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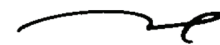


Ruben Timman

*“I am so close to the truth when I am
recording life as it happens.”*



*Richard L. Gorsuch
1934 - 2024*



*This is the shorthand character for “goodness”.
Designed in 1888 by John Robert Gregg.*



Sam L. Street

Greetings,

Welcome to the premiere issue of *goodness*.

This journal was born from a simple yet profound belief: **the common good is all around us. It is found in the stories we tell, the art we create, the images we capture, and the moments of grace that shape our lives.** In a world often consumed by noise and division, goodness seeks to highlight something different—expressions of beauty, truth, and shared humanity.

Twice a year, we will bring you voices from around the world—writers, artists, poets, and photographers—each offering their unique perspective on what it means to seek and create good in their everyday lives.

Within these pages, you will find essays that challenge, opinions that provoke, stories that move, and art that lingers long after the page is turned.

This first Spring 2025 issue marks the beginning of a journey, and we are grateful to have you with us. May you find inspiration here, may you discover something unexpected, and may the good you give and receive serve as a reminder that even in uncertain times, light continues to break through.

With gratitude,

Tim Gilman
co-founder / creative director





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Contributors



Ruben Timman
photographer



Carolyn Renee Dupont
professor / author



Samir Selmanović
pastor / author



Pam Mark Hall
songwriter / artist



Jonathan Rice
illustrator



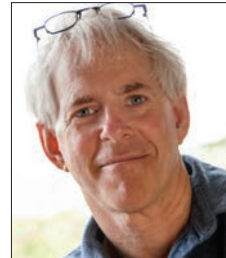
Debbie Hawkins
photographer



Susanne Lohkamp
writer



Christy Berghoef
writer / photographer



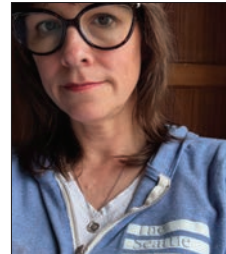
Tim Buckley
writer / poet



Liana Stone
poetry



Martin Burry
writer



Vanessa Ryerse
writer



Keith Mannes
author



Kevin Hadduck
poet



Brian D. McLaren
pastor / author





Christine Gilman

goodness.

of.



GOODNESS?

by Samir Selmanović

Goodness is a big word.

Goodness is not merely complicated. Goodness is complex. And there's a vast difference between the two.

A car, for example, is complicated. We can develop a finite number of rules and steps for creating one. There are a finite number of parts, all named and all in specs. Trained humans can take it apart and put it back together.

Garden, on the other hand, is complex. We have no known finite list of ingredients, no names for all the processes happening, and no specs. No science, religion, or even magic can ever hope to take apart even one leaf and put it back together.

Sometimes, goodness is like a car. Cause and effect are clear, and you know what to do. Fill up the gas tank and drive. When it breaks down or you have an accident, fix it. We can control cars.

But most of the time, and in ways that really matter, goodness is like a garden. We are never in control of a garden. It has a life of its own.

And yet, even though we cannot control a garden, we know how to care for it. There's pruning, fertilizing, and weeding. There are frosts, droughts, and dormancy periods. There are seasons tied to the hurling of our planet through the cosmos. There are losses, harvests, endings, and beginnings. We learn to nourish it. We learn to protect it. We learn to wait. To let go. All the while, we are out of control.

When we treat goodness merely as a complicated problem to solve, our caring for goodness can quickly turn bad, exhausting, and sometimes tragic. We overestimate our powers and force our understanding. When that fails, we *pretend* to be in control. And when that fails, we embrace a fantasy that someday we will turn the complexity we cannot control into something complicated that we will eventually control.

GOODNESS?

We need a better story of what being good means.

There are ways to transform ourselves and our world that are easier and, therefore, possible, as well as joyful and, thus, sustainable.

Complex does not have to be complicated. There's particular simplicity associated with being a gardener. In many ways, the complexity of a garden is inversely related to what it requires to care for it. Enjoy it, fertilize it, prune it, enjoy it, weed it, enjoy it, let it go dormant, enjoy it, harvest it, enjoy it, fertilize it...

Joy plus simple, obvious daily actions, big and small, difficult and easy, is all we need to do.

Goodness is something larger than any one of us can control. We simply participate in it.

The human mind is designed for simplicity; we are wired to look for solutions we can do with ease. Our general pattern is to simplify. That is how we have been deciding, getting things done, and evolving.

Nowadays, everywhere we turn, we are faced with warnings about all the ways we can go wrong with easy solutions. In the prescient words of American journalist HL Mencken, we are told, "For every problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong." Indeed, we cannot merely simplify our problems by shrinking them to what we already know.

We have discovered that a whole slew of biases run our lives. They have helped us survive for thousands of years. Times have changed; the biases that helped us survive are problematic now, and the stakes are much higher. Now, we must stop, think, question our intuition, think again, wait, and ask questions we avoid asking. That's all good; we all need to engage in the sometimes tedious and often necessary work of rechecking our perceptions and recalibrating our intuitions. Yet, an arms race with complexity will not succeed.

Humans need simplicity not only to survive but also to feel alive. Not any simplicity, but rather—and this matters immensely—the *radical* simplicity of participating in something greater than ourselves.

GOODNESS?

Science tells us that the rules in complex systems can be unexpectedly simple. Instead of trying to predict and control the future, we honor past lessons, examine present patterns, and allow ourselves to be engaged by something other than our own stories and thoughts.

We live in an era when everything changes everywhere and all at once. Even if we see change as exciting, the more we think about it, the more overwhelmed we become by our lack of control. Since this morning, our relational, professional, and planetary circumstances have already shifted. Tomorrow, we will wake up in a different world, and the person we see in the mirror will not be the same.

We are not change makers, change agents, or game changers. Those are the names we give ourselves as we play adult versions of the game of pretending.

We don't know, and when we don't know, we fear. Some nights, anxiety — a fear of being even more afraid — sits on our chests. Some days, it locks us in and does not let us walk out into the world. We realize, most often subconsciously, that rather than observing, instigating, or managing change, we are inhabiting change. There is no escape from our own lives. And since there's no escape, we may as well have compassion for ourselves and each other and learn to survive and delight in our lives together.

Yes, goodness is beyond our control.

But not beyond our participation.

When we let ourselves inhabit the goodness that holds us all, we find ourselves at the frontier of our freedom to participate in it or not.

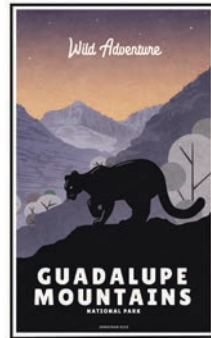
When we participate, we continually arrive at the moments of undoing who we have been, in contact with the forces we don't understand, inviting us to a conversation we don't yet know how to have.

