



Four Prayers with Scripture

TIFFANY EBERLE KRINER

Seek and read from the book of the LORD.

-Isaiah 34:16

DL¹—It’s one of those mornings after the tiniest bit of rain—the harsh sun, but better than the day before yesterday when it was 90-some degrees (22 degrees higher than normal). In fact, the ivy is practically spring-eager though it is fall, and they can only be screaming thirsty. Five or six tender sprigs of new leaves are straight up—pick me, sun! pick me—or, rather, *choose* me—sun! The leaves uncurl and spread wide as fingers—like Kobayashi Issa’s poem:

Asked how old he was
the boy in the new kimono
stretched out all five fingers.²

¹ DL=Dear Lord.

² Robert Hass, “After the Gentle Poet Kobayashi Issa,” Poetry Foundation, accessed Oct. 15, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47809/after-the-gentle-poet-kobayashi-issa>

Intertwining scripture, literature, and the trials and tribulations of life, the author writes heart-felt and soulful prayers to God in this article.

Stretching, yearning, even this late in the year. I wish. But it's a drought, and it's a stretch to stretch. Zinnas, old tomatoes, perennials with their darkening, spottening edges, know, well, sure, we should be back at it, should be Monday morning to business—but say just give us a minute. Let's for a moment just acknowledge that we've been dry for a LONG time; it's all been so much. We're *so grateful* for that sip, but it wasn't really enough, not really, that sip, that Sunday. Okay fine. I am the zinnias.

I heard geese and stayed to sight them. Those well-trained, athletic travelers at their way made a crew boat that one wonders at, bleary eyed as I am before coffee—the training that the row requires! I wished, seeing their cut down blue road, to be so trained, to be on the way, getting on with everything—there is so much everything. I didn't go, though, just stood there.

And just then, I saw the soar of what, at first glance, seemed very “morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple dawn-drawn falcon”—and more than one! But no, it was really a band of turkey vultures riding thermals in the morning sun over the clearing where our house sits.

Fiona has always admired *cathartes aura*—“majestic creatures,” she called them on the way to cello lessons that one time. All I could think today, though, was what were they smelling? What had died recently, was dying, might die soon? (I thought of S's dad, K's dad, L's mom, Uncle B). I worried for our forested pigs, the sheep (remember that one sheep that mangled its leg on that fallen tree that one time? Its blood still cries out to me.). Were the cats okay? Turkey vultures clean, science reminds me, purify, even digest livestock diseases. But.

Okay, so I've been having a hard time reading scripture; I can't think why. *Confess it*, said my spiritual director. *Whenever you are tempted, just confess whatever it is, as soon as possible. Takes the power right out.* She's very Ignatian. I'm bewildered by the whole situation. It's everyday overwhelm. Sitting down, just sitting down, I feel frantic, rolling my eyes over words as they smear in and out of focus with urgencies of all kinds. The word is like my to-do list. I actually want to read/do almost everything on it, even cleaning. But what first? What's the most important? What NOW? Can I make the clearest decision that will actually get me to do what I have decided to do? It's not just your word, I realize. It's all the hours, all the days working like that.

I'm not sure why I have so much trouble deciding, because any scripture would do—strictly speaking, anything IS doing this little season, when I have flipped open to obey anyway, or read out of habit. I forget where I was heading, scripturally, when the book flipped open to Isaiah 34 today. But then there it was, “Seek and read from the book of the Lord.”

That part of Isaiah is a terrifying melange. I knew I was being selective earlier this hot summer by only citing hopeful Isaiah 33:17, “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches far away.” I felt you were giving it to me for those students on their travel to Mexico, for that moment, that beauty of the Lord—and you were—*are* beautiful in the glory of the nations.

But the whole world gets it in Isaiah 34, “the widest canvas” says Motyer, to paint it all going down:³

Draw near, O nations, to hear;
O peoples, give heed!
Let the earth hear and all that fills it,
the world and all that comes from it.
For the LORD is enraged against all the nations
and furious against all their hordes;
he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter.
Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.
All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall wither
like a leaf withering on a vine
or fruit withering on a fig tree.

