

Poetry Corner

Hosted by Randy Smit and Rhonda Edgington

We welcome long-time Hope Church member Francis Fike (Professor of English Emeritus at Hope College) back to Poetry Corner. He brings both an original work and a poem by Christina Rossetti, which share many themes in common with one another and our current times.

--Rhonda Edgington

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“*miglior corso e con migliore stella.*” – Dante
“*vita fugge e non s’arresta un’ ora.*” – Petrarca

Time flies, hope flags, life plies a wearied wing;
 Death following hard on life gains ground apace;
 Faith runs with each and rears an eager face,
Outruns the rest, makes light of everything,
Spurns earth, and still finds breath to pray and sing;
 While love ahead of all uplifts his praise,
 Still asks for grace and still gives thanks for grace,
Content with all day brings and night will bring.
Life wanes; and when love folds his wings above
 Tired hope, and less we feel his conscious pulse,
 Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace:
 A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
 A little while, and life reborn annuls
Loss and decay and death, and all is love.

--Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Having just completed another cycle of the Church Year, that Eastered in the Resurrection of Christ, we might well think about time—its incessant flow, its lack or fullness of meaning, and how it may be redeemed. In “As Water, Downward,”² the speaker compares the flowing water of a river to time: ever flowing, in which once we have stepped, we can never step in that same part of the river of time again. That realization leads to some ways that we have tried to redeem time through photography, poetry and public works. Those efforts afford some comfort in our attempts to give lasting meaning to the “chronos-flux,” but of course, in the end, chronological time often defeats our efforts.

I admire Christina Rossetti’s sonnet¹ for many reasons—its masterful craft in meter and structure, and its honest but victorious theology: she asks, what can sustain us in our passage through time that “flies” often without fulfillment, leaving us with “flagging” hope and our lives “tired” of dealing with the “loss and decay” that time brings? She reassures us that we are rescued in this journey by faith, and the love and grace to which it is open, which equip us to endure the voracious passage of time not only in peace but in the final promise of resurrection. Thus she reminds us that throughout the Church Year we can experience how, in Christ, *chronos* can become *kairos* (fulfilled time, redeemed time) as we meet life’s opportunities, losses, and challenges.

--Francis Fike

¹From Rossetti’s sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata*. The epigraphs read: Petrarch: “life flies and lingers not an hour.” Dante: “A better way and a better star.”

²From Francis Fike, *In the Same Rivers* (Florence, KY: Robert L. Barth, 1989).



As Water, Downward²

*You could not step twice in the same rivers; for
other and yet other waters are ever flowing on....
In the same rivers we step and do not step; we are
and we are not.*

--Heraclitus

Through time our story goes
As water downward flows,
Not knowing what its end
Or how streambed may bend.
So poems will proceed,
Linear in their need,
Or highways will unfold
Pavement as yet untolled.
Though photographs may freeze
Wind-motion in the trees,
Or fix a waterfall
In permanent recall,
They cannot stop the flux
That forms the chronos-cruix:
No camera, we know,
Can stop a river's flow;
The view from speeding car
Soon will be passed, and far;
However line may last,
The poem must go past.
Moments to hours extend,
Hours to days on end;
Down by the current swept,
No moment may be kept
No matter how we try
To arrest or amplify.
So what is time, at last?
Moments that all are past?
Moments we may not see?
A now that cannot be?
A matrix and a mode.
A river, poem, road.
Though on it flotsam rides,
River itself abides;
The ancient Appian Way
Takes travelers even today,
And poems made to last
Seize present out of past,
Redeeming deepest loss
With unforeseen kairos.