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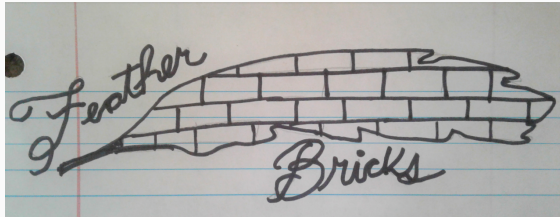
Feather Bricks

The Official Newsletter of North Park Theological Seminary's

School of Restorative Arts

Cover Art by Michael Sullivan

Feather Bricks



Logo by Steven Ramirez

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Letter from the Editors



Dear Readers,

I'm thinking back on the trail blazed by previous co-editors of *Feather Bricks*. It comes to mind the scripture Hebrews 12:11. We have all—through *Feather Bricks*—grown together, waited for something, code-meshed amongst one another, and set in a state of hope. As we journey closer, with anticipation, to what our world will comprehend as being “the new normal,” I ask that we develop a theme that speaks to “Healthy Realizations.”

What has this time of social distancing and remote-learning informed you about the resilience of your desires? What have you noticed about yourself that is no longer needed in order for you to succeed? How has your perception of community changed internally, as to positively affect your external interactions with others?

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

--Hebrews 12:11

I am certain that there is a wealth of wisdom vying to be shared with our *Feather Bricks* community as we grow forward.

Editor Ro'Derick Zavala (also known as Ro')

Dear Students, Writers, Thinkers,

This issue of *Feather Bricks* is a game changer just as much as it is another newsletter packed with fully-vitaminized texts for you to digest. Ro' set the bar high with his ideas for new columns ("Visualizations!" "Let's Get Real COVID!" "The Artist's Corner!"), and our community of writers and artists came through.

While reading these pieces, I was also reading student reflections on my syllabus for a new course I am teaching. (I was multitasking...maybe not so healthy?) I found a common comment my students made about my syllabus that rings true for the pieces in this newsletter. (And *this* is my "healthy realization"): One student summarized nicely when she wrote, "I realized from reading this syllabus that our writing is meant to do something." Others went on to explain that in the past, they had considered writing as a way to earn a grade or to check that task off a list, but that graduate-level writing now meant that writing should aim to "inform the ignorant," "defend a point," "call readers to action," and maybe even "to entertain."

I hope you find this issue full of "writing that does something" nutritious, fortifying, and maybe even a little bit tasty at times.

Write on! Professor Melissa

Devotional

by Professor Mary Veeneman



“It is no sign of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society.”

I heard this recently and I have been turning it over in my head for the last couple of weeks since hearing it. Although this was not said by a Christian, I think it is an idea that is profoundly compatible with Christianity, as can be the case with wisdom from other traditions. The Christian vision of health—true, robust health—is one that explicitly does not adjust to the present world. In fact, when Jesus prays for his followers, he asks for protection for his followers in the world precisely because they do not belong to the world.

“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world”
(John 17.15-16, NRSV).

So what is our Christian calling? How are we to be in the world? We are not to be adjusted to it; we are not to belong to it. In fact, our Christian calling might be to resist to the world, to be in the world working precisely to dismantle the things that make it so much less than God originally intended it to be. May our active work in the world lead us and others to resist the systems of injustice that make the world “profoundly sick.”

Prayer:

Lord, make us your agents of resistance in the world to work towards the restoration to what it was intended to be. Watch over us as we seek to work in the world while not belonging to it. Amen.

Imagine by Sara Woody

I keep hearing people saying this past year has been “unprecedented.” How arrogant of us to believe that simply because we have never lived through a time such as this means it has never been this way before. There have been pandemics before. There have been racial reckonings before. There have been controversial elections before. There have been disparities in our access to financial stability and healthcare. And, if we’re being honest, all of these events will happen again in the future too. I read responses in the Covenant Companion newspaper to the Black Manifesto in 1969. Now it is 51 years later, and some of those same words could be written today. Unprecedented? According to who?

A little over 500 years ago, Europeans “discovered” a whole world beyond their shores. On the Gold Coast of Africa, and in the tropical Caribbean islands, they encountered peoples very unlike themselves. Did they exclaim to themselves about how “unprecedented” this was? The very language around this era of history, which began the slave trade and colonization, and introduced white supremacy into our theology, seems to suggest yes. Instead of “unprecedented” they said, “Uncharted territory.” They said, “Discovery!” They said, “Claim.” What arrogance not to realize that these lands had been inhabited by the stories of indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Uncharted? According to who?

Representatives by David Denson

(Isaiah 56:3-8) Isaiah sought to bring his people back to their ancient, universal destiny. As the representatives of the true God, they were responsible not only for themselves but also for the world.

This is what I am seeing going on now. We are called to represent the true God in righteousness, justice, peace, love, and harmony, which represents God’s plan for the kingdom of shalom.

In response to these questions, my word recently has been, “imagination.” According to Willie Jennings, my ancestors lacked this expansive skill when they ventured beyond their continent. They could not begin to conceive that the languages and customs of the people they encountered were anything other than less. Their imagination stopped at the conclusion that they were superior.

I have always been a bit of a dreamer. As a child, I would spend hours by myself wandering in the woods, spinning worlds of valiant fighting, passionate romance, intrigue and escapades. Slowly, hormones and academics and resume-building activities and family trauma and part-time jobs and painful losses chipped away at the energy I had for this kind of dreaming. I’m not a child anymore, but I feel the Lord inviting me anew to imagine. Imagine a world where white people, starting with me, really listened, received, and repented of their racism. Imagine a world where prisons don’t exist anymore. Imagine a world that is whole, where the land is taken care of and our relationship with creation is restored, and the Church repents of its abuses, and the voices in the margins are centered, and all people are afforded the simple dignity of living...not just wish for it, but really picture what kind of a world that would be; what would we need to get there? Sometimes, it can feel painful to contemplate, because the ache of it not being our reality yet stings. But I feel that we must cling to the hope that God really can do immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine. May it be so, may it be so.

Mantra I Live By by: Live each day with purpose on purpose

by Yarmale Thomas

This is my personal mantra which I live by because for so many years I didn't believe I mattered nor had any value (before being incarcerated and while being incarcerated). However, after God revealed to me who I am and whose I am, I now know and understand that I have value and have purpose in this world, and I will be deliberate (or purposeful) in my interactions with whomever I come into contact with. To be purposeful means to be motivated by a sense of purpose. I'm motivated each day. I open my eyes to shine the light God has placed inside of me wherever I go, regardless of how I feel and smile because positivity is contagious. Covid 19 has devastated our nation and our world which has affected us all. I truly believe it's time to deliberately allow positivity to become the new perpetual pandemic which will change the world for the better. So, we all should live each day with purpose on purpose. Be blessed and stay safe.

Psalms 88:1 "A Phrase to Live By" Poem written by Writing Advisor Jamie Thomasson

Psalms 88:1 is my go-to phrase.

I use it every day for multiple things.

Psalms 88:1 can also be used as a visualization.

It's God's written word stored in the mind to remind you of God's love for his creation.

My go-to phrase eliminates fear and can remove Covid-19

And just like Martin Luther King Jr. "I too have a dream."

This dream brings hope to us all

By keeping our faith, the Blessings will fall.

So please keep this phrase deep inside you as a reminder

"The future is near" so leave the past behind you.

I "feel" this phrase, it "flows" through my "veins"

It brings me "love" and removes all my "pain"

Yes, for the moment it's true, I'm still locked up "behind bars"

But like a doctor used laser, "God will save me" and "remove all my scars."

I will have "hope" and not live in "fear"

And if it creeps up, "Psalm 88:1" is there.

I get reminded of the "promises made" when it clearly states in Psalm 88

"Lord, you are the God who Saves Me."

Focus by Howard Keller

My word for the year is "focus." It was inspired by the story in Matthew 14:22-23 where Jesus walks on water in the middle of a storm. There's a moment in this story when Peter, in an attempt to meet up with Jesus, steps out of the boat and begins walking on water in Jesus' direction. Before reaching his destination (Christ), however, Peter takes his eyes off Christ (loses focus), pays attention to the storm instead, and ultimately beings to sink. It isn't until Jesus reaches out to grab Peter's hand (re-captures his attention) that Peter is prevented from going under and thus saved.