Goodness is oozing with hope.



CLICK or SCAN

Samir Selmanović
Coach, Author, Wayfinder



Jonathan Rice



Jonathan is a poster artist, illustrator, and designer with a passion for creating visually striking and meaningful artwork. After spending much of his career crafting award-winning designs and advertisements for corporate America—helping clients sell boatloads of products—Jonathan realized his heart was in creating art that speaks to everyone.

Inspired by vintage aesthetics, retro design, and the charm of early pop culture, he is known for his ability to distill complex ideas into simple yet powerful images. Beyond his love for great design, Jonathan is deeply attuned to the goodness in the world, finding joy in everyday humor, the beauty of life, and the small moments that make it all worthwhile. His work reflects this perspective, celebrating the vibrant, uplifting, and timeless elements that connect us all.

thecreativevisualist.com
jonathanriceillustration.com



CLICK or SCAN



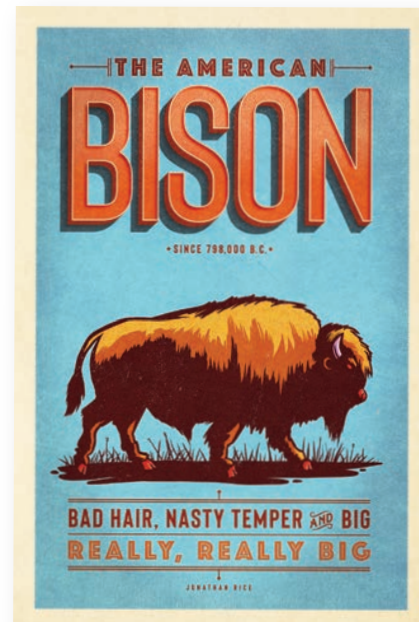
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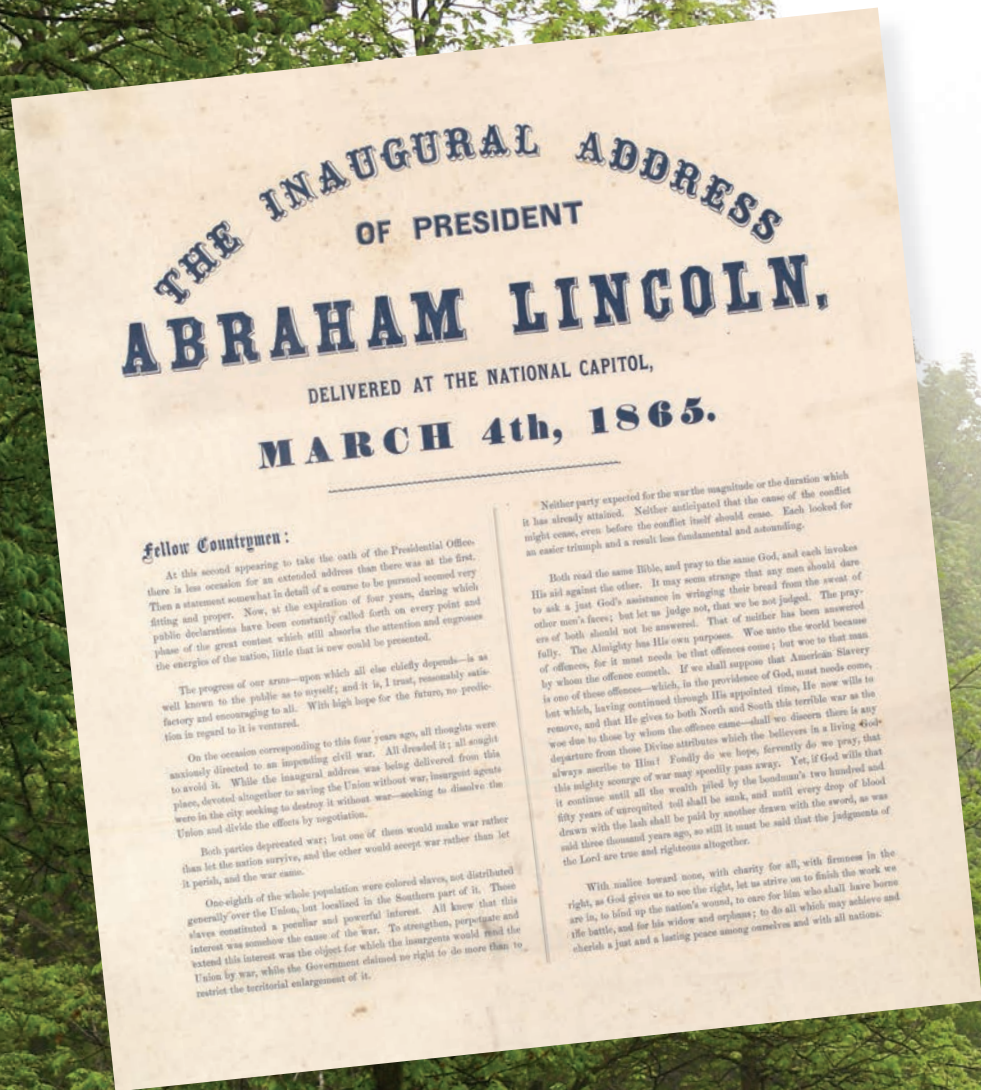


Jonathan Rice



Jonathan Rice





The Complex Morality of Abraham Lincoln

A MEDITATION for OUR TIMES

by Carolyn Renée Dupont



IN MARCH 1865, ABRAHAM LINCOLN stood on a platform outside the US Capitol and raised his hand to take the presidential oath of office for the second time. Four years earlier as the nation sat on the cusp of war, he had appealed to Americans’ “better angels” in this very setting. Now, as he assumed his responsibilities this second time, that war raged less than 150 miles away.

Everyone knew that the military situation boded exceedingly well for the Union and nearly hopeless for the Confederacy. The South lay in tatters—its once-elegant cities now burnt heaps of rubble, its population restive and starving. Only a small, self-deluded cadre of Confederate leaders believed they could prevail, while each week 800 deserters slipped away from the Confederate army with the approval of their families, friends, and fellow soldiers.

Lincoln might have gloated over the Union’s all-but-inevitable win. The administration’s careful strategy and vaunted morality stood poised to triumph, and he might have praised himself and his supporters. Even more, he might have mocked the pathetic losers in the South, rubbing their vanity and foolishness in their faces. Never, it might seem, had failure been more deserved. Never had right been more thoroughly vindicated.

But the President took a notably different approach. Rather than exultantly thumping his chest, he spoke with humility. Rather than harp on the South’s sins, he reflected on the nation’s shared wrongdoing. Rather than promote vengeance, he encouraged rebuilding and community care.