Compelling and horrific because its disasters are all too recognizable. And yet there you are, DL, in the middle of the chaos of judgment against the whole world, saving. A spot for thorns, nettles, thistles, jackals, ostriches, wildcats, owls, and ravens:

for the LORD has a day of vengeance,

³ J. Alex Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (InterVarsity, 1993), 270.

a year of vindication for Zion's cause.
And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch
and her soil into sulfur;
her land shall become burning pitch.
Night and day it shall not be quenched;
its smoke shall go up forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
no one shall pass through it forever and ever. . .

*I know it's an image of destruction, but I can't
possibly be the only one who sees in this
imagery Genesis 1—nesting and hatching and
brooding as God stretches out over it all, but
again.*

I know it's an image of destruction, but I can't possibly be the only one who sees in this imagery Genesis 1—nesting and hatching and brooding as God stretches out over it all, but again. Or Psalm 84—the home of your altar: nest of pitch, smoke going up becomes incense, becomes Spirit brooding, becomes not fortress, but altar, home, in the shadow of your wings.

Night animals (Lilith), wild goats (goat demons?) we are afraid of, but you aren't—you make them community. And there is this vast sweep in the move from chapter 34 to 35, where you make it new, again, because you come.

Though Andy Abernathy mostly skips over this apocalypse in his little Isaiah book (understandable—Isaiah is LONG), which I bought for the class of his that I didn't end up sitting in on after all, he does mention (via Smith⁴) in a discussion of Isaiah 63 that Edom has a triple symbolism—that old Esau, and the awesome wordplay that makes the symbol spread wide from EDOM to ADAM and the violence of blood red ADOM.⁵ God as king in Isaiah 33, then God the

⁴ G. V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-46* (B&H, 2009), 657.

⁵ Andrew T. Abernathy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach* (Intervarsity, 2016), 95–96.

king in Isaiah 36–37. Edom is an eschatological symbol, says Motyer, for the “final hostile power” opposing the rule and reign of God.⁶

If it is drought now forever, or flood of chaos and destruction, if it's pitch and burning sulfur, and the princes are nothing, and it seems like No Kingdom, well. DL, you have it, somehow, your *Cathartes aura*, cleaning it all, with thistles, spirits gathering? And then starting something?

DL—

Rhonda suggested the book of Jonah. Short, firstly. Narrative, also. Also, it has a lot of prayer in it, she said, and scripture. Okay. Here goes.

Yes. The very first line, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Ammitai, saying—” seems to give context for all relationship between people and God. Right? You first. It gets its own verse, so everyone has already thought of this, but that's the good bit—first, God is sayING (gerunds are so active and now, even in the past tense) and we are hearING a story in which you make the first move, you say the first word.

It COMES, your word, it comes TO. The wickedness has come UP, but Jonah goes DOWN. Down to Joppa, down into the hold, down into the ocean, down into the belly. But your word comes, here, everywhere, to the city. Yes, the basis of all our prayer is that the word of the Lord is coming, and a person can hear it and answer and pray and talk back, or a person can (har har) flee as if your word can't follow. You speak, and you want your messenger to get going, spreading the right and decrying of wrong, for the benefit of the city.

How plaintive, how caring you are in it all, Lord, that kind, lovely epithet: “that great city,” you say it so many times! Odysseus, many turned as Jonah, is the city sacker; but *you* love a good city. You say it just like my dad says it some nights, when we are all together, that phrase, “it doesn't get any better than this,” he'll say, or “you can't buy this meal in a restaurant.”

It's a longing for something in the future that happens even while you are together—a kind of future nostos.

⁶ J. Alex Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (InterVarsity, 1993), 269.

