



POEMS FOR ADVENT-EPIPHANY

Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

There are a number of ways to utilize poetry in your ministry. You might print and distribute these poems to members in your community, or read them aloud to open and close study sessions. In worship, you could offer a poem as an opening reflection, a meditation during the sermon, a moment of reflection after the sermon, or as a written prayer printed in the bulletin. However you utilize these poems, please include credit as follows: Poem by Rev. Sarah A. Speed | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org



The First Sunday of Advent | WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING
YOU ARE A BLESSING

JOY AND CELEBRATION

You are a blessing.
If you hear nothing else,
if the wind howls,
if your brain runs amok,
if rebuttals and denials line up like little toy soldiers,
then hear *this*—
you are a blessing.

I knew it the first moment I met you / heard your name / learned there are 7 billion of us
on this planet.
I knew it in my bones,
the way my feet know the way home.
You are a blessing.

For our creating God
breathed life into your being.
And there is simply no way that,
along with that life,
some of God's goodness
didn't slip right in.

So tell the rebuttals to rest.
Tell the toy soldiers to find another hill,
because this one is reserved for joy and celebration.
You are a blessing.
Breathe it in.



“WHEN WILL YOU BE BACK?”

Yesterday I visited an old man in the hospital.
I was not the only one. We talked on the elevator ride down—
Has he gained any weight? Will he stay in that room?
Does he like the food? Has he called?
All the man wanted to know was, *When will you be back?*

We ask that question in a thousand different ways
every single day,
our hearts leaning over themselves,
bending to get closer to love.
We say, *Text me when you're home.*
Call me when you're free.
One more kiss!
I love you all the time.
When will you be back?
What we really mean is—
I can't go through life alone.
Please don't let me go through life alone.



The Third Sunday of Advent | WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING
DO THE GOOD THAT IS YOURS TO DO

HARVEST

Maybe none of it matters.

Maybe you can't make a difference.

Or maybe that watermelon seed you spit out over the summer will grow into a green orb, full of sticky sweet fruit. Maybe the rain will nourish it. Maybe your mother's hands will pull it from the vine, slice it into wedges, and place it on the dining room table. Maybe the neighbors will come over and chomp into that soft pink fruit, juicy water running down their chins. Maybe you will laugh at the shared experience, at this garden-grown communion, and maybe the stars will shine brighter that night.

People say the problems of the world are too big to make a difference,
but surely those people have forgotten the fruit that grows from one little seed.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent | WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING
HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

DESPITE IT ALL

What's to love?

she asked.

I understood the question.

I've seen the riot gear,
the tear gas,
the names of children
wiped from this
war-stained world.

I've seen the spray paint Swastikas
and the Proud Boys with their flags.

I've heard grandmothers at church
pray in urgent, desperate whispers.

And I've watched young mothers cry,
because teachers carry guns.

I've felt the tremor of an earthquake.

I've felt the heat of climate change.

I've seen the temple curtain tear in two.

But despite it all,

the bell that wouldn't stop tolling,
the words that won't stop clanging through my heart,
are, *so much*.

There is so much left to love.

So much left to hope for.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent | WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING
HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

LESSONS FROM THE SCHOOLYARD

A baby bird fell out of her nest.
She cried and pattered about on the sidewalk below.
We children formed a circle,
amazed at how small her bobbing body was.
Eventually a sixth grader scooped her up.
Held her tenderly in cupped hands.
She said, *You have to be gentle.*
You have to be steady.
You have to let her grow,
so that one day she can fly.

I think hope is a lot like that baby bird.
Hold it with both hands.
Let it grow.
One day, it will fly.



"HEY LOVE"¹

My grandmother was strong. That's what they tell me. She played piano and clipped coupons. She raised four kids. One was sick. One never would, never *could* grow up. But she loved them all. And when life fell apart in brand new ways, she bought books. She went back to school. She started over again. She was the kind of strong that reminds you of a live oak. The kind of woman, the kind of tree, you'd want to crawl up into and whisper, "Tell me how you did it. Tell me how you survived the storm."

She was fifty-one when a vessel in her brain burst, blood coloring outside the lines, blood stealing large swathes of her strength with every pulse. After that, she never did play piano, read, or clip coupons. After that, she never could find the words. Nouns became things to point out. Names became numbers. Conversation creaked and slowed, but one word stayed.

The name of my baptism never crossed her lips, but when my grandmother saw me, she'd say—*Heeeeeeey Love*.

My grandmother and God have this in common.
Both know my name. Both call me Love.

¹ For Nana: Margaret Are.



First Sunday After Christmas | WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING

DON'T FORGET TO LAUGH

HOLY & UNHINDERED

I am sure it is important to close your eyes, to pray on your knees, to fling yourself into deep reverence and even deeper humility. I am sure the Spirit is close when we dress up, when we sing the descant line, when we murmur the words with a sincere and hopeful heart.

And I am sure that when you moonwalk through your living room in soft wool socks, when you cackle loudly enough for the whole restaurant to hear, when you squeal into the phone and make pancakes for dinner, when you plunge your hands into the dirt and talk to the sparrows, when you make a mess of Communion breadcrumbs all around the Table, or when you allow yourself an undone, unhindered, unpolished sort of joy—that the Spirit loves that just as well.

The angel said, *Do not be afraid; I am bringing you joy.*
We humans have spent a lot of time focusing on the fear.
Don't forget: God is also in the joy.



FIELD NOTES

With tears in your eyes,
you name all the bumps
and zigzags your life has taken.
With clenched teeth
and a hummingbird pulse,
you wake up
and wonder—how did I get here?
In the last 40 days of
desert wandering, you say
you haven't heard God's voice once.
You say you miss when God was close,
when God used to sing the harmony line.
So you yell at the sky,
begging God to drop a pin,
to name the road,
to draw you a map.
You lament the way this life isn't easy.
You ask me—was the road ever straight and narrow,
or was that all a lie?
But then you crest the mountain,
and I don't hear from you for a while,
because God was growing
in the lilac field
on the other side of the hill.
God was scattered
among the pebbles
of the road you never planned to take.
Isn't it amazing, you say,
there are a million roads home
and God walks every single one of them.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Founding Creative Partner of A Sanctified Art

Rev. Sarah Speed (*she/her*) is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Social Work, and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary. Sarah loves to combine her love of all things creative with her passion for God. She believes that the Church has a responsibility to open every

door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities. Sarah feels called to live her life welcoming people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world. Writing is her most beloved spiritual practice. You can find her daily poems on Instagram and Facebook: [@writingthegood](#) | writingthegood.com

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