2020 (and part of 2021 so far) was/has been nothing short of a storm for most of us. But I'm reminded by the story above that we serve a mighty God who is constant and immovable—no matter the storm. With that understanding comes a confidence that no matter how difficult the times or circumstances may be, as long as we stay focused on what's important (God, family, friends, community, health, school, Freedom struggle, etc..), we will ultimately make it through the storm and achieve our goals.
Stay focused.

“Healthy Realizations” (Releasing the Plum-line of Truth)**By: Ignacio “Nacho” Alvarez**

Healthy Realizations! When I think about this phrase, the first thought that comes to mind is “sound realities.” But at the same time I’m still reminded of two particular scriptures:

“A merry heart doeth good like medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Prov. 17-22).
 “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

These two specific scriptures are highlighted to me, and this specific phrase comes to mind because they reveal that when a reality is truly grasped and understood, it has a liberating and holistic effect. But, when it is not seen or embraced as it is or should be, it encapsulates or enslaves an individual; I’m not necessarily talking physically, though eventually our physical will reveal our internal bondage. As a matter of fact, the word truth in this particular instant can be defined as “reality,” or that which as been revealed. Thus, we can translate John 8:32 as “You shall come to know, grasp, and understand the reality of who you are, where you stand, and how you’ve been positioned within your specific spheres, and that revelation or reality will deliver you from the delusional and unhealthy perceptions that have shaped you and defined you.”

Many of us, unfortunately, have been trapped in unhealthy realities; we’ve measured ourselves, others, and our environments from a place of error and delusion. We are like individuals dropped off in a desert setting without any water. Eventually, due to the lack of such a vital substance or reality or truth, we begin to “hallucinate.” Mirages begin to appear out of nowhere due to this deprivation. Subsequently, we chase after them, thinking that if we catch up to them our desires will be met, our “thirst” quenched and finally fulfilled. Seeking after these lies and delusions, however, only causes us to lose a grip on reality. We fail to see that these mirages are merely fantasies, myths, and aberrations: a byproduct of unhealthy pursuits.

Ultimately, this quest leaves us in a “dis-eased” state. We find ourselves wounded, hurt, offended, and “parched.” We are left internally broken, disappointed, confused, and ashamed. But maybe, just maybe, this is the perfect starting point for our entrance into the realm of sound or healthy realizations. Think about this notion for a second:

when we were unable to “move,” when we had no place or person to turn to, when we were empty, and bankrupts, “reality” set in. And once it set in, we were able to make the necessary adjustments; we were able to pursue after that what was substantive and concrete. We were able, most importantly, to change our narrative and reality because we had finally seen reality as reality!

Our reality, the reality we currently find ourselves in, does not have to remain that. It can change. Truth, or rather the TRUTH can reshape it, remold it, if we allow it to. For instance, I am currently incarcerated, but this reality does not have to remain my reality. It can be altered, transformed, and changed. It can become a healthy realization only when I begin to embrace the truth of it. Other than that, I remain in an immobile state, stuck in a false reality, chasing after mirages that leave me worse for wear. I will remain in a dis-eased state and everything that I touch and everyone I encounter will only be affected negatively.

A healthy realization, therefore, begins with us accepting the realities of life without acquiescing to them. This acceptance, therefore, isn’t a static recourse but rather an empowering stance, one that endows us with the capacity, energy, and resources to modify that reality, either for the good or for the worse. Accepting our current reality should release us into it in order to change it.

At the end of the day, our sanity is at stake. Remember that the heart can be translated as mind and understanding, so when the Proverb declares a “merry heart,” it is also alluding to a sane mind and understanding about the reality we find ourselves in. A sound mind, therefore, if cultivated, ultimately impacts our physical makeup and overflows into our day to day affairs via our actions. If we remain sound of mind within a broken vision, everything else will follow physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. So let’s begin by establishing a healthy or sound heart and mind in order that we engage in our reality in a healthy manner and seek to change it from the right angle. Healthy realizations, therefore, begin with a healthy heart. Ultimately, what I’m saying is, “Change your heart, and ultimately the possibility to change your reality!”

The Brother from Another Mother by John "The Baptist" Hall

I have many brothers and sisters in Christ. One in particular I met only a few days after arriving here at Stateville. Luigi Adamo, another brother in Christ, introduced me to Ryan Miller after we had met in a prayer circle on the yard. The day I met Ryan, I had a bunch of written raps I planned to let him hear because Luigi said Ryan was the best rapper he ever heard. And the fact that Ryan was a Christian rapper really piqued my interest.

So, we were formally introduced and we kind of went off into our own little area on the yard. I pulled out all these raps and I swear the Devil began hating on us because a strong wind blew my raps all over the yard. (And it was August!) And we were on the north yard (by seg), so we really had to chase down all my raps. Needless to say, we became friends right away. I was moved after a week because X-house (where we were) was just a temporary housing for me because I was on the new. But every time I saw Ryan he was friendly, and he helped me sign up for a number of Bible-based classes. He introduced me to other brothers in Christ and even helped me get in the choir. I was fortunate enough to see Ryan as well as Lauren Daigle perform in concert. I credit Ryan for a lot of opportunities I have been afforded. He always has treated me like a friend. No, like a brother.

He has always lent an ear and even offered advice a few times. His Christ-like character is awe-inspiring and I am proud to have him not only as a friend but also to call him my brother. I pray that God positions us to do great things together in the future. If it wasn't for Ryan, a lot of people wouldn't even know who John the Baptist was. Even something as mundane as signing up to attend Christian services was made easier with Ryan's assistance. Ryan has shared his musical visions with me, which are inexplicably awe-inspiring. Ryan has made me feel welcome here, and through him I have met other brothers in the choir who also exude a Christ-like character. In closing, I'd just like to say that even though my skin is a little darker than Ryan's, he is, and will always be, my "brother from another mother."



Ootu (part 4)

by Luigi P. Adamo

The "games" themselves were varied, but whichever we'd play, they would all begin the same. Ootu would draw that little simitar of his out from his scabbard. It would hiss as bright orange flames would erupt, covering the whole of its blade, making the sound pop and crackle whenever moved, like a piece of wet firewood. Ootu would use his flaming sword to burn circles on the ground, once around himself, another around me. Things would vary from there depending on which "game" Ootu was about to run.

Ootu (part 4) by Luigi P. Adamo (cont...)

My all-time favorite was the game I used to call “The Stone Men” game. If we were about to play that game, then after drawing our circles with his flaming sword, Ootu would begin vocalizing these sounds. It was almost like he was singing, and the lyrics he sang were from some unknowable language, though it sounded so much more like he was playing notes of music with his throat than speaking any kind of tongue.

As Ootu “sang” his song, I could hear the world around me vibrate and become in tune with his song like a tuning fork would. Even my own flesh would dance on my bones to the rhythm of Ootu’s song. Once those atmospheric vibrations reached their peak, river stones from around my family’s swimming pool would begin to rumble, shake, and come together, forming themselves into two action figure looking creatures made up of those stones. Standing between six and eight inches tall, they were quite a sight to behold.

Ootu taught me through his mind projections how to use my mental concentration and focus to control these stone men, using only the power of thought. I remember how when I first tried, my stone man was all clumsy and awkward, staggering around, tripping over his feet or tipping over like a drunk carrying a heavy load on the rolling deck of a ship in rough seas. But after only a few short practice attempts, control over my stone man became second nature, like moving part of my own body.



Ootu would make our stone men battle each other with punches, kicks, and every kind of pro-wrestling move imaginable. With each blow dealt, I felt my concentrational hold over my stone man weaken. We would continue our battles until one or the other’s hold over their stone creature would break completely and would fall apart, back into a pile of stones. It was a lot of fun! Way better than playing ‘Rock’em, Sock’em, Robots,’ that’s for sure.

I was fairly good at his game, too. Ootu said that I was somewhat of a natural. When I would win, Ootu would clap his little hands together in a celebratory applause, nodding his head up and down, projecting “good job” or “well done” into my mind. When I’d lose, he’d show me why I lost, teaching me how to learn from my mistakes in the hopes that I wouldn’t repeat them. “Better to make mistakes here with me than with a less forgiving foe,” he would often say.