The Complex Morality of Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln did not equivocate about the moral wrong of slavery or about the South's great sin of waging war in the interest of expanding and preserving this institution. His address offered no rewriting of history, no softening of responsibility for the profound suffering of the preceding four years, no false moral equivalency. Everyone knew, he noted at the outset, that the slaveholding lay at the root of the war. The South, he reminded, had been willing "to make war rather than let the nation survive." The Union, on the other hand, had "accept[ed] war rather than let it perish."

Here Lincoln asked his listeners, in effect, not to think differently about right and wrong, but to complicate their view of their enemies and, especially, of themselves. In particular, Lincoln highlighted how both sides shared the propensity to err, the willingness to abuse religion for their own ends, and the ability to hurt and wound.

Perhaps this approach grew from Lincoln's understanding of the war and of slavery's history. He well knew that both he and the Union had compromised with slavery. He and his party had committed to stopping the *spread*

"Neither party" expected such a devastating war.

Though "*Both* read the *same* Bible, and pray to the *same* God, and *each* invokes His aid against the other," he argued, "the prayers of *neither* have been answered fully."

But as Lincoln continued, the us-against-them framing dissolved. The President spoke rather of "neither," "both," "the same," and "each"—words that cast the belligerents not as moral opponents, but as fellow sufferers. "*Neither* party" expected such a devastating war. Though "*Both* read the *same* Bible, and pray to the *same* God, and *each* invokes His aid against the other," he argued, "the prayers of *neither* have been answered fully."

of human bondage, not to its immediate eradication. Early in the war, Lincoln and the northern-dominated Congress had offered the South a generous bargain: they could keep their slaves if they returned to the Union. Had the South accepted this offer, 1861 would have unfolded quite differently.

Even more, Lincoln knew that honest history would prevent the North from boasting clean hands on slavery. Southern slave-grown cotton had enriched

The Complex Morality of Abraham Lincoln

the entire nation, fueled the textile mills of New England, and returned handsome profits to northern investors. Northern congressmen had supported the interests of their slaveholding colleagues. Federal resources helped slaveholders hunt down and seize their fugitive bondsman. On a flimsy pretext, the nation had prosecuted a war with Mexico to secure slaveholding Texas.

Even when Lincoln finally issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, slaves in Union states and in parts of the Union-occupied South remained legally in bondage, a concession Lincoln made to keep those places under Union control. That concession bursts any illusion of the President's absolute intolerance of slavery.

In many ways, Lincoln embodied the nation's long history of compromised virtue, and perhaps for this reason he could not present the war as a contest of the righteous North against the evil South. This same knowledge prompted him to identify slavery as an American institution, not a southern one. A similar understanding drove him to wonder if God gave "to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came."

Now, as the war neared its conclusion, Lincoln suggested that more horror might await; perhaps, he thought, "God wills that every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid with another

drawn with the sword." Yet, almost in the same breath, he urged his hearers against retribution and toward reconciliation: "With malice toward none, with charity for all." Going further, he implored his countrymen to perform acts of service, irrespective of tribe: "to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

This president led by example. Mary Todd Lincoln's younger sister Emilie married a Confederate general, Benjamin Helm. After the General died in battle in 1863, the widowed Emilie sought return home to Kentucky. But she could not cross Union lines without taking an oath of allegiance to the United States, an act she saw as "treason to her dead husband and her beloved Southland." When officials telegraphed the White House asking what to do with the president's sister-in-law, Lincoln responded: "Send her to me." Lincoln and Mary comforted her grieving sister, while critics rained recriminations on a president who would harbor the enemy in his bosom.

As our country plunges again into dark and difficult times, many wrestle to respond appropriately to unfolding events and policies that they abhor. The clean, brittle lines of right and wrong beckon seductively. We want to etch those lines more deeply, seeing our opponents as thoroughly evil and ourselves as uncomplicatedly good.

The Complex Morality of Abraham Lincoln



Background Images / Library of Congress & Adobe Stock

But clean moral lines often grow blurrier as we look closer. We can better preserve our humanity if we hold—even lean into—a tension between moral absolutes and lived complexities.

And when our righteous anger boils, let us remember the moral complexity that lurks below the surface. As we condemn the evils that would destroy the nation, let us not frame ourselves simplistically as moral heroes. Let us examine and appreciate how our own failings may have helped create this moment. And, above all, let us recognize our political enemies as fellow sufferers who will need their wounds healed and who may, occasionally, require taking into the bosom of our care.

As Lincoln delivered this second inaugural address, his listeners included a man whose understanding of the war brooked no moral complexity. He saw clean moral lines everywhere he looked—only goodness in his altruistic self and in the God-fearing people he hoped to avenge, only evil in the tyrant who had destroyed democracy and unleashed a dangerous social revolution. Six weeks later, he fulfilled this crisp moral vision by putting a bullet through the President's head. His name was *John Wilkes Booth*.

'With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations'

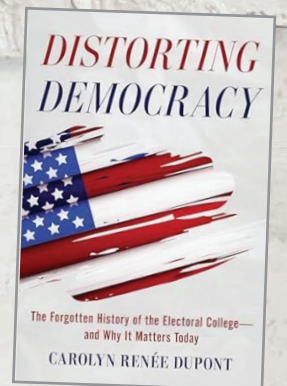
Abraham Lincoln.

DISTORTING DEMOCRACY

The Forgotten History of the Electoral College and Why it Matters Today
by Carolyn Renée Dupont



CLICK or SCAN





Note from Mr. God

by Larry Norman



I was so down
Just hangin' around
Wondering what to do
When suddenly I was surprised
From outa the blue

The birds sang their song
As I walked along
I suddenly felt quite odd
Cuz out of the sky fell
A Note from Mr. God

And it said . . .

You got the blues but you can shake it
You have chance you must take it

While you can.

Don't give up hope, never lose it
You got a choice but you must choose it.

And that's what it said on
The Note from Mr. God

CLICK or SCAN



Ahmed's Heartfelt Cry

text & photography by Ruben Timman



The world must know about this . . .

In the summer of 2017, nearly a million Rohingya fled across the border from Myanmar into Bangladesh. Years of discrimination, violence and exclusion reached a dramatic low point when they were hunted down by the Myanmar army, villages were burned to the ground and many people were killed. Just across the border in Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee camp was created.

As soon as I hear about this tragedy, I cannot remain silent. I say to myself: 'These people must be given a place in the Museum of Humanity'. Thanks to a donation, in 2019 I will travel with my colleague and storyteller, Maarten Nota, to the enormous camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, to collect portraits and stories. Because the world must know about this!