Even in Kyoto—
Hearing the cuckoo's cry—
I long for Kyoto.⁷

This is such a Buddhist poem, I know, the transience, the feeling of hard—what is it—nostalgia? An anticipation of future nostalgia? Cuckoos cry in summer and even when you think, YES, this is IT, you know it will be gone. But surely for you, Lord, that feeling of city as falling, but something to long for, for the future, is not nostalgia, but a transformative *nostos* (yes, everything is *The Odyssey* this year). That great city—it's falling, failing! "Should I not be concerned," you ask, "about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their life, and also many animals?" You are always so good about the much cattle, thousands of hills. And I agree, a good city is one with much cattle. Like Madison, WI, the cow barn and the guy practicing bagpipes in there, early in the morning.

I guess we think of praying as calling on our god in a crisis—like the sailors, "each cried to his god"—and I love the devout solidarity—such accountability partners!—when they tell him "Get up! Call on your God!" And surely it must be okay to do so! You answered them, seems like, though, of course, it happened before they called.

Your word comes with a WAY bigger story, a bigger job, but a smaller role. Jonah, avoiding the word *and* prayer, both. Maybe he thought there are two kinds of journeys—toward you and your work or away from you and your work. There's only one kind, though, with you. And the story marks it.

And the end! The rosy-red fingers of dawn, coming in hot for him. The bush that rises and falls. He's so mad that it was *your* word that mattered, not his. Feeling that one. So hot outside the city myself, looking east in the rising sun's heat, not writing much.

The sum of it is this: You are SO KIND! Saving the mariners, saving the runaway—hilariously—and, you always DO this, saving the much, much cattle.

DL—

⁷ Robert Hass, *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa* (HarperCollins, 1994), 11.

Rereading *On the Road*; it all feels so familiar! Well, not the drinking, trolling for girls part. Not the Benzedrine either, come to think, nor the hitch-hiking, two-timing. The pace of it, I mean. The Beats' bop apocalypse, the break, the change, the frantic fingering of it all (goldfinch!). Dizzy's impossible breathlessness—all about breathing but using every single dram of air toward stuffing another note into the beat, another word into the line. You only pause for effect, to break, to zoom on. But I wonder, how do you know whether you're zooming the bop apocalypse or just speeding toward a stroke? Kerouac did die young, poor thing.

Everyone I meet these days is feeling the speed, that too muchness. I ran into Stevener at the coffee shop, and he was trying to cut things out; Whitley said—and she is like so many of us—I'm a department of one these days; I ran into Nicole at the office—we keep longing for the conversation that can radically change things—we can't live like this, can't keep doing this. Last week, I thought I was pregnant for *days*, and though the thought was terrifying for a 47-year-old (though, Louise Erdrich did it, bless her!), I kind of wanted a baby as a principle of selection—“Nope, sorry, can't. Baby.”

There are two reasons for going for it all: (1) The thrill of it all—another yes, to live by yes; (2) the fear of saying no—the judgments, the insufficiencies, the missing things.

Dean Moriarty is both, though he seems all yes. He—they, really—are in pursuit of experience, speed, consciousness, articulation—as Carlo Marx (Allen Ginsberg) described it “embarked on a tremendous season . . . trying to communicate with absolute honesty and absolute completeness everything on our minds. We've had to take Benzedrine. We sit on the bed, crosslegged, facing each other.”⁸

But they can't sit there, facing each other, talking. There's just too much experience. Carlo says “I have finally taught Dean that he can do anything he wants, become mayor of Denver, marry a millionairess, or become the greatest poet since Rimbaud. But he keeps rushing out to see the midget auto races. I go with him. He jumps and yells, excited.”⁹

He goes and goes and goes—the pace is immediately apprehensible in the prose: Dean says, “It is now” (looks at his watch) ‘exactly

⁸ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Viking, 2007), 41.

