

David G. Truemper Memorial Concert
April 13, 2010

All of Us Go Down to the Dust: A hymn and choral festival
Commentary by Susan Cherwien

I.

Eventually, so soon, too soon, the journey through childhood, hopefully to maturity, brings us to what seems, from a distance, an ending, a dark nothingness.

We learn from physics that nothing disappears without a trace.
The ratio of matter to energy is in constant flux
but the quantity of the total of both remains the same.
What has been matter metamorphoses back into energy.
Energy coalesces into substance.
Nothing disappears without a trace.

Life is changed, not taken away, sings the Sarum liturgy for the dead.
Life is changed, not taken away.

Primary stars explode, and from the stellar gases, secondary stars are formed.

Black holes, whose immense gravitational pull is so strong not even light can escape, may be but feeders for white holes pouring forth new creation into another universe.

Leaves grow, color, fade, fall, and become part of the soil nourishing the tree, drawn up again into the tree in new form.

All rivers run to the sea.
What is from God returns to God.

Life is changed, not taken away.
Nothing disappears without a trace.

O God, Thou art Master of All.

Excerpted and amended from "Life Journey", in *Crossings* by Susan Palo Cherwien (Fenton, MO; MorningStar Music Publishers, 2003), p. 89. (MSM-90-31) Used by permission.

II.

The Lakota
among other plains tribes
kept a pictorial record
of the passing of years
called a
winter count.
Painted on a buffalo hide
the pictures spiraled inward
each representing
one year
one major event
that characterized that particular year.
Perhaps
we should all
keep a winter count,
a winter count
of people -
people who have significantly
colored a year of our life
or, by a kind word or attention
changed our journey.
perhaps
we could draw a picture
or compose a melody
like Elgar's Enigma variations
or write just a couplet
to re-member and name.
Think of all the people
we have encountered
and how they are in our bones
and how their voices are in our ears
and how their kindness or wisdom
broadened our center.
Perhaps
we should keep a winter count
a winter count
of people
all the blessed generations
that God has woven
overlapping
meandering
into our journey.

Excerpted from "To Everything A Season", in *From Glory Into Glory* by Susan Palo Cherwien (Fenton, MO; MorningStar Music Publishers, 2009), p. 278. (MSM-90-42) Used by permission.

III.

The Talmud says
"Every blade of grass
has its angel
that bends over it
and whispers
"Grow, grow".
Every unique part of creation
is precious to God.
Every blade of grass,
every tree frog,
every daffodil,
every human,
precious to God.
(and angels whisper
"grow, grow")
Every strand of DNA
is formed of four elements:
carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen -
that combine into four different molecules
of which every unique
and unrepeatable individual
is formed -
And what is being transmitted to us
in these DNA spirals?
Our ancestors.
The communion of saints.
The cloud of witnesses -
a spiral procession -
their stories, their songs,
their strengths, their tears -
the Anthonys, the Cecilians, the Martins
all individuals with unique, precious bodies
transmitted to our unique, precious bodies

Every precious human
every blade of grass
created by God, loved by the wounded Christ
shaped by the communion of saints,
is a never-to-be-repeated
song that rises in the universe.
Each death is a death to all.
Each grief is a grief to all.
(and the angels whisper "grow, grow" ...)

Excerpted and amended from "Wonder Love Praise", in *From Glory Into Glory* by Susan Palo Cherwien (Fenton, MO; MorningStar Music Publishers, 2009), p. 30. (MSM-90-42) Used by permission.

IV.

The saints.

Some have seen the types of things we have seen.

Some have lived through the types of things we will live through:

Perhaps they went to college or worked the docks.

Found a life-partner or remained alone.

Raised children or dedicated their lives to other service.

If they reached old age, they were young and vibrant
then, experienced and doubtful
then, old and tolerant.

They watched children grow to adults.

Watched their own youthful faces age.

Watched parents die.

They delighted in friendships.

Saw their skin become like parchment.

Saw friends die.

And those that grew old

(the same vibrant people,

in bodies smaller now, and slow),

it seemed they were the congregation for all the funerals.

And we have watched *them* die.

And we know that someday we will be the congregation at all the funerals.

And the young will watch us die.

And they will become the congregation at all the funerals...

+ + +

The cycle of life is relentless,

but precious.

For God is also relentless and flows like a river through the midst of earthly life.

It seems that time bears us all away,

But it is the great and gentle Spirit of God

that carries us through life

through death

through the portal

V.

Astrophysicists are searching space
for a universal constant
a suspected
but as yet unproven
underlayment
of the visible universe.
Atomic physicists search subatomic space
for evidence of gluons,
the actions of which
are responsible for forces
such as electromagnetic fields
(In God we live and move and have our being)
Physicist David Bohm experimented
to show that there are two orders to the universe
the explicate - that which can be seen, touched, sensed
the implicate - that which is enfolded in
and underlies
the universe we see.
(How lovely is thy dwelling place, O God of Hosts!)
Humans are always
earnestly in search
for that which underlies the universe.

There is an ancient definition of God:
God is an intelligible circle
whose center is
everywhere
and whose circumference, nowhere.
In baptism our center is placed
in God's center - everywhere.
In baptism, our awareness and being expands.
and we discover,
like the branches to the vine,
our profound
and deep
abiding connection
to all things -
ta panta - all things.
and to the evermore
presence of God
(The dwelling place of God is among mortals)

Excerpted and amended from "Image of the Invisible God", in *From Glory Into Glory* by Susan Palo Cherwien (Fenton, MO; MorningStar Music Publishers, 2009), p. 218. (MSM-90-42) Used by permission.

VI.

All the seasons
in truth,
overlap.
There is not one day
suddenly - poof -
all green
and no grey
all blossom
and no mud
all autumn
and no bloom
all snow
and no green.
we have seen the summer
concealed in spring
and spring alive under
winter white
Why should death surprise us?
we have seen its signs
woven in all the seasons
why should it startle?
we have watched the leaves
turn and fall
why should death frighten?
we have seen the new buds
beneath brown leaf
and frost.
Through this
woven landscape
a river flows
meandering
a river
whose name is called
Holy
Holy
Holy

Excerpted and amended from "To Everything a Season", in *From Glory Into Glory* by Susan Palo Cherwien (Fenton, MO; MorningStar Music Publishers, 2009), p. 270. (MSM-90-42) Used by permission.

VII.

Fear not.

The journey itself
is home.

The journey through life
through death
the journey itself
is home.

Here in this spiral procession
deeper and deeper
broader and broader

God is the path

God is the companion

(Whither shall I flee from your presence?)

God, the lighted window in the night

God, the guiding stars overhead

God, the opening door

God, the welcoming voice

God, the waiting meal.

There is no place where God is not.

in lonely haunts

in dark mine tunnels

in desperate days

in pain,

in death

Fear not.

We are never alone.

We process

from home

through home

to home.

There is no place

Where God is not.

Prayer

O God, Great River of Life, Source of All Good Things,
blessed are you
for the creating of the worlds
the shaping of clay
the breathing in of life

blessed are you
for the Christly body
the patient guiding
the relentless compassion

blessed are you
for the Spirit's attention
the whispering angels
the waiting embrace

blessed are you
for each unique life
each precious journey
each song rising from earth;

Grant that we may take our place
in the spiral procession,
singing aloud with all the blades of grass
with all life
and all heaven:
Holy, holy, holy!
thine is the greatness,
thine the power,
the glory, the victory
thine the majesty, with Christ and the Holy Spirit,
One God,
now and through all age of ages.
Amen.