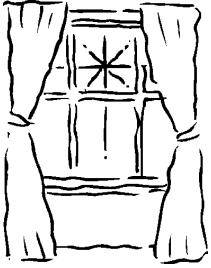


Looking Out My Window, July 22, 2024

Poetry, part 1



We carry around a number of texts in memory and those texts do their work within us. Poetry has been a source of encouragement, light, and strength for me. God has spoken repeatedly through verse, and poetic strophes have illumined dark inner corners and congealed fluxing emotions. Even if the lines get a bit mangled in recall, the rhythm, rhyme, and imagery of poetry penetrate in ways that prose does not.

The biblical prophets resorted to poetry in their ongoing confrontations with the political power structures spewing forth their propaganda in prose. Poetry subverted that prose and sparked the imaginations and faith of the hearers. Some of the most significant Scripture in the Anglican tradition is cast in poetic symmetry, for example the *Magnificat of Mary* (Luke 1:46-55; *BCP*, 119) and the *Nunc Dimitis* of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32; *BCP*, 135).

Like some of you, I paid little attention to poetry as an adult. But, around 1990, my life had run into rough water. Our marriage was tattered. I was increasingly uncomfortable in the Baptist tradition as a cleric and teacher. Sitting in my home study in Atlanta, I was reading the autobiography of a Methodist pastor, Robert Rains, *Never Far From Home*; I was identifying with his journey—resigning a thriving church, leaving his wife and family, and driving away with his belongings in a trailer looking for a new life.

He quoted a poem by Theodore Roethke, “The Waking.” As I read it, chills went through me. The powerful images and the crafted lines of that poem found me and pointed me toward the risks of a new life, one that I would begin living into two years later. Now, a shelf in my living room groans under the weight of books of poetry. Lines from poems have become mantras that encourage and inspire me. Roethke’s collected poetry was the first of many volumes to find a home with me.

You can read that poem, “The Waking,” at this link.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43333/the-waking-56d222of25315>

Next time, part 2: how poetry has become more a part of my life and found its way into preaching.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David W. Perkins+".

David W. Perkins+
Priest in Charge