtaining with him life, and life everlasting.

Yours in Christ,

Preston

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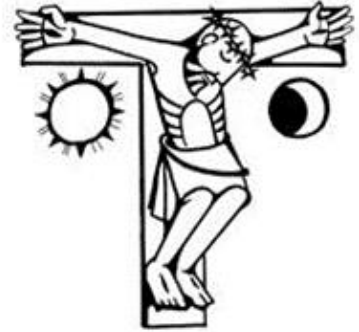
The next issue of On Eagle's  
Wings will be available on  
May 29th, 2022.

## Passion Triptych

Sheryl Loeffler

Triptych is a term from art—a painting, often an altarpiece, consisting of three hinged panels. Often the Crucifixion is the subject of the central panel, as it is in this triptych of three poems.

I wrote the third poem first. At another church, where I served as Director of Music, the ministerial staff and I based a Lenten service on the Stations of the Cross. I was asked to write a commentary on the last station—Jesus is laid in the tomb. The two other poems in the triptych followed several months later. Many years later, at yet another church, Pr. James Brown featured three of my Nativity poems and these three Passion poems in a Lenten program with music that he called Meeting God’s Spirit in Poetry and Song.



In **“Bread and Wine,”** I borrowed the phrase blood of the grape from the wine industry. I found it in a magazine article about wine.

As I read, I came slowly to realize what may be obvious to everyone else—that wheat and grapes have to be crushed to make bread and wine (which made them even richer to me as symbols of Jesus’ broken body and blood).

In **“The Cross,”** I’ve told the story of the Crucifixion from the point of view of the Cross. The idea isn’t original. I took it from one of the oldest poems in English—when English was an unrecognizable Anglo-Saxon—written about 1200 years ago, called *The Dream of the Rood*. Rood is an old word meaning cross.

I took as my starting point the Rood’s description of its violent abduction from the edge of a forest. In my poem, however, I’ve made the Cross female, almost Jesus’ lover.

As Jesus agonizes in Gethsemane, the Cross reflects on the coming Crucifixion, which she knows will end her life, too.

## Cookies for Ukrainian Relief Update

Jennifer Uttley

Many thanks to all who supported this outreach ministry by purchasing cookies and to our bakers who gave of their time and resources to make them.

I am pleased to report that together with sales and additional donations \$2000 was sent to PWRDF for Ukrainian Relief. With thanks and prayers for those supporting the mission.

She refers to Jesus as a second Adam, an Adam who will take the place of the sinful first Adam. And she refers to herself as the tree that will take the place of the tree in the garden that led humankind into its first temptation.

**“Linen and Spices”** went in its own direction. I was supposed to write a commentary on the story of Jesus’ burial. And I started to. In the poem, the frightened secret of Joseph of Arimathea, who gave his tomb for Jesus, and Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night, is that they are disciples. But when I got to the word myrrh in the scriptural story, lines from an old Christmas carol came to me—Gold in honour of the King, / incense to the Priest they bring, / myrrh for time of burying—a carol about the three Wise Men. And suddenly, I found myself in a room with a dying Wise Man, a room with my dying father, who had died three months earlier at Christmas,

*(Continued on page 3)*

*(Continued from page 2)*

a grief that still ran raw.

The poem looks backwards from that room, then forwards again, from the death and burial of Jesus to the light of his Nativity and the Resurrection to come.



**Passion Triptych**

**I**

**Bread and Wine**

Remember me—  
the beaten stalk,  
the battered heart.  
Bread of my tears,  
wept for you—  
eat it to your hunger.  
God before you, God within you.

Remember me—  
the tortured vine,  
the broken fruit.  
Blood of the grape,  
pressed for you—  
drink it to your thirst.  
God before you, God within you.



**Passion Triptych**

**II**

**The Cross**

I grew in a garden,  
as the boy grew at home,  
straight and strong  
in the Maker's eye,  
until I was cut down.  
Men with axes  
struck me  
and felled me  
and carried me off  
on their shoulders  
to make a gallows tree.