Ootu told me how when he thought he had taught me enough, he would leave me. I would get very sad whenever he would mention how good I was doing because I didn’t want Ootu to ever leave. Whenever I voiced my concern about Ootu leaving, he would simply say, “Don’t be silly, I have to eventually go. I’m a watcher, not a doer. I cannot directly participate. That’s against the rules. I won’t leave until you’re ready. Once you’re ready, what will it matter?”

As logical as his assurances to me were, I couldn’t help the sadness I felt when Ootu did finally leave. I remember that dream especially clearly.



Vision Vs. Visionary by Michael Pizarro

When you think of the word “vision,” sight tends to come to mind. On the other hand, when you think of visionary, you think of someone who can speak what they see into existence. The mind can’t comprehend what the eyes aren’t ready to see, and this is the distinction between a vision and being a visionary.

In Numbers 13:1-2 and 26-33, the Lord told Moses to send spies to look at the promised land. Twelve spies were sent. Although their sight and vision were the same viewing of the promised land, they returned with conflicting reports. Two of the spies saw a land of milk and honey. They believed that they could overcome any obstacles that lay ahead because of the promise. Ten saw defeat, death, and hardship. As a result, they were denied entrance to the promised land. The two Joshua and Caleb, their eyes saw the promise, and this is what their minds comprehended. An individual can perceive the significance and nature of events before they have occurred. It is not enough to have vision. It is a necessity that you believe you have the ability to manifest what you have conceived.

We are responsible for actions performed in response to circumstances for which we are not responsible. Two rappers by the name of Young Jeezy and Jay Z began in impoverished communities and allegedly participated in illegal activities to generate wealth and move out of the hood. Each of them had a vision, but they evolved into visionaries. Young Jeezy said to another

“Look to the sky, what do you see?” And someone responded, “The clouds.” Young Jeezy said, “No. Not me. I see opportunity. I’m an opportunist.” Jay Z had a vision of financial freedom and generational wealth. As a visionary, he said, “I bought some artwork for 1 million; two years later it was worth 2 million, and a few years later it’s worth 8 million.” Now, he says, “I can’t wait to give it to my children.” The distinction between being a visionary and having a vision includes how you define what you see in relation to how you define yourself and your access to it.

We are the architects of our lives. Faith, love, and hope overcome. As architects, we cannot do any construction unless we first develop a plan. The plan has all the problems, but our focus is on the solutions. Our vision is a promise that begins with faith. Esau’s birthright was his promise. In a state of hunger, he perceived that he could die. This was his vision when he sold his birthright. His hunger was a temporary circumstance, yet he could not exercise his foresight. How many of us are selling our birthright to the eternal kingdom during this pandemic? As visionaries, we know that this world is passing and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

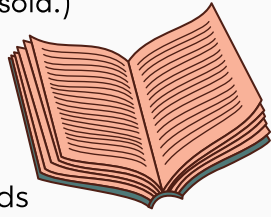
Problems can’t be solved by the same level of thinking that created them, as the mind can’t comprehend what the eyes aren’t ready to see in vision vs. visionary.

Book Review: The Forgotten Tales of El Capitan

(Available through Amazon, Better World Books, Google Books, and anywhere great reads are sold.)

Fighting for Greater Change

By Ryan Wendt



So many people in this world fight for a cause greater than their own. This world needs good causes because of the oppressive forces that are at work within systemic structures. Way too many people have been victims of the systemic oppression that is at work in this world. Some people get lost in the system and are forgotten. This is why we need people to advocate for causes that are greater than our own as a result.

In his novel, *The Forgotten Tales of El Capitan*, North Park Seminary's School of the Restorative Arts student Alex Negron writes about Capitan Alejandro De Los Amantes and his rebel band fighting against oppressive sovereigns and thieving pirates. This book tells the tale of a man who was erased from the history of Spain and charged with treason against his native land. Another tale talks about the search for the Armor of Monteczuma. A third tale tells of the tale of the Fountain of Youth, a secret portal. A fourth and final tale is about venturing into an unknown world.

At various points in this book, I felt as if I was right there fighting alongside Capitan Alejandro De Los Amantes. Alex's writing made it feel as if I was right there on the Seven Seas with El Capitan and his rebel band. His writing made me get lost in the story as well. I couldn't wait to find out what was coming next. A definite page-turner! Additionally, I had moments where I could sense Alex's passion and heart for justice coming out in the pages as well. Reading this book reminded me of the oppression I have experienced in my life. Feelings of not being included, not heard, and not seen. These feelings of forgottenness that Capitan Alejandro De Los Amantes experienced made me reflect on my forgottenness.

Though reading this book reminded me of my past at certain points, I experienced healing at the same time. Alex's written words helped me to realize there is hope and healing through the character of El Capitan. With that said, I believe that is why Negron wrote this book: to show that no one is beyond redemption and resurrection. This is illustrated in El Capitan's bravery and courage.

Therefore, this book has taught me that no one is beyond redemption or resurrection. Anyone can change; transformation is possible for anyone. Alex Negron illustrates this in his book through the character of Alejandro De Los Amantes. This book testifies and gives voice to the fact that anyone can change and no one is beyond transformation. No matter what we have done.

Let's Get Real COVID!

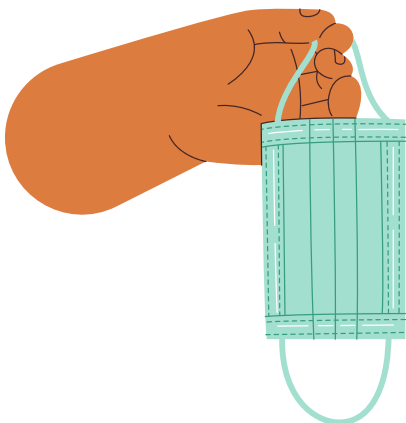
**CORONA 19
BY ANTONIO "SLIM" BALDERAS**

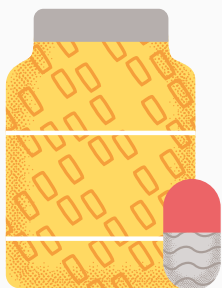
Covid-Nineteen ain't at all what it seems,
It steals your breath and then destroys your dreams!

Covid-Nineteen is officially on the scene, so you'd
be best to recognize and understand just what these facts MEAN!

Today you've awoken from what you falsely thought was
A foolish dream when in fact it was Corona-Nineteen,
Otherwise known as Covid-Nineteen and it's here,
No my dear I am not talking about the beer.
I speak of something more deadly and worthy of your
Most terrifying fears, so please don't stand six feet or near.

Covid-Corona-Nineteen isn't your average
Medical affliction, once upon you it destroys
Your entire immune system without the proper
Use of social distance.





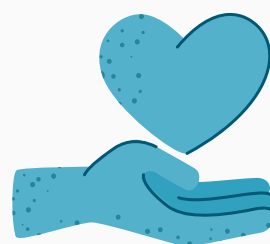
LET'S GET REAL COVID BY MICHAEL SIMMONS

They had no definite answer for my low white cell counts. Trips back and forth to the outside hospital. All kinds of tests—including a bone marrow biopsy. While dealing with that, I'm trying to navigate these stumbling blocks placed in my path simply because They hate the change I represent. I focused on that set up for failure. Then, there's this weird head trauma that They chop up to migraines, except this has been constant since January 2020. They figure They can simply feed me medication. Not going for that. Add to this the stress of my nephew possibly being the next in line to be thrown atop the heap of a pile called "The Criminal Justice System"—and my brother's internalized racism allowing him to reason that this is simply normal for young black boys.

All of that was before COVID! I'd already been getting no rest in the midst of chaos, lying awake at night wondering if I would awake even if I were I to drift off. And now COVID?! Now, I am literally surrounded by death. Losing loved ones with no other time or space to grieve, only smoke to breathe, while trying to read. Finally brought me to my knees. Thank God for true friends encouraging me to take care of me. Throwing pride and caution to the wind, I was finally able to cry myself to sleep. Finally, some rest.

