

The Face of Peter

Here I go
skulking around the edges of the crowd again.
Can it have been last night—
it seems like weeks ago—
that I was loitering in the shadows
of the High Priest Caiaphas's Palace,
evading those suspicious looks
and even more suspicious questions?

Why couldn't I have remembered
what he told me only a few hours earlier,
at the table, about betraying him?
Nothing seems to stick inside my head anymore.
I just sound off without thinking,
and now look where it has gotten me.
Those women with their mocking,
 Surely you were one of them.
 You sound just like a stupid Galilean.
That crowing cock,
and it wasn't even close to sunrise.
And then the look he gave as
the soldiers led him out to Pilate's residence.
I haven't wept like that since I put on
my fisherman's apron.

"Fisher of men," he called me,
back there at the beginning of it all,
when Andrew and I found him on the shore.
Some fine fisherman I turned out to be!
Last night I lost the only catch
that ever meant more than life to me.
And now he's in the Romans' net,
pinned up there like a fish hung out to dry.
Still living, though, by the way his head

and arms are moving just a bit.

Strange, the way his arms,
stretched out like that,
remind me of him speaking on the mountainside;
how he used to ask us where we thought the limits
of God's kingdom should be set.

Was it only for the priests,
the Pharisees, and holy ones?
Should the boundaries be drawn around us Jews,
shutting out all Gentiles?

Might we also allow in all the good folk,
those who tried, the best they could,
to keep God's laws and ordinances?

And then he'd spread his arms out wide,
just as if he meant to grasp the whole wide world
in his embrace, and bellow,

with a broad and beaming grin across his face,

This wide, would you believe?

No, even wider, wider by far than I
or anyone can ever hope to reach.

God's kingdom is for everyone, no limits,
sinners too, especially sinners,
that's why I am here today.

For you, and you and you.

Oh no, he's looking over this way.

It's as if he's searching for me,
sifting through the crowd with his weary,
wounded, yet still tender gaze.

And those arms again, pinned down so cruelly
and yet I could almost swear they're moving,
beckoning, gesturing me closer.

Calling me to join him on that cross.

What was that he said again,
when first I called him "Christos"

on the road by Caesarea Phillipi,
about taking up the cross and following?
And I rebuked him.
Little wonder that he spoke to me as Satan.

But if I go to him they'll know me,
seize me, strip me, hang me high
there by his side.
Surely that is not what he would ask,
is asking of me. There's nothing I can do
up there to help. Surely I can be of more use
safe out here and free, able to carry on his work.
Surely it would only be a useless gesture.
And then, what of the burden
of my wife and family left
to the care of Andrew and the rest.

They are looking at me again.
Isn't that one of the palace girls
from last night standing over there,
talking to those around her
and then pointing in my direction?
Better move along, better fade back into the crowd,
get lost again, as if I never had been found,
lost as I was before I found him,
before he found me.
Who's lost now?
Got to go.