Here I meet Ahmed Hossain. He desperately tells me the shocking details of his flight from Myanmar with his children. Among them is his eldest son Mohamed, who was shot in the cervical vertebra during the flight. He has been paralyzed since that moment and has been lying on a mat in a hut since the summer of 2017.

A story full of sadness and helplessness. All this time, father Ahmed is waiting

for a better life, while his son urgently needs medical care – care that is unaffordable for him. I have no words for this suffering. All I can do is share his story with the world, in the hope that it will help him.

Five years later, I am once again allowed to travel to Cox's Bazar with Maarten. Unfortunately, the situation in the camps has hardly changed - the circumstances are still just as hopeless. Yet I meet people with resilience and sense the dignity of a people proud of their rich history, traditions and culture. This time, too, we are able to portray dozens of people, and thus give the Rohingya a face again.

**Every good deed, every
healing gesture, lights a candle
of hope in a dark world.**

On the second day in the camp, something special happens. Suddenly Ahmed is standing in front of me. He heard that we were back and walked for an hour and a half to meet us again. For me, that is a miracle – in a camp with almost a million people. Ahmed tells me about his situation. Nothing has changed in five years. He hopes to be free one day,



Echoes of Myanmar



Ahmed's Heartfelt Cry

and above all that his paralyzed son can finally be helped. He still dreams of a miracle: that someone will pay for the expensive operation.

I listen to his story speechless. I search for words . . . and promise to share his situation with the world again – in the hope that it will be picked up somewhere and do some good. As I say this, I doubt that it ever will. His situation feels so intensely hopeless. Discouraged, I ask myself: ‘What can I do now?’ We live in a world in which it seems that change only comes about through grand gestures from ‘important’ people.

Then it dawns on me: doing nothing is not an option. We have a responsibility—a mission. I am reminded of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:40: ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ It is clear that everyone has a role to play. We can all do something, no matter how small and insignificant it may sometimes seem.

This brings me to the words of the British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

“Every good act, every healing gesture, lights a candle of hope in a dark world. What would humanity be after the Holocaust were it not for the memory of those courageous few who saved lives, hid children, rescued those they could? There were times when the gift of a crust of bread, even a smile, gave a

prisoner the will to live. A single message of support can tell populations that they are not alone.

One act of hospitality can redeem a lonely life on the brink of despair. A word of praise can give strength to someone losing the will to carry on. We never know, at the time, the ripple of consequences set in motion by the slightest act of kindness. ‘

A little light’ said the mystics, ‘drives away much darkness.’ And when light is joined to light, mine to yours and yours to others, the dance of flames, each so small, yet together so intricately beautiful, begins to show that hope is not an illusion. Evil, injustice, oppression, cruelty do not have the final word.”

I find hope in these words: no matter how deep the crisis, how dire the need and how hopeless the situation may seem, improvement begins with paying attention to each other. This can start a movement and even offer people like Ahmed perspective in a seemingly hopeless situation.

That is why I will not remain silent. I call on the world to help people like Ahmed. By offering the Rohingya a place in the Museum of Humanity, I give them a face and with that, a voice. And with that voice, we can respond with the words that are so important, especially in this day and age: “I see you!”



Echoes of Myanmar



Echoes of Myanmar sheds light on the resilience of the Rohingya people, featuring handmade textiles, wooden boats, drawings, and woven tools created by Rohingya refugees. The exhibition offers a voice to this displaced community, sharing their stories of survival, strength, and cultural heritage.

In February 2025, a Dutch team from Museum of Humanity, photographer Ruben Timman, and storyteller Maarten Nota traveled to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in collaboration with IOM and the Hope Foundation to capture the experiences of those affected by the crisis. The Hope Foundation has been providing essential medical care, including maternal services and emergency healthcare, in the refugee camps.



Echoes of Myanmar

The **Museum of Humanity** shows that every person is a masterpiece. Through portraits, stories, exhibitions, training, and happy activism, we bring people together to truly see one another. This is our response to polarization, prejudice, and exclusion.

Their mission is to portray humanity with dignity. Over the years, the museum has gathered nearly 9,000 portraits and stories, always photographed against a black backdrop to ensure that everyone is portrayed equally.

info@museumofhumanity.nl

CLICK or SCAN





There are so many people doing such good work out there . . . and if we put all our good work together, encouraging one another and being merciful rather than critical, if we each make our little contributions with a great big heart of love and sincerity . . . if we keep sowing seeds of kindness and justice and humility left and right . . . and if we don't grow weary in doing good, we shall reap a harvest, I do believe, deep in my heart . . . we shall overcome.

It won't be easy. It won't happen fast. There will be many difficult days . . . many "dangers, toils, and snares." And the struggle is never over. But something beautiful is trying to be born, even in the midst of so much ugliness.