It wasn't long before I began to realize that I was actually falling upward. The smoke cleared, and the noise subsided, enough for me to hear that still small voice reminding me of the cost of discipleship: allowing me a moment to recover from wounds exacerbated by my lack of focus on God's word.

As I sit here in E-311 and look back on it all, I can only give thanks for God's strength that was made perfect in my weakness. The noise and smoke fills the air once again. That weird feeling in my head remains. The powers that be continue to hate my advocacy. My nephew remains a pre-trial detainee. All my tests were good results. Got my second vaccine and resting in the chaos, living in my word for the year: HOPE.



Let's Get Real COVID!



Memorial For "Vicente Lopez," Descansa en Paz! By Benny Rios



Vicente Lopez, known as "Lopez" to many in Stateville, was a good man. However, his passing seemed to go unnoticed in our community here at Stateville which is why I felt it necessary to write this memorial for him. I met Vicente over a decade ago when we were both housed in E-house. He was a "paisa," a term used to refer to Latinos who only speak Spanish- it's a term of endearment if anything. He was elder, always serious, minded his own business, and always willing to help others in need.

I witnessed his generosity when this younger paisa named Carlos became his celly. At the time, Vicente still had family nearby that showed him support. While Carlos, a fellow Mexican immigrant, didn't have any friends or family in Illinois to show him any support. Vicente basically adopted Carlos. Vicente's family would visit Carlos, accept his calls, send him money, and they even offered him a place to live upon his release. I saw these selfless acts from Vicente as admirable and they left a lasting impact in my life. He was a good friend.

Early on during the first couple of months of the pandemic, Vicente was one of the at least twelve prisoners to succumb to Covid-19 within a period of a few weeks. At least five or six people died from our cell house during that time. It was a scary few weeks. We soon began hearing about brothers passing away throughout the joint. However, I didn't hear about Vicente's passing until a month or two later. The person who told me about Vicente's death didn't know him, he just happened to mention "Lopez" as he recited the names of people who passed away in other cell houses.

Unfortunately, over time Vicente lost touch with his family because they moved out of Illinois and some even moved back to Mexico. When that happened, the support he used to get was no longer as it once had been. Since he and I were located in different cell houses, we'd rarely see each other. However, whenever we did run into each other, we'd catch up on things, which is how I found out about his family and lack of support. He never asked for anything, but I always told him to make out a list of things that he needed or wanted so that I could send the stuff to him. He always attempted to repay me, but I always refused. If it were the other way around, he'd do the same for me or anyone who needed help.

I don't know if his family was ever notified about his passing. I don't know if they had the chance to claim his body. And I don't know if he was mourned and memorialized. Dying in prison, especially without any form of support, is one of the most inhumane ways to die. I do want to point out that Vicente was a good person who held himself accountable for his actions. He is someone that I prayed for when he was alive, and I still pray for his loved ones. I want to honor his life and I want people to remember him as a good man long after his death. As long as I live, he will always be remembered.



Being Present During A Pandemic



by Vickie Reddy

I'll never forget the note I received from SRA student Howard Keller early on in the pandemic, where he said, "those yellow envelopes turning up each week makes it feel like my friends rolling on by to pick me up." It gave language to the connection I knew was being forged as we created a way around this virus that seemed determined to separate, isolate and destroy.

Not long after I received that comment from Howard, Prof. Melissa and I were talking about being present and she mentioned a call she had just been on where they were talking about a "ministry of presence." This term really stood out to me and I went looking for some definitions. I found this quote by Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian Henri Nouwen that helped describe it for me:

"More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets. It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them."

Despite our separation, or perhaps because of it, I have found that this past year has presented me with exactly this opportunity (albeit in its own unique non-physical form). The separation has brought with it a refocusing that was made clear in an exchange I had with SRA student Antonio "TK" Kendrick about the ministry of presence at the time I was thinking it all through. He said: "When a person can make someone feel like an image of God through their actions, body language, and energy, they are practicing the ministry of presence." Our dialogue extended to my own observations on how pre-pandemic in-person engagement often could mean that my body was present, but my mind was not fully because of its hyper-active nature and struggle to tune out all the distractions and responsibilities.

The pandemic and resulting rhythms of facilitating and actively engaging in our correspondence exchanges each week have grounded me and brought a necessary stillness, providing the opportunity for me to learn to be present in a form I may have not learned otherwise.

Being present during a pandemic has meant continuing to show up however I can. In my case, it's by way of yellow envelopes.



The Poetry Avenue!

-Whatever COVID...-

by Ro'Derick Zavala

3/27/21 8:02am

{Fully vaccinated}

-What is a community
that will not Flourish?
Certainly not ours...
For we live. We breathe.
We feed. We nourish.

-We sit with each others' thoughts.
We discuss. We debate.
We relate like we ought...
We create our escape.
-We lead. We advance...
We plan to succeed.
We hug. We hold hands.
We band when we grieve.

-What is a community
that doesn't operate like ours?
A weak one if you ask me...
For we seize every opportunity
to collaborate beyond bars.

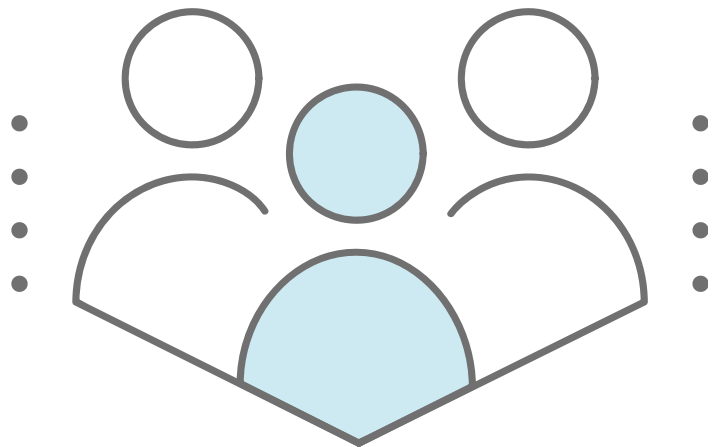
-We bring the outside in.
We send the inside out.
We stand strong in our faiths
For we do not doubt...

-Whether in person
or remote.
Whether side-by-side
or six feet.
Through masks,
Through lockdowns,
Through brutal vaccines.

-Where is our community
when not in class together?
In our hearts.
In our minds.
In our prayers.
Forever!

HE>i

Ro' Sr.



The Poetry Avenue!

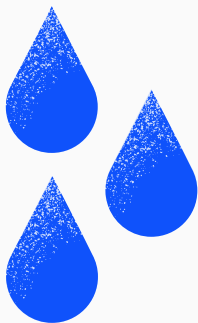
“I CRIED JUST FOR YOU” by David “Nazeeh” Bailey

I really don't understand why but I cried just for you. I don't even know you, but I still cried for you. Maybe it's because we are inter-connected, maybe it's deeper than that, all I know is that I have cried just for you.

Over the past decade, I've seen on the news, about the drought in South Africa, all the babies deformed, disfigured, dying just because they have nothing to eat, I cried for you.

The African wars in Somalia, Angola, Rwanda, the countless dead, murdered babies and the multitude now left without a Mother, without a Father or even a Friend, I cried just for you.

Those that were murdered, beaten, hung from trees, bitten by dogs, and watered-down during the Civil Rights Movements, I cried just for you. A special tear from my heart just for you.



I am deeply touched and filled with mixed emotions every time I see the ills of our society being reflected on the news, our daily newspapers, and magazines, it's though I am really there, a victim everytime something happens. God only knows that I've cried just for you.

Somehow or another, its' as though I knew you all, and I do somehow, I can even feel it in my bones, in my body, in my spirit. We are one, you are me, and I am you therefore, we are inter-twined as one, and that's why I cried just for you.

I felt what you feel, the pain, suffering, even the loss, the ills of yesterday, today and tomorrow. When will it ever stop, when will it ever end?

Maybe never. Only God really knows. Therefore, we must live for those who have gone, smile and laugh for those who have passed, and keep our heads and continue to have faith. But I'm often mindful, that I just cried for you.