⁹ Kerouac, 41–42.

one-fourteen. I shall be back at exactly *three-fourteen*, for our hour of reverie together, real sweet reverie darling, and then, as you know, as I told you and as we agreed, I have to go and see the one-legged lawyer about those papers—in the middle of the night, strange as it seems and as I tho-ro-ly explained.’ (This was a coverup for his rendezvous with Carlo, who was still hiding.) ‘So now in this exact minute, I must dress, put on my pants, go back to life, that is to outside life, streets and what not, as we agreed, it is now one-*fifteen* and time’s running, running, running—” and Camille says “Well, all right, Dean, but please be sure and be back at three,” and then Dean says “Just as I said, darling, and remember not three but three-fourteen. Are we straight in the deepest and most wonderful depths of our souls, dear darling? ... I was amazed. Everything was so crazy.”¹⁰

When they finally do sit down and talk, Carlo and Dean, Sal thinks it is “like a man watching the mechanism of a watch that reached clear to the top of Berthoud Pass and yet was made with the smallest works of the most delicate watch in the world.”¹¹ I feel it, I feel it: “If you keep this up you’ll both go crazy, but let me know what happens as you go along.”¹²

It’s not without spiritual significance, all this breathless pace and detail. Kerouac once wrote that *On the Road* “was really a story about two Catholic buddies, roaming the country, in search of God. And we found him.”¹³ The visions they longed for—and had!—all of it, pursued through a “beatific indifference to the things that are Caesar’s. . . a tiredness of that and a yearning for, a regret for, the transcendent value, or ‘God,’ again.”¹⁴

It is as if they could realize the intricacy of the world’s watch parts, at a fast enough rate, they might see you. I feel it, too, in a leaf, a Petrie dish, the movement of morphemes together toward meaning. How should the intricacy, the glory of it, *not* propel one toward speed—toward a sharing—that is epiphanic?

And you know how it is to move like that, right, bringing the kingdom through the lines? Gospel of Mark, right? The pace, the

¹⁰ Kerouac, 43.

¹¹ Kerouac, 50.

¹² Kerouac, 50.

¹³ John Leland, *Why Kerouac Matters: The Lessons of On the Road (They’re Not What You Think)* (Viking, 2007), 17.

¹⁴ John Leland, *Why Kerouac Matters*, 150.

energy of the thing. I forget how many times that word “immediately,” “straight away,” “then,” comes up. I looked it up—35?—but then when the pastor gave a sermon on something related soon after, he got a different count than me. Point is, you know speed! *Immediately* when you were coming out of the water, the dove. *Immediately* after that, you were on the gospel road to the wilderness. When you called the disciples, pretty much right after that, *immediately* they left their nets and joined you; with James and John, you *immediately* called them and, of course, they came.

And you know how it is to move like that, right, bringing the kingdom through the lines? Gospel of Mark, right? The pace, the energy of the thing. I forget how many times that word “immediately,” “straight away,” “then,” comes up.

In Mark 10, you were going so fast that you are recorded as leaving Jericho precisely 1/3 of a verse after arriving. It doesn't even say what you were doing there. Walls down, you marched out—followers, crowds, words—on the road.

But that speed with the Beats, with Sal and Dean in *On the Road*, can burn through whole relationships, whole ways of being. Sal sees the problem in the vision in *On the Road* when Dean's coming to join them in Mexico:

... a burning shuddering frightful Angel, palpitating toward me across the road, approaching like a cloud, with enormous speed, pursuing me like the Shrouded Traveler on the plain, bearing down on me. I saw his huge face over the plans with the mad, bony purpose and the gleaming eyes; I saw his wings; I saw his old jalopy chariot with thousands of sparking flames shooting out from it; I saw the path it burned over the road; it even made its own road and went over the corn, through cities, destroying bridges, drying rivers. It came like wrath to the West. I knew Dean had gone mad again. There was no chance to send money to either wife if he took all his savings out of the bank and

bought a car. Everything was up, the jig and all. Behind him charred ruins smoked.¹⁵

Something wrong there, the pace of it all, the damage done. Dean straight up abandons Sal, abandons him fever-stricken in Mexico. He's, in the end, a rat—beloved!—but a rat. He couldn't stop. I feel that same crazed, breathless drive—we can put in another thing; let's figure it out; let's find the real thing.

