

Psalm 96

- ¹ O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
- ⁴ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
- ⁶ Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
- ⁹ Worship the LORD in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.
- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
- ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it.
- Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- ¹³ before the LORD; for he is coming,
for he is coming to judge the earth.
- He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.

The Summer Day *Mary Oliver (1935-2019)*

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean--
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down--
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

The Contributors

U. A. Fanthorpe

Not your fault, gentlemen.
We acquit you of the calculatedly
Equivalent gift, the tinsel token.
Mary, maybe, fancied something more practical:
A layette, or at least a premium bond.
Firmly you gave the extravagantly
Useless, your present the unwrapped
Hard-edged stigma of vocation.

Not your fault, beasts,
Who donated your helpless animal
Rectitude to the occasion.
Not yours the message of the goblin
Robin, the red-nosed reindeer,
Nor had you in mind the yearly
Massacre of the poultry innocent,
Whom we judge correct for the feast.

Not your fault, Virgin,
Muddling along in the manger,
With your confused old man,
Your bastard baby, in conditions
No social worker could possibly approve.
How could your improvised, improvident
Holiness predict our unholy family Xmas,
Our lonely overdoses, deepfrozen bonhomie?

Christmas

George Herbert

All after pleasures as I rid one day,
My horse and I, both tired, body and mind
With full cry of affections, quite astray:
I took up the next inn I could find.
There when I came, whom found me but my dear,
My dearest Lord, expecting till the grief
Of pleasures brought me to him, ready there
To be all passengers' most sweet relief?
O Thou, whose glorious, yet contracted light,
Wrapped in night's mantle, stole into a manger;
Since my dark soul and brutish is thy right,
To Man of all beasts be not thou a stranger:
Furnish and deck my soul, that thou mayst have
A better lodging than a rack, or grave.

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for thee?
My soul's a shepherd too: a flock it feeds
Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.
The pasture is thy word: the stream, thy grace
Enriching all the place.
Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Out-sing the day-light hours.
Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right:
We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold,
I will go searching, till I find a sun
Shall stay, till we have done;
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipped suns look sadly.
Then we will sing, and shine all our own day'
And one another pay:
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine,
Till ev'n his beams sing, and my music shine.

Advent Calendar

Rowan Williams (b. 14 June 1950)

He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.

He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky

He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

The Anunciation

Edwin Muir (1887-1959)

The angel and the girl are met
Earth was the only meeting place.
For the embodied never yet
Travelled beyond the shore of space.
The eternal spirits in freedom go.

See, they have come together, see,
While the destroying minutes flow,
Each reflects the other's face
Till heaven in hers and earth in his
Shine steady there. He's come to her
From far beyond the farthest star,
Feathered through time. Immediacy
Of strangest strangeness is the bliss
That from their limbs all movement takes.
Yet the increasing rapture brings
So great a wonder that it makes
Each feather tremble on its wings.

Outside the window footsteps fall
into the ordinary day
And with the sun along the wall
Pursue their unreturning way.
Sound's perpetual roundabout
Rolls its numbered octaves out
And hoarsely grinds its battered tune.

But through the endless afternoon
These neither speak or movement make,
But stare into their deepening trance
As if their gaze would never break.

Before I got my eye put out

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Before I got my eye put out –

I liked as well to see

As other Creatures, that have Eyes –

And know no other way -

But were it told to me, Today -

That I might have the sky

For mine - I tell you that my Heart

Would split, for size of me -

The Meadows – mine –

The Mountains – mine –

All Forests – Stintless Stars –

As much of Noon, as I could take

Between my finite eyes –

The Motions of the Dipping Birds –

The Morning's Amber Road –

For mine – to look at when I liked -

The News would strike me dead –

So safer – guess – with just my soul

Upon the Window pane -

Where other Creatures put their eyes –

Incautious – of the Sun -

Pied Beauty

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim.

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;

And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him