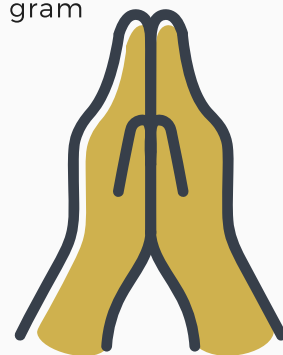
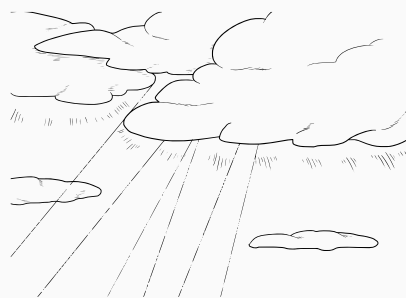
For at this present time, all I can do is pray and in my silent prayers I am crying too. Crying both mentally and spiritually. I am in bondage and that's why I hurt even more, because at this time I can only cry for you.....

"Choose God: A Song by John "The Baptist" Hall

Everyone hollerin goon squad, on the bricks I used to move hard but when I was arrested and sentenced to 58 years I decided to choose God; no more narcotics of lifting heaters, was made a believer like Nicodemus in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that's three different interceders; Christ was convicted of misdemeanors, many are called but for different reasons but serve the same purpose, created and called to be products of chapter 2:10 Ephesian's; don't like it up I'll recite it so even the youth understands

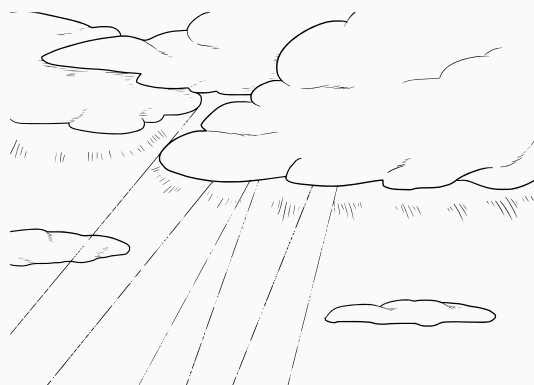
We were created in Christ to do good works God preordained us to do in advance
Jesus befriended me, Satan's the enemy, difficult times, read 2 Timothy
Stopped being secular lyrically, audience smaller but seems like it's more people heard me
Ain't no more fear in me, I'm Daniel's friends in a furnace, what worried ya'll didn't concern us
Thing and dressing sharp don't mean a thing if you can't stay awake till the end of the service
Backsliding Christians are just like a rod and a staff that metamorphose into serpents
Blood on my doorpost, so when death comes a knockin, we like it doesn't concern us
We were all purchased, bought with the blood of the lamb, he helped me become who I am
He hears me pray to him whenever I'm stuck in a jam or repented for puffin a gram
I once trusted man, but now that I'm wiser I choose God

Avoided the fire I choose God
Exalt his name higher I choose God
I love the Messiah and choose God
They said do or die but I choose God
The Devils a lie so I choose God
You'll receive grace if you choose God
Salvation a waits if you choose God
Lord! You are my Shepard so we are connected,



Because I was lost, then you spotted me like a leopard, when I felt really rejected
Something about the name Jesus, you should respect it, don't worry about being subjected to pain, torture or ridicule, worry about where you gone go when you get resurrected
Ahhh!!! Family Bible's replaced ruggers, the same way Mathias replaced Judas
Seeing how God knows the hearts of men, omniscient mean he sees straight through us
Back in the day I was more gutter, now I partake in the Lord's supper
Sometimes I feel helpless like Mary and James having to witness the Lord suffer
Ten seconds left on the game clock, Salvation entails a changed heart
Four major prophets, four different gospels, 66 books with the same plot
We know that Christ is the main theme, he and I play for the same team
I didn't repent in confessionals, but I still got on my knees and I came clean
He told me put him above all things, and not to be bothered by small things
Focus on being content, least that's what Phillipians 4 reads
The Bible's in scripted with all the facts, with more information than almanacs
Submit to his will, he will convert you, look at what God did to Paul in Acts

Was told make a choice, well I choose God
I keep hearing voices say, "choose God"
People rejoice when you choose God
Satan's annoyed cause I choose God
Now that I'm wiser I choose God
Avoided the fire I choose God
Exalt his name higher I choose God
I love the Messiah and choose God





Untitled by DeCedrick Walker

It's due time between morning and noon time
To reflect on the acute mind of the God who renewed mine
The righteous will still shine as the scripture said
The living word lifts the dead when I need sustenance I picture bread
At Calvary on the cross was the place where the victor bled
The same foot that the serpent bit was the foot that split his head
When he rose he went ahead and told the shepherds to feed
Every flock they oversaw, but wait for Heaven to breathe
So it did but since then the whole Gospel was preached
Whether you accept it or reject it it's the Gospel of peace
It's the bridge between the poor and the hostile elite
The only power that's able to change a wolf to a sheep
In other words, it's a rarity, it's simply unique
Jesus is who he say he is and not who you think
Watch dudes do what fools do and learn from mistakes
Make sure your mouth different and the words in your mouth different
And since it's the times we're currently in
Hope that hearts that love God are discerning the end
Can't change the road you're on because it's turning again
The consequences that we reaped were deserved in the end
As a side note though it's places the mind won't go
It's evident if you don't read the mind won't grow
These days I'm even more compelled to ride solo
Plus my vision is tunneled I'm a mourn til the system is humbled
There's a mountain in the distance that's beginning to crumble
My whole life I've been waiting for the end of the struggle
Life is deep so I reach for a shovel
Peep game use your head and never speak with a muzzle
Most likely it'll keep you in trouble—routes through rubble

Writing Advisor Corner

Collaboration by Vaughn Washington

After reading the article “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center” by Andrea Lunsford, I am persuaded that collaboration can indeed make a person a better writer. At first thought, I was a little skeptical, being in the frame of mind that collaboration of any kind presents its own set of problems or obstacles, especially when it comes to writing and the arts. When I think of writers and writing my first thoughts go to literature, and historically, most of the great novels and literary publications (as far as we know) have been written by that sole individual that wanted to express his or her ideas in books, articles, or pamphlets for everyone else to read. These writers undoubtedly felt that they had something unique and sacred to share and wanted the credit for giving birth to their thoughts and concepts.

Granted there have been successful collaborations in the past by writers such as Marx and Engle who wrote *The Communist Manifesto* which prove to be very successful in persuading people to adopt a socialistic ideology. Gilbert and Sullivan were successful in the theater with their collaborations on operettas such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*, and William and Durant collaborated on a history book called *The Story of Civilization*, but those are notable exceptions.

Most writers are lone wolves operating in a “Garret” writing center sort of concept that emphasizes the “genius” within the writer—these centers view knowledge, as Ms. Lunsford says, “as interiorized, solitary, individually derived, individually held” (9). Ms. Lunsford states that she was once a proponent of this idea of a writing center along with others like Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, and Donald Murray, the author of one of the course books we are assigned to read for this tutoring writing class called *The Craft of Revision*. Ms. Lunsford states that she too had problems with the idea of a group-oriented writing center.

In the past, Lunsford had been an advocate of the “Storehouse” writing center which basically was a kind of “information station prescribing and handing out skills and strategies to individualized learning materials (3).” This knowledge was outside of the individual, as opposed to the “Garret” center, where the knowledge was interior, inside the individual. She decided that both of these methods were

inadequate and that another model of writing center was needed with a different kind of collaboration she called the “Burkean Parlor” centers, which emphasize giving the most control to the group. This is a truly radical idea that goes against the establishment of the education system, like turning the asylum over to the inmates 😊. This new model is infused with the ideas of diversity, flexibility, and most of all that control, power, and authority...be invested in the negotiating group. Professor Kenneth A. Bruffee wrote in his article “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Collaboration of Mankind,’” that “peer tutoring” and “collaborative learning” are a greatly-needed “...alternative to the classroom” (331-332). Bruffee has been a staunch advocate for peer tutoring and collaborative learning since the eighties. These “new age thinkers” about writing centers include Anne Ellen Celler, Frankie Condon, and Elizabeth H. Bouquet to name a few. They are all advocates of the Burkean Parlors writing centers method, more or less, which emphasizes a learning experience for both the student and the teacher and promotes a free-flow exchange of ideas.