That said, despite your drive, You stopped. You were on the road, blazing out of Jericho, a city that has never not been dismantling itself (and what close-walled city isn't? what is a wall but a fall waiting to happen?). But then—then, the scripture says—you “stood still” for Bartimaeus. To hear him calling you, to call him, you stood still.

Me and Petey are sitting here facing roadwork, to the east—some broken pause in the wheel-winded days. From the equipoise of this linden coppice's back layout, yearling stems rise in a sort of comb or net; they might catch the dead hag tree debarking in clusters above them. These fall desiccant days shrink leaves from the upper walnuts, but the hard lemon fruits hang yet, all danger. A falling walnut into the soft muscle of a shoulder is the best-case scenario. Petey beside me knows enough, dogly, to shiver early, jigging, though it is heat coming, not cold, with this wind.

Call me, won't you? Fall on me? Or catch me. Crush lemon to nut meat. Have mercy. Let me seed.

DL—

Pray as You Go *I think* had these two stories on recently, and as I am grasping at semi-dry shards of your word, I can't get them out of my head: (1) the Luke 11 dinner at Pharisee's, with your chiding of the Pharisees about the outside and inside of the cup; (2) the Mark 14 dinner at Simon the Leper's house where the woman with the alabaster jar comes.

It's because of all the things that I was thinking of when they came up on the commute: being observed in teaching a million times for promotion and having to read three years worth of evaluations over and close-read them to process them for a committee that will decide whether I am good enough; feeling like a sham when writing

¹⁵ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (Viking, 2007), 259.

that conference paper—and what is it even FOR?!, those nine people who attend?; the embarrassing number of hours I spent planning professional attire for three days, plus books and toiletries and laptop and walkable shoes that could fit the 9 inch by 10 inch by 16.5 inch backpack I bought so I wouldn't have to pay for a carryon bag with United, hours which then meant I needed to nearly pull an all-nighter like some kind of college sophomore; the ridiculous cost in time and money of that one grand gesture that felt like you were calling me to (but maybe I was calling myself to?) and the way that the entire break was sucked away to that gesture that I have no way to evaluate and to all-too-futile cleaning for hosting when I got home; all the work that is undone or that I didn't do well enough; the untouched grading; the committees. Ugh, I hate writing it all down even.

The scriptural passages, though, yes. They have so much in common: dinner parties with you (*if you could invite anyone in history to dinner*, right? They must have won THAT lottery); dishes as main features of the stories; dinner guests getting offended by things (no WONDER I clean so frantically for guests!); Jesus having to bring up again and again what real justice and care for the poor would look like. And, I realize now, *performance*. They both deal with performance.

The “you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness” came through loud and clear when thinking of all the ways I am looking to perform—what? basic life and/or grown up and/or professional competence? Hearing that passage, I truly didn't feel you were being mean when it came clear as relevant. Water on a sponge, as Ignatius would say. When you said “you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces” and warned “you are like unmarked graves” I honestly felt some admiration for even the wording there—like you really, *really* get how it all feels to be that rabbi doing all those things with the mint and the rue and all that to look a certain kind of way. And the answer, the solution, “give for alms those things that are within” felt like real spice for thinking. The application/solution for greed and wickedness inside seems obvious: if you are greedy inside, you should give alms so “everything will be clean for you.” Same with wickedness: do good acts of service for real and you WILL be clean in and out. But so, what's the antidote for wanting to be thought basically competent, to be respected, to be together? Be publicly incompetent? I'm probably good there, tbh. Look like a

slob? Impossible not to in the city, I guess. I guess I thought—well, giving the attention to the actual mind, the thinking, the paper, the actual questions, rather than whatever scaffolding of professional shibboleths. “Practicing justice and the love of God” you say later. I think I practice trying to be lovable (by which I mean funny) and/or unmissable (by which I mean smart) instead, even as I am writing a paper about justice and ridiculous grace in Erdrich’s *LaRose*. Wait. Do you mean writing it up into a scholarly article instead of just giving it at a conference? Well, I didn’t think this prayer was going *that way*. Hello there, sinking feeling!