Brian D. McLaren

The Hardness *of* the World

text & photography by Christy Berghoef



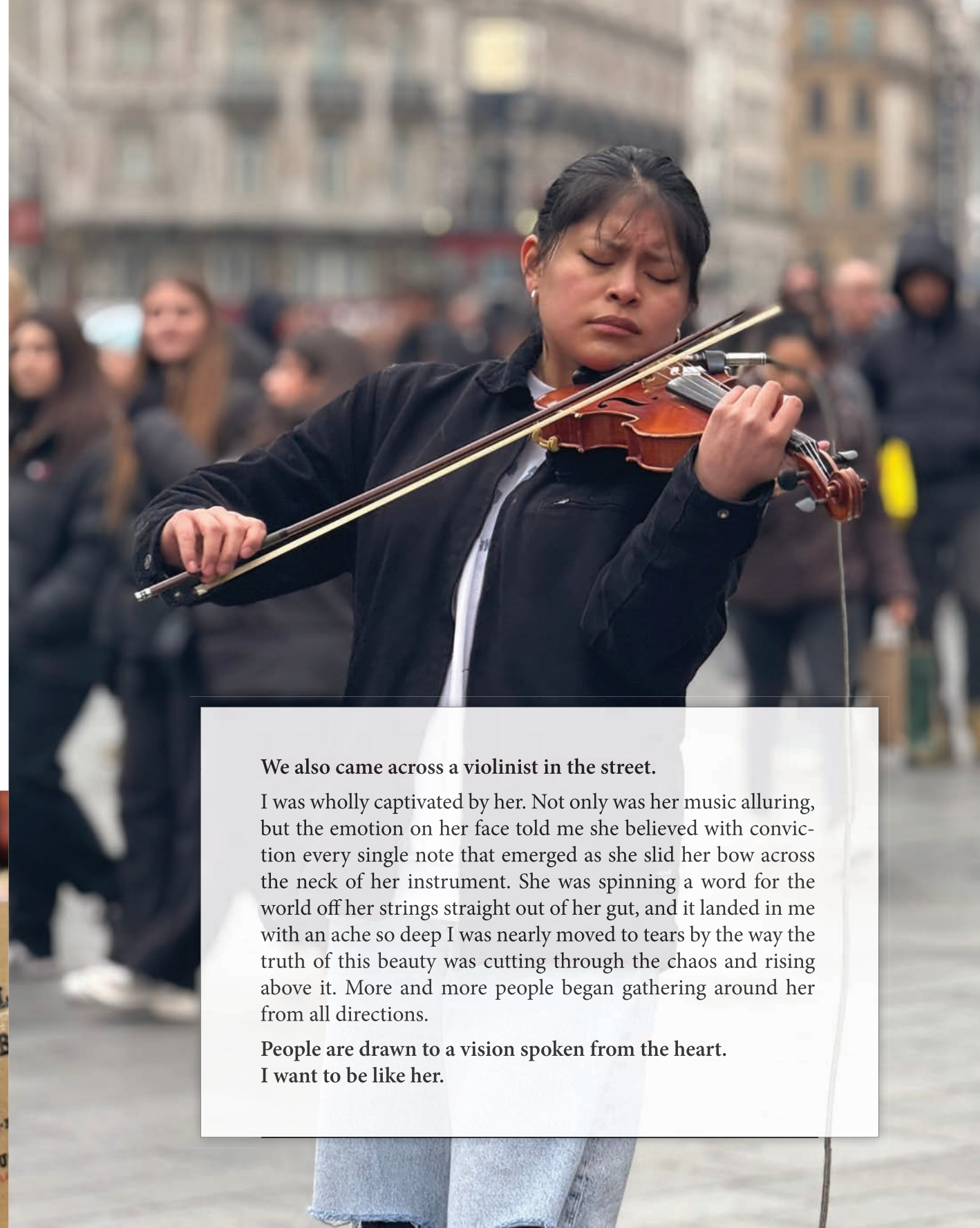
The world is a hard place right now. Don't allow it's hardness to harden you too!

After I read the HCR [Heather Cox Richardson] piece, I sighed deeply and said to Alicia resolutely, "I need chocolate." We exited the restaurant and turned the corner to the sight of the sun streaming between the buildings behind us, landing on Dark Sugar Chocolate boutique across the street. My mouth fell open. This was fate (or providence depending on your theological perspective), and I beelined my way for the charming entrance.

I felt all the temptations of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. Everything was gorgeous. It all smelled amazing. After long and serious consideration, I ended up walking out with the most exquisite dark chocolate covered candied orange slice I had ever seen. I slowly and deliberately nibbled my way through it, moaning as I enjoyed every second of thrill in my mouth.

The chocolate saved me.

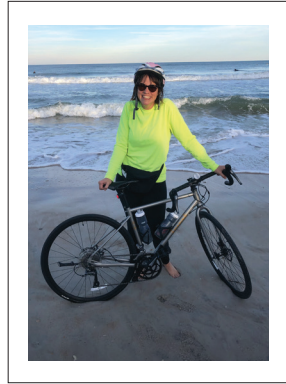
Paired with tea it was just what my body, soul and spirit needed.



We also came across a violinist in the street.

I was wholly captivated by her. Not only was her music alluring, but the emotion on her face told me she believed with conviction every single note that emerged as she slid her bow across the neck of her instrument. She was spinning a word for the world off her strings straight out of her gut, and it landed in me with an ache so deep I was nearly moved to tears by the way the truth of this beauty was cutting through the chaos and rising above it. More and more people began gathering around her from all directions.

**People are drawn to a vision spoken from the heart.
I want to be like her.**



Good for You

by Vanessa Ryerse

I had never seen dark like that before. Never been to this place before and didn't even know what I was looking for, squinting into the distance, trying to prepare for the unexpected. But how do you prepare for what you do not know? How can you guard against danger you have never even thought of before? How do you orient yourself when every minute takes you further into a landscape hidden in pitch black darkness?

Out every large window in the bumbling box we had called home while on the bike trip, I looked for some pinpoint of light. I'd never been in the Florida panhandle before. Tim was driving the RV and he told me to look out for bears. I shook my head in disbelief and laughed at the absurdity. Here I was in the middle of nowhere, away from my family, my orderly existence as wife and mom,

gardener, Etsy seller, mosaic artist. A few weeks earlier, I retired from the church my husband and I planted after over twenty five years of steady church ministry. My children were flying the nest and I had no idea who or what I would become. But I had started this thing in McAllen, Texas and now I was about to settle in again for the meditative, singular focus of pedaling a bike across the southern border of the United States with We The People Ride.

The plan was straightforward. Start on the west coast, and ride bicycles across the country, to see up close the "open" border, the people that live there, the people that die there, and why it is such a politically volatile conversation in American politics. The trip was dreamed up by Doug Pagitt with Vote Common Good, and he was joined for every mile of the

Good for You

trip with Mario, a real live rock star from New York City. Individuals or groups joined them along the way for sections of the journey that started in October and lasted sixty six days.

I rode for two hundred and fifty miles in Texas. Sometimes with larger groups, news coverage, events. But most of the time, it was just me and Doug and Mario. The guys are both ultra athletes, while I have to remind myself to get up out of my desk chair and walk around my house sometimes. They rode sleek road bikes; I rode on the heavy e-Bike. I tried to make my pedaling as honest and real as possible, keeping the "pedal assist" level at a three out of ten, but sometimes, I had to dial it up so I wouldn't slow them down.

We rode on highways, side roads, dirt paths, and bike paths when we could find them parallel to the border. We rode in the heat and the rain and sometimes perfect weather, and we ate a lot of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches along the way.

Now, I was back to ride for another ten days across the state of Florida. Tim had just picked me up from the airport in the RV to meet back up with the team.. After miles of desolate driving in the dark, we reached a small town where Tim navigated the RV through a Chick-fil-a, which he pronounced Chick-Filla, because we were starving. It was normal on the bike ride to get food wherever you

found it. My favorite was when Doug bought an entire red velvet cake from a roadside stand.

After decades of looking after a whole family, it was lawless and invigorating to never really know where I would eat or sleep from day to day. Most of the time we slept in the RV, but when other people or groups joined in, I'd bunk in a KOA cabin, a tent, or the occasional serendipity of a hotel. My former fundamentalist self would have been horrified about my being the only female with men, but my former fundamentalist self was also depressed, narrow and never had any fun.

The world is horribly dark. At the time, I was drawn to the issues of the border because my adopted daughter is a Latina. When the El Paso Walmart shooter killed 23 people and wounded 22 more, eyewitnesses reported that the shooter would pass over white people to save ammunition to kill more brown people.