I would call this a “new age” kind of writing center because the concept of the “one-search” model has evolved into a “we develop” sort of model. It has an eastern religion flavor to it where everyone is equal and all different voices are blending together by co-operating and collaborating with each other. There is a socializing aspect of fellowshiping with one another instead of a student-teacher atmosphere. This surely must create a more relaxed environment where both student and teacher share in the learning process.

These kinds of writing centers are flexible and friendly and encourage the bonding of its participants. Relationships are formed, friendships are made, and this type of human interaction is beneficial to the collaborative learning concept of creating good writers.

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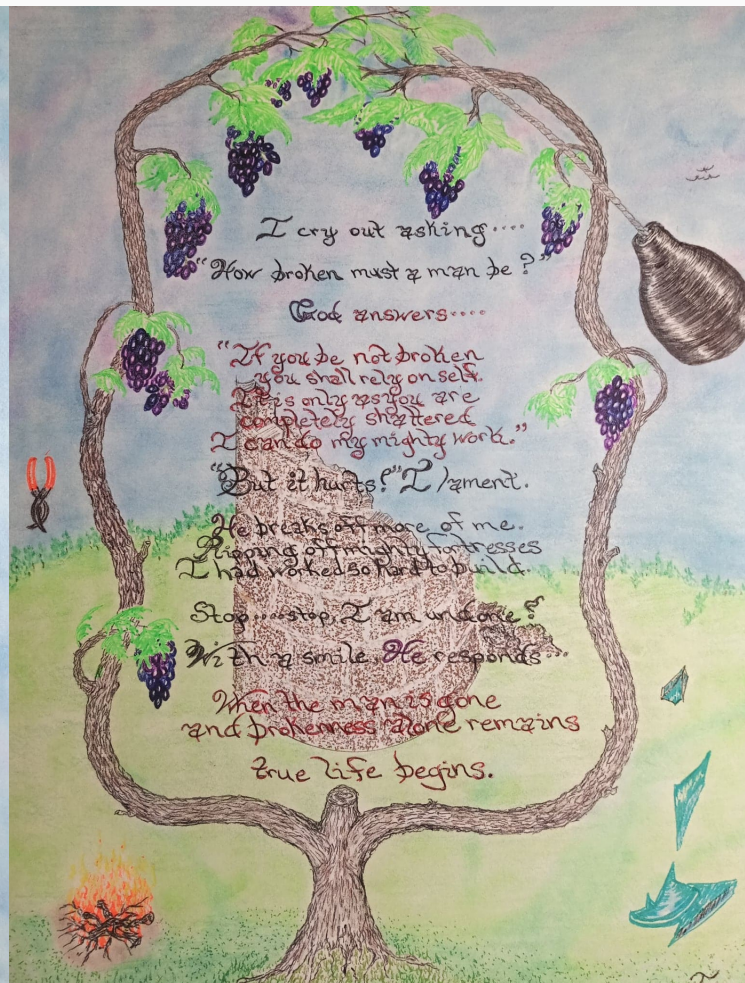
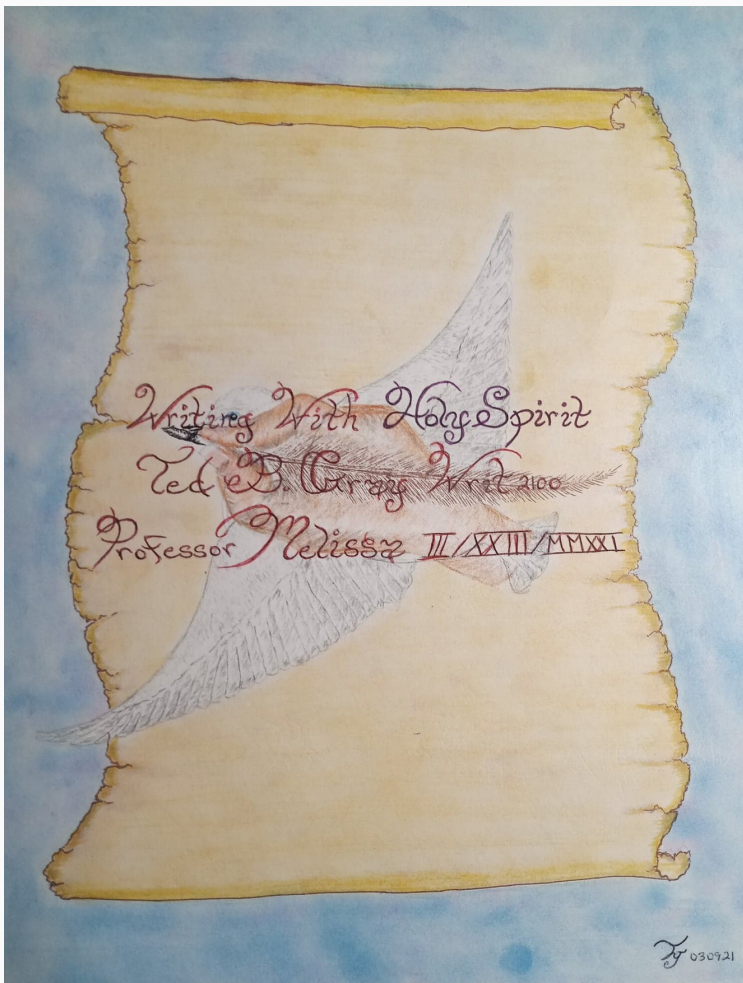
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Writing Advisor Corner

"Writing with Holy Spirit" by Ted B. Gray

Note: These drawings and Bibliography accompany Ted Gray's "Collaboration Essay" that was written for the WRIT2100 "Tutoring Writing" Class this spring.



All artwork drawn, formatted, written, and designed by Ted B. Gray

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***The Amplifier* with Alex Negron and Scott Moore**

Alex:

*Scott's take on healthy realization reminds me of Donald Murray's lesson on making connections in *The Craft of Revision*. On page 13 of his book, Murray says, "The writer is a master weaver, rewriting before writing by making connections between pieces of information, observations, ideas, theories, memories, fears, and hopes that, when connected, create new meaning."*

In this piece on healthy realizations, Scott was able to take films and make a distinct connection with true peace, the Shalom that was intended for us all. It pulled me in and made me wonder what is it that I do that puts me in a state of Shalom? What vulnerable position I find myself in that allows the Shalom of God to flood me? It's when I allow the pain and hurt I'm feeling to run its course instead of bottling it up. Scott did a great job taking different concepts and making connections that help us understand our place in God's peaceful kingdom.

A Taste of the Way Things Ought to Be by Scott Moore

Here's a healthy realization for ya': I'm a crier. Now, you may be asking yourself, "How exactly does this guy realizing he cries a lot relate to his current and future well-being?" Great question! Please, allow me to explain...

I'm not so much a crier in the sense that I shout out announcements in a court room or make random exclamations while riding through the town streets on horseback (though I can shout, exclaim, and ride a horse with the best of 'em). No, the kind of crier I am can probably be best described as someone who gets emotional to the point of weeping with only the slightest provocation required—and I do mean the slightest. I'm talking about things like watching a ray of sunshine or a fireworks display through a dirty window from the confines of my prison cell; reading stories about people coming together in times of crisis on my tablet; and, either seeing a movie about romance and weddings, a commercial involving warm, fuzzy animals, or anything superhero-related on T.V.

In my defense, the emotional response and subsequent crocodile tears towards the fireworks are because they always remind me of my late mother Donna, and the times we celebrated her birthday on the 4th of July. As for the other stuff... yeah, I'm a mess. I can't help it, though. I'm a

hopeless romantic (don't get me started on "The Notebook"), real life examples of love of neighbor give me a sense of confidence for humanity, and I find something pure in the affection and loyalty of most pets. I'm just a big softy, I guess.