I guess the epiphany about grace that I was looking for *was* difficult to discern on so little sleep. Startled, but not surprised that that pack of coyotes invaded the front lawn *just* as I lay down with only one hour and forty minutes of sleep available before the alarm, btw. And conference papers *are* short, and maybe ONLY performance.

But the woman with the alabaster jar was performing too, is what I am saying.

Remember David Hooker’s bee exhibition at Calvin? He found that dead bee on the sidewalk. He wondered how it died; he thought about a lot of bees dying and wondered why they died (though of course we all know some about it now). He wondered if he could cast the actual dead bee and make one out of clay; he did cast it; he learned how to glaze the cast clay bees with a sort of ambery resin; he learned how to affix gold to them. Then he made, what, two *thousand* of them? The hundreds of hours—to figure out the process, to begin a sort of reproduction. The glazing, the firing, the conceptualization of the shape of the exhibition! And then, he set them up in a labyrinth so people could think about themselves and the outside world. There were 800 MORE than could fit in the space. And the thing, the breath-taking thing to me, was that each bee in the exhibition was *numbered*, and each was packed in order for transport, and each was set up in order in the show.

I bought ONE clay bee from him with the ambery glaze AND the gold on it for something like \$30 or \$35 bucks—because he’s nice to me as a friend. It’s in one of my little desk-drawer-turned-Cornell-box bits in the living room.

I told the youth group about it—and about his other performance piece The Sweep Project that has him literally broom sweeping miles and miles of routes and trails of Underground Railroad in Illinois to

think about what has been covered, uncovered, swept under the carpet, swept away, etc. The kids were dumbfounded: WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT? The audacity! The time!

David's expensive, lavish interpretation of the bees' art responds to the bees' breathtaking, renewing, threatened gift to the world; it tries to give back. In blisteringly, publicly remembering what has been swept aside—uncountable hours of stolen labor and leisure during slavery, he draws attention to cost of remembering well. These remind me of the woman with the alabaster jar. What she is doing is performance art, the expensive kind.

Three hundred denarii is more than 3/4 of a year's worth of work. Was she a perfumer? Maybe she was the carver of the alabaster? People assume she was just rich, which misses the point *entirely*, in my view. Even if, by some easy method, she was able to procure pure nard and the jar, she still had to decide to do it, to figure out *what* to do for the grand gesture, how to pay the cost, how to manage what it would mean in embarrassment and interruption of social norms and all that. And it was an interpretation, was it not? Like all art? What does pouring extremely costly oil on your head mean?

In the translation of the phrase, rendered in English "break open," the "break" seems extra. So she could break the vessel and pour out that precious oil like she sensed somehow was your own costly, valuable life blood poured out for many.

You interpret it in the text as preparation for your death, and given that the gospel says *JUST* prior to this vignette that "the chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him," it seems VERY, VERY possible that the woman, if she were well connected, might have heard some things. She could have constructed this as a Jeremiah-esque performance-based symbolic warning? One commentary I read said she didn't need to break it. In the translation of the phrase, rendered in English "break open," the "break" seems extra. So she could break the vessel and pour out that precious oil like she sensed somehow was your own costly, valuable life blood poured out for many. You said this story will be told "in

remembrance of her”—and we drink communion in remembrance of how you poured out your blood for many. All of these seem so poetic, so carefully offered as meanings.