**I never had to ask
myself why I was out there.
I was there for the
goodness.**

That was the moment I finally understood that my whiteness could not protect my daughter from the racist hate that was being fueled with lies and misinfor-

Good for You

mation about immigrants. I wrestled with God in the darkness of the El Paso desert, sizing up the problems against my total lack of platform, resources, or effective skills.

“Nobody will listen to me!” I assured God.

**“You haven’t said anything yet.”
God winked back at me.**

We completed the ride across Florida. By the time we were joined for the last legs of the journey by other riders, I gave my e-Bike away because I was strong enough to ride a regular bike. A little at a time, I had built resilience for the journey. I had grown strong and confident and joyful on the ride.

And I had met amazing people from all over the country who were working for good: anti-death penalty activists, anti-gun violence activists, Good Samaritans providing water in the desert, incredible women at the border who cared for asylum seekers and refugees. All along, people joined us in the journey: filmmakers, music producers, attorneys, grandparents, artists, Hollywood writers, pastors, poets, and a girl in the park who heard us talking and jumped on a bike for the last mile. How we celebrated when we finally dipped our toes into the Atlantic Ocean!

But now, the bike ride is in the past, and our current political situation is even more bleak. It would be easy to become paralyzed in horror by just one day’s headlines, but they keep coming. Over and over again, I hear people say, “What do we do?” As I think back on the bike ride, it occurs to me that one small shift is needed for the coming days.

Give up. Read it again. Give up.

What I mean is, give up the hope that you will make a difference. Give up an attachment to results. Give up the illusion that you alone can do something that will be huge. Looking back, I realize that I gave up on my argument with God in the desert because I thought God was promising some kind of result in the problems. A win. In some ways, things have only gotten worse.

Except one. *I am better.*

We can’t do good in the world because we are assured it will work. We can’t do good in the world to win against evil. We can’t do good in the world out of duty. We do good because we need goodness. In the face of so much evil, hate, hurt, trauma, war, poverty, violence, genocide, injustice, cruelty, loneliness, ignorance, polarization, misinformation and greed, we are not helpless. We get to choose how we will respond.

In the time that has passed since the ride, I created an art installation about gun violence called Rend and Remem-

Good for You

ber that is scheduled to appear in three museums in the coming years.

I trained to become a hospital and hospice chaplain and earned my associate board certification, and entered grad school in a program that blends theology, psychology and art.

I’m a staff chaplain at a level 2 trauma center and I see hard things every day. All of these things are not about me being particularly special or great. All of them are an expression of my need for goodness. I’ve learned that trauma doesn’t happen when we face a terrible thing.

Trauma happens when we face a terrible thing and cannot take any action.

The size of the action we take doesn’t determine the impact. Dorothy Day wrote, “Young people say, “What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we can only lay one brick at a time, take

one step at a time, we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform these actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.”

Much like one small mile after another on the bike built the strength to ride for five hundred miles, the small actions we take each day build muscle to do the next right thing in front of us. Fixing our attention on showing up to do the work yields a surprising benefit: there is scientific proof that taking small actions fueled by care for each other, leads to a calmer mind, less anxiety, a sense of meaning, and reinforcement in the brain that this feels good. In short, helping each other is good for us. In all of this darkness, there is nothing but opportunity to let your light shine.



We The People Ride

SAN DIEGO to SAINT AUGUSTINE



Pacific Ocean / San Diego, California

In the fall of 2021, a diverse group of faith leaders, activists, and everyday citizens embarked on a unique journey along the southern border of the United States from San Diego, California to Saint Augustine, Florida. **The We the People Bike Ride,** was more than just a cycling event; it was a journey of discovery mission.

Over the course of 67 days and thousands of miles, participants pedaled from city to city, town to town, all along the border spreading a message of justice, compassion, and the urgent need for the moral reckoning and reform of American immigration policies.

Vote Common Good, an organization dedicated to inspiring people of faith to engage in the political process for the sake of the common good, launched this tour as a call to action.

The is a critical moment in American history. The country is still reeling from the January 6th insurrection, grappling with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and witnessing widespread debates over voting rights and democracy itself. The tour emerged as a hopeful counter-narratives . . . one that reminded Americans, once again, of the principles upon which the nation was founded: liberty, justice, and freedom for all.

For each rider this experience left an indelible mark. A reminder that democracy is not a spectator sport, and that faith, when aligned with love and justice, can be a powerful force for change.



Atlantic Ocean / Saint Augustine, Florida



We The People Ride



Alisha Mannes

As I walked through their tent city and saw the terrible living conditions that these women and their children are forced to live in as they wait and wait for some glimmer of hope of a miracle.

We broke bread (well, actually a tortilla) and shared a meal with them. Often I wept as I heard their stories of determination, strength and bravery in the midst of danger and trauma.

We played and interacted with children who still find a way to experience joy in the midst of their terrible situation.

And finally, I walked back across the border into the U.S., silently crying as I became even more, acutely, aware of my own white privilege.

For me, they were more of a blessing to me than I was to them.

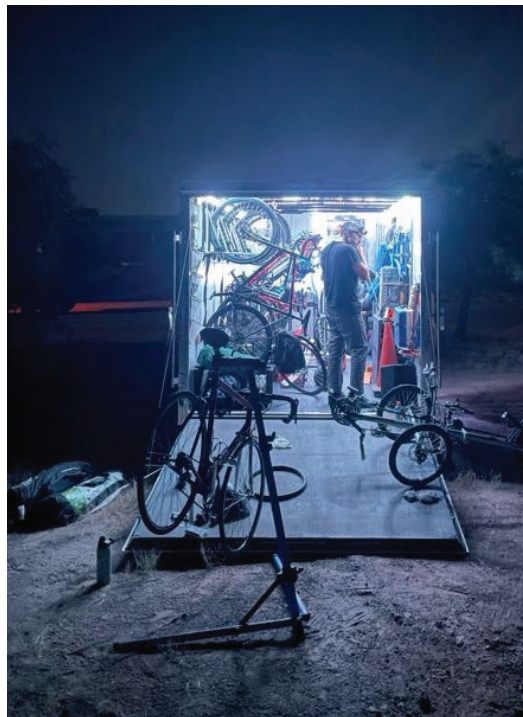


We The People Ride

Photography by Brandon Pfeiffer, Dan Dietrich, Doug Pagitt, Tim Gilman & others.



We The People Ride



We The People Ride





CLICK or SCAN



We The People Ride





The Hidden Power of Goodness

by Martin Burry



My favorite author of fiction is James Lee Burke, the creator of a mystery series based on the exploits of his noir character Dave Robicheaux, Vietnam Veteran, on and off again police officer, ex-small business owner, and an ex-alcoholic with a tendency toward violence. The setting for Burke's series is Louisiana, and his books read quite a lot like a Tarantino movie, meaning they are a study of the mindset of violent men.

