

Groans and Hope

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For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we await for it with patience.

- Rom 8:22-25 ESV

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Times Beach

Once home to more than 2,000 people, Times Beach is now a Ghost Town in Missouri outside of St. Louis just off of the Old Route 66. In 1983 the town was evacuated due to a dioxin contamination caused by a waste hauler spraying waste oil on the roads to control dust. The waste oil was later found to have levels of dioxin 2,000 times higher than agent orange.

The Environmental Protection Agency bought out the town and established an incinerator on the site to clean 240,000 tons of contaminated soil. The incinerator was later demolished and the debris of demolished buildings from the former town are buried beneath a large grassy mound. The site is now a state park.



The Watch

The long and winding the road carried me on
Away from the noise and hustle of the highway
Along and under and around
Abruptly converging on straight streets
Long approaches and right angle corners
Fooling me to watch for children playing,
But no buildings stood to give them home.
Domesticated shrubs and bushes betrayed
The shape of what once was where.

And then I saw the mound--
The grave of a town,
Its bones buried deep beneath closely cut grass.
Rectangular mound parallel to the straight street
Neat and orderly lines betraying
The imposition of the order of man
Even upon the shape of death, if it may be so...

But death came still.
Death to the soil cast into the refining fire;
Death to the community cast out;
Death to the place abandoned by its people
And buried the poison beneath the mound.

Though man has left, the trees remain
Their silent watch fills the square places
Lacking children's calls, and it stands guard
Around the mound of bones.



"Hold!" they stand and gather round the mound
To maintain the silent vigil, to hem the evil in.
Or, to gather round in eager anticipation
To see what yet may rise from these bones,
From this fallen, buried and burnt grain of wheat.







Kiefer Creek

A small creek flows through Castlewood State Park just outside of St. Louis, flowing into the Meramec River just above a popular swimming hole. Kiefer creek rises up from springs and runs through a number of new subdivisions before flowing into the park where dogs and children wade in the stream while parents grill dinner, ignoring the warning signs.

Refuse from almost a hundred years of human occupation fills the woods and lines the creek bed, but the bigger danger is what cannot be seen with the naked eye. Levels of *e coli* are twice the safe level and have been known to cause health issues in dogs. Yet, every spring, the floods and run-off bury the refuse a little deeper into the riverbanks.





Kiefer Creek

To work! To work!

Here's another rush of rivulets to bury
With fresh mud the refuse of man miscarried

Here's a log!

Plunge it into the bank!

Take root around it!

Each passing liter like Cinderella's rodent friends,
Dressing up with whatever's at hand.

Grow and leaf out!

Bushes and rushes for a green canopy

How's it lookin'?

Ragged.

The narcissistic beauty in rags long ago lost patience
And left her rags and refuse behind on the riverbank.

Naked into judgment she went, does she know?



Hide.

The spring clean for the may queen struggles to cover
The beauty's rusted refuse, to spread her rags of mud and leaves
To hide her ugly disdain for the beauty of clean waters

Paint.

When the time runs out, there remains one last offering
Declare the dry bones alive, paint the sinews in reflection pools
Let the faux flesh layered in lascivious paint cover the bones
Groan.

While bleeding out from a thousand cursed wounds
And seasonally shifting sand to futilely cover the shame
Sick and poisoning even those who care, who came.

Hope.

Hope that the refuse and rags would not just cover
Hope that the refuse and rags would be removed
And one day flowers cover the banks for the return of the King.



World Bird Sanctuary

Tucked on a ridge beside Lone Elk Park is a jewel of conservationists and bird enthusiasts alike. Founded in 1977 by ornithologist Walter C. Crawford, Jr., the sanctuary is a place for bird watchers of all ages to see free shows, walk nature trails, view the birds and be educated on our feathered friends.

"Our mission is to preserve the earth's biological diversity and to secure the future of threatened bird species in their natural environments. We work to fulfill this mission through education, propagation, field studies and rehabilitation."

Volunteers roam the grounds not only taking care of the birds, but teaching visitors about the birds for which they care and inspiring the next generation of conservationists and ornithologists.





Shaw Nature Reserve

Shaw Nature Reserve was originally set up as a safe refuge for the plant collection from the smoke pollution of the 1920's, but its role in the community has evolved through the years. Now it is a nature reserve, a place to walk and hike, and a good spot for relaxing and for studying nature. It has become a premier educational, research and habitat restoration and reconstruction site.





Walking in Daffodils

Oh how brisk blows the breeze of time's regrets,
The weight of years and joy and beauty press
Upon a single heart, until it must
Be burst asunder or must share a part;
And find another who will take the match
To set alight the meadow with the spark
Of yellow flame, a thousand tiny suns ,
Which leap, along the path of wand'ring walks,
Whose worship prayers call the sun of spring;
And lighten human hearts borne down by drifts
Of heavy winter snows and frozen hopes.
Awake the flames of youth and beauty's light,
And with it burn the winter dross away!
Now gone is winter's bleak and dark despair,
Replaced by vows of summer's youthful cares.



Our Home Garden

We moved into our home on San Miguel Court in July 2007, just before I began my studies at Covenant Theological Seminary. While the yard was full of annuals and bulbs, years of neglect had allowed the vines to grow rampant and choke out the garden. We later found out that the owners previous to the one from whom we had purchased the home were the Finochios, a family who has lost a teenage child in the home to an accidental shooting. After all the care they had invested in the yard to make it beautiful—flowers, pond, pool, deck, shrubs—they had left because could not bear to stay.

So we set about to bring it back to its former beauty and I hope the Finochios would be glad to see the restoration. As I pulled the weeds from my garden, I pulled the weeds from my theology as I began my studies. I like to think there is some fruit of our labors, some seven years later in our little ‘pilot plant’...





The Crocus

When winter snow has almost left the ground
And Nature struggles with the pangs of spring
And birds return with hope beneath their wing,
A splash of fragile strength is upward bound;
While tree buds wait for sun to come around,
The crocus will not wait, it's first to bring
Its own small herald of the coming spring,
Despite the snow and frost that bares it down.

And we, while lost in troubles of our own,
We often lose ourselves beneath the frost
And hide until the winter's winds have blown.
Remember even then, you're not alone,
For still, my love will bloom beneath the frost--
Forever in my heart, and in this poem.