Was she trying to bring in the priestly blessing? Like the oil that is poured on Aaron and runs down his beard in the Psalms? Vs. say, pouring it on feet or in knee pits. Was she, artistically, anointing you? Ordaining you for the ministry you were about to undertake, the sacrifice of yourself? Maybe she knows it's not the right kind of oil for THAT sort of anointing in the cultural setting, so wants to use a different oil because she wants to up the cost, up the *meaning* of the anointing. Or maybe the women could use the burial oils, not the anointing oils? Maybe she's turning the one into the other?

My word, the audacity!

David Hooker, when I first talked with him, almost two decades ago, impressed me because he was so utterly sure that he was an artist. So he never worried about time—the time to move clay into the studio, for example, was part of the art, not taking time away from it. All the things that went into the art—the cost of the clay, the time to frame, the moving of things from one place to another, were part of the art. And the art was what he was for.

That woman needed to have *that* kind of confidence—or, no, maybe she didn't have confidence, but rather *courage* from some serious Spirit empowerment—to invest 3/4 of a year of work into earning the materials, to know when the time was right to moving the materials into place, to design the process and performance, and then, breath held, nervously, possibly blasphemously, certainly out of social norm bonds break all her work and pour it out into the open. It was what she could do with the materials she could get; finding the meanings ready to manifest.

It was so breathtakingly extravagant. It was over in, what, ten seconds? And MOST of the people didn't even get what she was doing. But she blessed the body of Christ, *your* body, anointed it for resurrection as much as for death; she made it beautiful and meaningful.

I wonder if she thought about the people who ragged on her, if it was hard to keep your kind receipt of her piece in mind. The negative evals always stick hardest—longest. I wonder if she worried that her choice of materials, the cost of them, might have *been*—not just *seemed* to the audience to be—just for show. The cost of it was part of the performance; but was it the right choice? Would she worry that

Jesus gave her the odd memorializing “what she has done will be told in remembrance of *her*”? She probably knew that she did something to remember *him*? Or was she moved then, later, to try and do things for the poor, too, just in case, to show beautiful kindness to them too? Was she worried that what she did wasn’t enough?

I guess my point is, DL, that it feels like I *want* to say, OH, perfect! Just DON’T be like the Pharisees and DO be like the woman with the alabaster jar! Here is the principle of selection for life on the road, to find the *yes yes yes* of Dean and Sal when they eschew the mammon and mores in order to find you in exuberant, extravagant motion—here’s how to say yes to the call when it comes, sending you to Tarshish or out of Jericho, here’s how to know the difference between performing a cup washing and breaking the cup right there—smashing it on the wall and suddenly then, beholding “the king in his beauty” as Isaiah 33:17 puts it.

But if she *was* rich, did she think about what she was wearing when she came in? Did she worry whether the state of her household was above reproach, what with her apparently having time and money to give away 3/4 of a year’s worth of stuff in one performance? Did it go again and again in her head, what they said? And did she go home and do the dishes and measure out the spices for tithes?

All the sick, expensive slicks of my days and years of this endless labor and failure, yes, I’d like them to anoint your Body, all of them. I’d like to be aroma of God, to say yes, yes, to sit and look back and forth with the Body as earnest and intricate as the mountain watch of Carlo and Dean, to hear and say yes you are meaningful and to give so profoundly that beauty itself would result, healing, even.

Here. Now pass clouds
—stately act—from sight
behind them, light.
dawn’s burnt fingers prod

day: air’s tears and currents,
a train’s weighted trudge,
road’s roar, heart guilt’s warrant.
Now. A terrible urge

for your word; I point my fear
and watch it cloud and go, anxious

at the delicate ruffled wear
of these topmost branches.

Yes, a cock there crew
in the distance, & the road again.
Say I won't betray you
today. Say it in rain. ⊕

Tiffany Eberle Kriner is Associate Professor of English at Wheaton College and the author of The Future of the Word: An Eschatology of Reading (Fortress, 2014) and In Thought, Word, and Seed: Reckonings from a Midwest Farm (Eerdmans, 2023). She also lives and works at Root and Sky Farm in Marengo, IL.