In the book *In the Electric Mist with the Confederate Dead*, Robicheaux remembers growing up poor with his brother in the midst of his family unravelling and falling apart; a genial, hardworking father working oil rigs in the Gulf and rarely home, an unhappy mother and willing victim of men's lies and sexual exploitation, and the two young boys absorbing the hammer blows of an imploding family. Robicheaux remembers witnessing his mother and her lover in her bed, an immoral and vile man named Max, when he came home unexpectedly early from school.

After seeing this he started dreaming every night of a white wolf in a wooded, white desolation that would eat her pups. Then one day Dave walked

by an open door of a convent where two young nuns, who were supposed to be waxing the floor, were jitterbugging with each other in their bare feet, their veils flying, their rosary beads swirling on their waists, their cheeks flushed, and their eyes sparkling. He watched as they laughed and danced and knew that if he would remember the dancing nuns before he went to sleep there would be no more white wolf in his dreams.

I write all this as a witness to the simple yet extraordinary power of goodness. In our culture we rarely notice the good, or when we see goodness modeled for us. To be good has a negative connotation—elementary school kids are mortified to be called a goodie, goodie two shoes, everyone knows nice guys finish last, and caring too much about a person or circumstances is to put oneself in danger of being labeled a “do-gooder.”

There are multiple reasons why we often miss and overlook the power of the good. Goodness is subtle, quiet; power often is loud and dramatic, goodness isn't efficient; instant gratification is easily accomplished by the use of evil or power; and goodness is resilient without introduction or flash, it is

The Hidden Power of Goodness

often accompanied by trials or sorrows; therefore goodness is hard to recognize. Perhaps the greatest reason why the power of goodness slips our attention is because the word good is applied in so many contexts as to dilute the meaning of the word. There is “good” as in being well behaved; “good” as in describing quality, i.e., like a good book; “good” as in beneficial, as in eating veggies are good for you; “good” used in the sense of a skill, i.e., a person can be good at their job; and “good” even describes something as nice or pleasant, like the weather. It’s a wonder that we notice when the word “good” is used in the sense of moral goodness, i.e., acting in a way that is right, virtuous, or kind.

Make no mistake, there is power in the moral good. There is a reason why Burke used this scene of the goodness and wholesomeness of dancing nuns in his novel banishing the nightmare of a mother wolf eating her young. Goodness is a brief, bright revelation of God Himself within this often violent world. To experience the good is to encounter the fingerprints of a Creator God on His good creation; these glimpses of the light that the dark cannot overcome is an encouragement from God.

The reason for this is because the source, the font, of all goodness is God. “God is light and there is no darkness in him at all” (1 John 1:5, NLT); Jesus told the young man that, “Only God is truly good” (Mark 10:18, NLT); James in-

forms those he is writing that, “Whatever is good and perfect comes from God above, who created all heaven’s lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows” (James 1:17 NLT). Because God is good, anything that is truly good reflects his nature. We may live our everyday lives and miss this, but the nature of the good is real.

It is sometimes hard to understand this because often the world around us seems consumed by the corrupt, the powerful, and the wicked. The little, the least, the lost, the last, and the loser seem to be perpetually on the gallows.

**Make no mistake,
there is power in the
moral good.**

Many people have traveled the valley of the shadow of death so often that they have an alternate address and a post office box there. Unimaginable tragedies happen every day: the obscenity of war, disease, chronic pain, parents burying their children, mass casualty events in schools or on our streets, despair, and suicide—and this is to name only a few. In this situation it is possible to miss the good trees for the evil forest.

However, the good can remind us even in the valley of the shadow that evil is a parasite feasting on the real and

The Hidden Power of Goodness

cannot exist on its own. CS Lewis made this observation . . .

*“In reality we have no experience of anyone liking badness just because it is bad. The nearest we get to it is in cruelty. But in real life people are cruel for one of two reasons—either because they are sadists, that is because they have a sexual perversion which makes cruelty a cause of sensual pleasure to them, or else for the sake of something they are going to get out of it—money, or power, or safety. But pleasure, money, power, and safety are all, so far as they go, good things. The badness consists in pursuing them by the wrong method, or in the wrong way, or too much. I do not mean, of course, that the people who do this are not desperately wicked. I do mean that wickedness, when you examine it, turns out to be the pursuit of goodness in the wrong way. You can be good for the mere sake of goodness: you cannot be bad for the mere sake of badness. . . . Goodness is, so to speak, itself: badness is only spoiled goodness. . . . Evil is a parasite, not an original thing” (CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 32-33).*

We are challenged by the things and the people we hold dear to do good, to offer ourselves as an opportunity to re-

veal the goodness of God. There are no “random acts of kindness,” as much as there is God’s goodness flowing through His disciples into this world, this world that seems to value gaining goals by any means necessary, that values power, that seems less and less able to counter evil. We are challenged to prove that evil is not self-sustainable, it is dependent on twisting people’s desire for the good in that they will pursue those desires in an evil or counterproductive way.

Finally, we are challenged to offer ourselves to God so that His goodness can heal the wounds the dark has left on this world and on people’s souls—that God can banish the recurring nightmare, not so much of a white wolf, but of a man-eating lion that prowls about seeking whom he may devour and destroy.

Let us do good.



by Liana Stone

*light a candle in the rain
 just see what it feels like
 it is ridiculous, I know, but it is life
 taste it on your tongue, the sheer audacity of being,
 it's fair to wonder—how can it last?
 light a candle to remember
 it's all a vapor
 we are dust, the stuff of stars
 it catches in my chest and won't let go
 they told me it was purpose-driven—life,
 but I don't believe it
 seems to me the stuff of being is hung
 on Agony and Light
 what purpose does it play
 the flickering flame,
 the way it dances on the very
 shadows it creates
 I can't help but love that movement,
 I hold it in my gaze
 and all the more for what I know—
 the unavoidable, soon to be snuffed out
 such winsome bright!
 and who can bear it?*

*what a wretched thing
 to grow a hearty love for
 what you are losing
 but we are all already losing,
 aware or not,
 selah.
 haven't we broken down
 the nuts and bolts of living
 so brilliantly
 armed ourselves against
 our brevity
 with inattention
 if I just ignore it perhaps, I won't remember
 what a holy thing it is
 to just exist
 light a candle and remember
 it cannot last
 oh, I crave it all the more for the
 brilliant, ephemeral flash
 I am both blinded and beguiled
 by the fleeting, incandescent thing
 it is to be
 alive*

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Justin & His Pecan Pie

by Keith Mannes

Since the 2024 election I have been, like most people I know, paralyzed. I have apocalyptic thoughts and many sleepless nights. We did what we could to prevent in this election. Since then, I haven't known what to do, exactly.