Okay, I get it. The superhero thing is weird, but when I'm watching "Avengers: Endgame" and Captain America is suddenly joined by Black Panther and all the other previously erased heroes in the midst of facing down Thanos, I begin to sob. Then, when the suspenseful music reaches a crescendo as Cap' summons Thor's mighty hammer, Mjolnir, to his hand and utters the iconic, "Avengers!...Assemble" rallying cry for the first time in over 10 years of Marvel movies, I'm in full-on-blubber mode. This description of my emotional tendencies may not be flattering, but I've come to a healthy realization that embracing the beautiful moments in life can be beneficial to the body, mind, and soul because these moments allow us to experience the peace of God and the way things ought to be.

Now, I know some of you might be thinking, but contrary to popular belief, and with the exception of bawling my eyes out whenever my beloved St. Louis Blues finally hosted the Stanley Cup (Cubs fans may relate), this proclivity of mine is a somewhat new development. Generally speaking, I've only become an emotional wreck since the last 5 years or so of my incarceration. Prior to that time, I rarely if ever got all mushy about anything

The Amplifier



A Taste of the Way Things Ought to Be
by Scott Moore (cont...)

not related to my kids or sports. Even if I did, I sure as H-E-double-hockey-sticks didn't write it in a newsletter for everyone to read about.

As a rule, I've found my sudden bouts of waterworks rather embarrassing and only shared their onset with those closest to me—who, in turn, proceeded to make jokes at my expense. (You jerks know who you are!) Joke's on them, though, because this feeling of embarrassment has recently begun to dissipate as I've come to embrace the concept of shalom—a Hebrew term which essentially means peace to the nth degree. The Peace of God to the nth degree.

As Dr. Rick Love points out, shalom occurs around 250 times or so in Hebrew scriptures, and, whether translated, "peace, prosperity, success, well-being, safety, welfare, deliverance, salvation, or completeness," each time is used to show that "God's peace is multidimensional and comprehensive" (Love 23). The prophet Isaiah refers to the coming Christ as "The Prince of Peace" (9:6), and Christians, like myself, often refer to the first four books in the New Testament as gospel of peace; in fact, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection launched God's kingdom of shalom here on earth (Love 29).

Those of you in North Park's MACM program will undoubtedly recognize shalom from the times it's been used in both matters of racial reconciliation and movements relating to social justice. Personally, as a white man whose privileged naiveté and dysfunctional theology robbed me of the ability to recognize the oppression facing people from different ethnic, cultural, and/or religious backgrounds than myself, I'm grateful for having been educated on

the undeniable link between shalom and social justice. Embracing the beauty in God's mission of peace for marginalized people suffering under the yoke of inequity has transformed my body, mind, and soul through empathy and love of neighbor. This healthy realization has helped me understand my calling to help heal and restore the broken relationships between all people bearing the image Dei.

However, if academics and/or religion aren't your cup of tea, then it might help you to think of shalom (the peace of God) as the beautifully inexplicable moments of life that tempt one to believe in a world created with purpose and design. Whatever the case, all of these descriptions of shalom only go so far in explaining what it truly entails. You see, shalom is the all-encompassing peace of God that means, as clarified by Cornelius Plantinga Jr., "universal human flourishing, wholeness, and delight... Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be" (Love 24).

This understanding of God's peace can help lead all of us into making some healthy realizations in this season filled with angst and uncertainty. Realizing the power of shalom, if only for a moment, revitalizes our spirit and sheds light on God's intended purpose and meaning for our lives. To embrace this supercharged peace is to embrace that our loving Creator has already taken care of what ails our body, mind, and soul; all that's left to do is reach out in faith and accept our blessing. And let's keep it real, here. Isn't some semblance of physical vitality and wholeness what each and every one of us need during this atmosphere of isolation amidst a global pandemic? Are we not all seeking the emotionally equalizing benefits of hope and safety in the eye of the storms with political division, racial injustice, and loss of loved ones swirling all around us? Is there one among us who, deep in their spirit, doesn't yearn to experience deliverance and salvation in a world that is clearly "out of harmony with God's creation" (Love 26)?

A Taste of the Way Things Ought to Be

by Scott Moore (cont...)

Embracing the characteristics of shalom is an essential part of living a life of victory. For instance, with the benefits of recognizing God's peace of mind, the thought of me being a crier isn't so embarrassing anymore because I know why I get all teary-eyed whenever I see an uplifting commercial with a dog visiting a little girl battling cancer in a hospital; I understand what's causing the lump in my throat as I read about a 7 year-old jumping through the window of a burning house to rescue neighbors' baby daughter. My soul is tasting of the fruit that these beautiful moments of shalom provide in the midst of life's sickness and trials. My tears are the antidote of humility and delight pouring out of my body to wash away the shame I feel for not fully embracing the beauty found in these moments of God's peace in action.

With this newfound healthy realization in mind, I no longer experience a twinge of chagrin when I begin to feel my heart begin to dance in my chest at the exact moment Rachel Mc Adams leaps into Ryan Gosling's arms in the middle of a torrential downpour. Suddenly, it all makes perfect sense why I start crying like a baby every time I watch a re-run of my favorite comic book superheroes conquering the Mad Titan and his horde of evil monstrosities;



Drawing by Scott Moore

The Amplifier



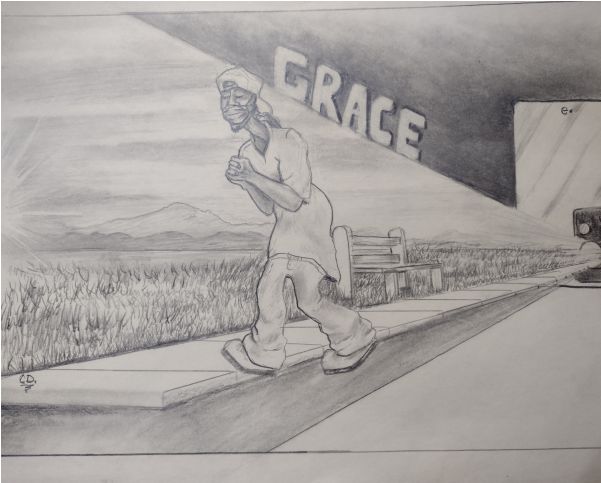
"Avengers: Endgame" is about bringing all inclusive restoration to people lost in the past, and God's endgame is about bringing comprehensive peace to a present and future kingdom (Love 28). Realizing this peace—this promise—is what gives us the ability to stand our ground when circumstances get tough and life seems to be falling apart at the seams. Embracing the fact that God is being revealed to us in each and every moment of shalom will give us the enthusiasm and fortitude necessary to keep carrying on whenever it feels like we can't possibly take another step in our walk. This...ahem..."good news" means that whenever we experience the beauty of shalom in all of life's little things—the tranquility of falling snow, getting a message of encouragement from a friend, hearing a precious child giggle with glee—it's a reminder of how God's grace is taking care of the big things that might otherwise paralyze our ability to find peace and harmony.

As such, let's all be mindful that while the peace of God is a priceless commodity, it doesn't mean we should distinguish between the greatest examples of human flourishing, natural beauty, and supernatural prosperity and the least of these moments. The daily happenings of life provide varying degrees of shalom, and embracing the beauty in all of them will bring us one step closer to understanding God's intended purpose for humanity. I promise that once we experience the joyous delight of shalom in our hearts and feel God's peace deep within our souls, we will cry out, "This is the way things ought to be! We have tasted of shalom, and it is good!" (Love 27). That, my friends, is a healthy realization indeed.