I wait as he prays.  
Tomorrow I'll hold him—  
an Adam for Adam,  
a tree for a tree.  
His slayers will drive  
their black spikes through us.  
And the shadowed earth  
will shake  
as our lifeblood spills  
in great red drops to the ground.



**Passion Triptych**

**III**

**Linen and Spices**

They came from the dark  
of their frightened secret  
to take down the body,  
to wash it,  
to salve it  
with aloes and myrrh,  
to wrap it in linen,  
to offer a tomb  
before the coming night.

The last of the Wise Men  
stirred in his dying,  
dimly remembering myrrh  
he once gave  
to an infant  
wrapped in cloth.  
He knew this much—  
led for so long,  
he had borne witness  
to that child's birth  
(or was it his death?)  
before the coming light

## R.S. Thomas, the “grumpy” Welsh priest

A reflection by Andrew Brockett.

When, in his Easter Sunday sermon, Preston referred to the Welsh poet R.S. Thomas, I waited to hear what poem would be quoted. I knew only one poem by *that* Thomas (he was not Edward, nor Dylan, but Ronald Stuart Thomas) – I had treasured that poem for 40 years: it is called *The Country Clergy* but more of that later – it was not the poem which Preston quoted.

The reference to R.S. Thomas (1913-2000), who was undoubtedly “grumpy” and “crabby”, led me to dig a bit deeper (and most of what follows comes from the website of the Poetry Foundation). He spent nearly all of his working life as an Anglican priest in country parishes in North Wales. It is largely hill country, harsh and bleak; the parishioners were farmers who led lives of hard labour on lonely farms in an unyielding landscape.

His experience as a priest among such people, in such an environment, shaped R.S. Thomas as a realist who saw the tragedy of the human condition: it inspired his grim, merciless, austere poetry.

He was disenchanted with the modern world (hence Preston’s reference to sermons on the evils of refrigerators and washing machines). He tended to look back on the past as a better time, and he particularly lamented the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English-driven, industrialization that had ruined the natural beauty of Wales. He wrote of “the assault of contemporary lifestyles on the beauty and peace of the natural world” and:

“We are told with increasing vehemence, that this is a scientific age, that science is transforming the world, but is it not also a mechanized and impersonal age, an analytic and clinical one; an age in which under the hard gloss of affluence there can be detected the murmuring of the starved heart and the uneasy spirit?”

Despite the natural and human tragedy that R.S. Thomas perceived in the world around him, he clung to his religious conviction: his poetry expressed an almost Job-like questioning of God. As one critic wrote:

“... one of the important functions of poetry is to embody religious truth, and since for him as poet that truth is not easily won, his poems record the struggle with marked honesty and integrity, thereby providing the context for the necessarily infrequent moments of faith and vision which are expressed with a clarity and gravity rarely matched by any of his contemporaries.”

That ability to identify with all of us who have real questions in our search for meaning and truth, and that surrender to the mystery of God, are well-expressed in the extract from his fine poem *The Answer* which Preston quoted on Easter Sunday:

*There have been times  
when, after long on my knees  
in a cold chancel, a stone has rolled  
from my mind, and I have looked  
in and seen the old questions lie  
folded and in a place  
by themselves, like the piled  
graveclothes of love’s risen body.*

The “old questions” are answered by “love’s risen body”.

And here is the poem by R.S. Thomas that I have admired (perhaps with unrealistic nostalgia) for many years:

### ***The Country Clergy***

*I see them working in old rectories  
By the sun's light, by candlelight,  
Venerable men, their black cloth  
A little dusty, a little green  
With holy mildew. And yet their skulls,  
Ripening over so many prayers,  
Topped into the same grave  
With oafs and yokels. They left no books,  
Memorial to their lonely thought  
In grey parishes; rather they wrote  
On men's hearts and in the minds  
Of young children sublime words  
Too soon forgotten. God in his time  
Or out of time will correct this.*

# On the Jesus Train: Bruce Cockburn and a Christian Imagination

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Dr. Brian Walsh

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Sundays  
7pm-9pm EST

April 24,  
May 1, 8, 15, 2022\*  
via Zoom

\*recordings will be available for those unable to  
attend all classes.

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