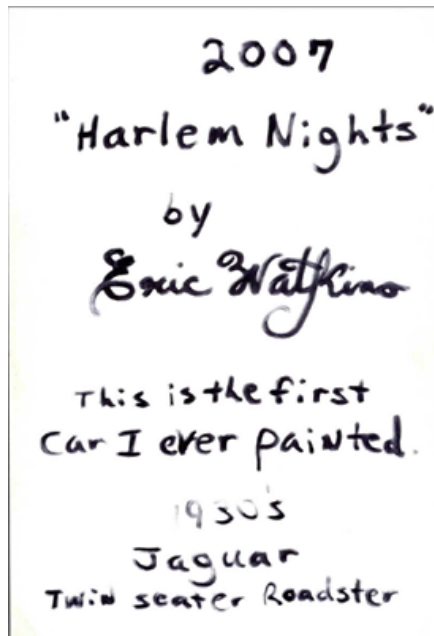
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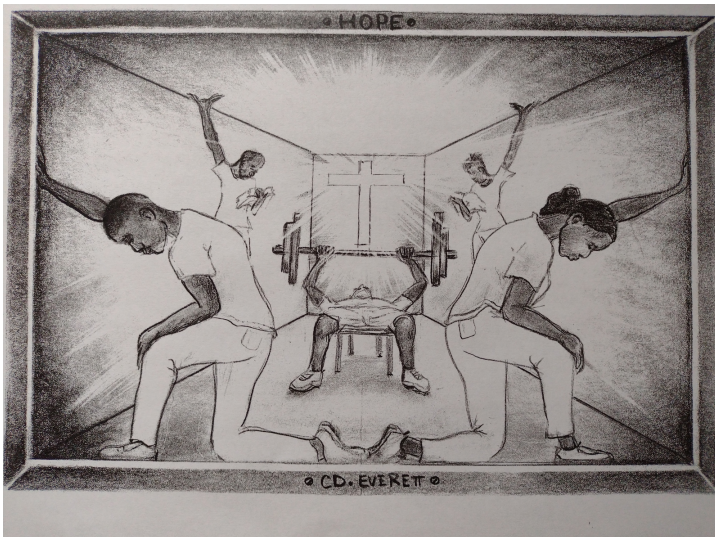
The Artist's Space!



"Grace" by C.D. Everett



"Harlem Nights" by Eric Watkins



"Hope" by C.D. Everett



Mike P.'s Grammar Corner

WITH SPECIAL GUEST SALLY ENGBRETSON

While the date that marks Easter on many of our calendars has passed, the Easter Bunny has been a little behind this year and is still hard at work delivering eggs; moreover, the Grammar Bunny (the Easter Bunny's second cousin) has been busy delivering grammar tips. Upon recommendation of this column's author Mike P., the Grammar Bunny presents this special delivery: words of wisdom from writing coach Sally related to common concerns of writers. Questions? Comments? Send them to Coach Sally via Prof. Melissa, and the Grammar Bunny will be back next April.

One of the most common concerns of writers is the time it takes to write, and not knowing what to write. Knowing the purpose for writing and the audience who will read your document can be extremely helpful, cut your writing time and help you be more persuasive. Most academic writing is for a professor who needs to know what you learned and your reaction to a text. Readers of other nonfiction writing such as documents used in court want to know your position on a subject and why you believe your position is valid. I use the following methods for writing and suggest them to my students.

"Audience is everything" is my mantra. How an audience receives your words is often affected by their age, education, gender, economic status, religion and ethnicity. You choose your words and examples for the best communication with your audience. Whenever you get stuck not knowing what to write, ask yourself "what does the reader need to know from me or what do I want the reader to know?" Choose your evidence in each paragraph based on what evidence will work for that audience. I will explain this further in the following paragraph:

The first paragraph needs to capture your reader's attention. You can use a quote that grabs attention, give background to your subject, or give a short narrative (one or two sentences). Any or all three of these can be used. The last sentence of the first paragraph is often the thesis. You need to "tell" your audience where you will take them: subject, opinion, and why, so what or because. For example: Insomnia [subject] is a significant public health problem in the United States [opinion] linked with major health consequences such as increased risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, obesity, and depression [why].

Sally Says...

Next, you build your argument or persuasion paragraph by paragraph. The first sentence of your paragraph is usually your support contention for your thesis. Then you support that point with evidence. The most common forms of evidence are examples, cause/effect, classification/division, comparison/contrast, definition, description, narration (short narrative only one or two sentences), and process. Please use only one or a few of these per paragraph. Think again what point you want to get across to your specific audience, and that will help your choice for evidence. For example, I once was a figure skater, but would not use a figure skating example for my evidence in a persuasive paper if the reader had never skated. Knowing my "educated guesses" about my audience saves me time in choosing evidence for my argument. Unfortunately, in this space I cannot take you through all the suggested forms of evidence. However, follow this construction of support contention and evidence through each of your paragraphs.

Your purpose for writing is to come to a conclusion. I think of conclusions like a math problem. I figuratively draw a line after my last body paragraph and "add up" my evidence. Based on my paragraphs what final analysis do I have? Final paragraphs are short, maybe only four sentences. Your choices for a conclusion give: a prediction, a summary of main points, an interpretation of your data, an urge to action. Choose one or two of these; not all four. Be careful not to circle back and start your argument all over again. No new evidence should be submitted in the conclusion.

I wish you the very best in your writing. Your words are so important and need to be heard.

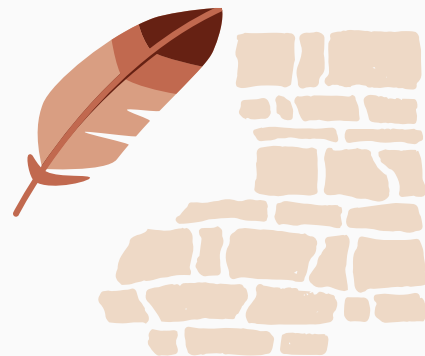
Closing by Pastor Libby Piotrowski

This issue of *Feather Bricks* is full of wonderful reflections and artistic expression. It has me thinking a lot about our healthy realizations, our expectations of one another and of God, and just where we place our hope. The following closing comes from part of the Easter sermon I preached April 4, 2021. It has been revised a bit, but I hope the message remains clear.

Expectations are a funny thing. Numerous famous voices have been quoted as saying that it is better not to have any expectations of the people in your life – without expectations of those you love, you have to face disappointment. I think that is hogwash. Knowing that you can count on someone, something, is good and healthy. And being someone who can be counted on is good and healthy. To make and keep promises is good and healthy. But it is true that people are human and humans mess up. We disappoint one another and, hopefully, we do our best to seek forgiveness and to offer forgiveness.

The prophet Isaiah speaks a bit to this notion of expectation – of what we can count on and what is true – both now and in the age to come. The following passage, from Isaiah 25: 6-9, speaks to a promise we can count on – a promise given to God’s people. It is the description of the banquet to which each of us is invited; the great hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
 a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
 of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
 7 And he will destroy on this mountain
 the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
 the sheet that is spread over all nations;
 8 he will swallow up death forever.
 Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
 and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
 for the Lord has spoken.
 9 It will be said on that day,
 Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
 This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
 let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.



Isaiah’s prophecy is, course, multi-layered. On one level, it speaks to Israel quite plainly. And why does Israel need this beautiful depiction of a feast – rich in wonderful food and drink? It is here because the people Isaiah is speaking to have seen death – they have experienced death and they know the pain and the horror and the loss and the grief and the darkness of death – just like we do. Death is universal and so Isaiah speaks this promise from God as a word of consolation, of life, and joy. God’s plan and promise are sure. This is something that Israel knows well, history has taught them. God has taught them – from their Exodus from Egypt, to the Babylonian exile and deliverance, and their defeat over enemies – but they need the reminder, just as we do. Time and time again, God shows us who God is. Time and time again, God reveals God’s character to us. Sometimes we just need a reminder.

Closing by Pastor Libby Piotrowski (cont...)

But this passage also speaks to the end times and our eternal hope – to Israel and to us - this passage speaks to what is God’s eternal promise precisely because Jesus died and rose again! Isaiah’s prophecy speaks to Christ’s sure resurrection and the promise that death will not win when he gives us a beautiful glimpse into a world in which death no longer has the power to swallow us up. A world in which laughter echoes, instead of tears. A world in which the veil of mourning; the shroud of death, has not just been lifted, but has been fully swallowed up - and a heavenly banquet set – a banquet to which all are invited with God as our gracious and most generous host. The cosmic geography has been rearranged in a promise for everyone. God is working God’s purpose out. We can expect it.

God’s mercy and grace and forgiveness are poured out in full measure – grace upon grace, little glimpses of God’s great glory- to us here on earth and, yet, we know that the best is yet to come. Talk about a healthy realization! Can you imagine that? Can you see it? Believe it, friends, the story of Jesus is not yet over! That is a promise!



Worth the Wait: Answers to Black History Month Crossword by Rayon Sampson (from Feb/March edition)