I found a partial answer from Justin. I am his hospice chaplain.

Justin has Parkinson's and lives in a care facility. All day, every day, he is in a wheelchair. He must be lifted into his bed each night by a machine. Often when I am there, he struggles to hold his head up; his lower jaw hangs slack, and he drools heavily. If I ask him a question, I have learned to wait ten seconds, at least, for his attempt at speech.

Last week I arrived as Justin was finishing lunch in the cafeteria. I said, "Hey – go ahead and take your time and enjoy your lunch. I'll come back in a few minutes."

Yes, I did come back later. As he left his lunch table with me, he handed me a little paper cup with a lid and with a fork wrapped in plastic and asked me to carry it for him – his snack for later, I was thinking.

Finally, after long, painstaking maneuverings of his wheelchair, Justin reaches his room. We enter. We talked about his life as child. He said that when he was a kid, there were two pecan trees in his family's yard, but his mother never

made even one pecan pie, and so it has become his lifetime's favorite pie. We talked about baseball. About his sister. About the Bible Study each week in the facility. He kept saying, "It's just good to be with people."

It was time to go. As I did, he gestured to the little table next to his T.V. He said, "Don't forget that." He was pointing to the little cardboard container. I protested; he insisted. I opened it. It was a little slice of pecan pie. From the look of it, at lunch he had cut his piece of pecan pie in half, had asked a caregiver for the container and fork, and had saved it out for me.

Hell's steamroller can't stop what Justin sacrificed for me, and what I felt when he gave that little gift.

So Alicia and I have signed up to help protect immigrants in our town. The actions we've signed up for may have implications. Maybe some suffering or sacrifice.

That's alright. It's just my slice to give. Until, maybe, some larger form of resistance comes along.

UnMediated

Simple Faith. Pure Love.

by Keith A. Mannes



CLICK or SCAN



*Before the River
Empires into the Sea*

by Kevin Hadduck

I was born not long ago and came with such haste to where I am, not seeing, not hearing, not touching or tasting all that I should have, not loving all whom I should have.

*Where have they
all gone?*

They have faded behind me into the fog along the river. I think it is not far now to where my river empties into the sea. I will walk slowly from here and pay attention. I will not pass by an open heart.



Better to Give

by Susanne Lohkamp

After marching a full eight hours, Vanya's platoon was exhausted and on edge, wanting nothing more than to collapse on the ground and rest. The featureless countryside spread around them, and the overcast sky was cloudy in that heavy, expectant way that promises snow. But when the squad captain asked for a volunteer to reconnoiter the surrounding area, Vanya's hand shot up. Walking in the evening air would quiet his thoughts after the events of the last few days and prepare his mind for the next day's maneuvers. He wanted to go alone, but the captain sent along his comrade Levy, a soldier whose cold toughness surrounded him like a warning.

Levy agreed with the captain. "Not safe to go alone," Levy said. "You're just a boy."

Vanya pinched out his cigarette, put the stub in his jacket pocket, and stood. The two men set off together, walking away from the camp. As they came to the meadow where the artillery was to be placed the next day, Vanya took point and strode on ahead, checking for possible enemy hideouts behind bushes, bombed-out cottages and barns, and piles of rubble. His searching gaze was intense, but his mind was elsewhere. He slowed his pace,

his head aching as he squinted into the late-afternoon winter sunshine. Behind him, he heard the crunch of Levy's wary, careful steps.

How long had this tour of duty dragged on? Six months? A year? While Vanya stopped to consider, his vigilant soldier's eye picked out a spot of red. As he got closer, he realized it was an old woman with a red kerchief tied around her head, sitting still, so still, and her colors so grey that he didn't notice her at first perched on an overturned blown-out shell of a truck. She seemed to be a part of the truck itself, a fender, or perhaps a door. There she sat, wearing a deteriorating pair of men's rough black boots peeking out from under the muddy layers of her skirts.

Vanya stopped in the road before cautiously walking over to where she was sitting. She wore round silver wire-framed glasses, the same kind his grandmother wore. The thick lenses were smudged, and behind them, her eyes stared, unmoving, like stones perched on a ledge.

When she saw him looking at her, she stood up heavily, stiff but solid, bringing out a thick stick to steady herself.

Vanya drew back—what was that in her arms? Instinctively, he threw out his chest and straightened his shoulders. He shouted, “Put down your weapon!” But no, now he could see it was just an ordinary round loaf of bread, “peasant bread,” they called it. The top was dusted with flour and square grains of coarse salt. The old woman’s blouse, her hands, and the front of her skirt were all dusted white with it.

She nodded and held it out to him, her face blank.

Vanya’s mouth watered, already tasting the crusty saltiness of the outside, the black, earthy goodness of the inside. He remembered eating thick slices of black bread like this with his grandmother’s hot soup, thick with meat, carrots, potatoes, and cabbage. When she could get them, his grandmother had cut fresh beets—stalks, leaves, and all—into the soup. The beets turned the broth a bright magenta that dripped gleaming red spots on the white tablecloth while Vanya and his sister giggled, showing each other their crimson tongues and teeth.

Now, with a sharp hunger rising inside his heart, Vanya’s hands were already reaching out for the loaf when a shout rang out behind him. He’d forgotten all about Levy.

“Wait! Stop! It’s a trick!”

Vanya flinched and was brought back to the present. He took up his rifle, held it solidly against his body, like he’d been

taught, and pointed it directly at the old woman’s face. He wanted to look like a soldier. All business now.

“What are you playing at?” He demanded. “Put your hands up.”

Vanya heard his comrade approach him from behind, felt him lean close, and heard him whisper in his ear. Vanya said nothing; he just shook his head.

“Put the bread on the ground,” Vanya told her. “And put your hands in the air.”

Yet the old woman didn’t move; she only sat back on the wrecked truck bed. He heard her labored breath as she sat down.

For the first time, the woman spoke, in a rusty old dialect rarely heard anymore.

“Put the bread down,” Vanya ordered again, louder.

And now he heard Levy’s rifle cocking behind him. Vanya knew it, too, was pointed at her.

For the first time, the woman spoke, in a rusty old dialect rarely heard anymore. “So much attention for an old lady.”

Vanya shook his head, suddenly smiling. I bet she pours her tea into its saucer to cool it and then slurps it too, Vanya thought. Both his grandparents had done

this. Such bad manners shocked and embarrassed his mother, but after that, Vanya and his sister had held “saucer tea parties” where they didn’t use cups at all.

Looking into the old woman’s bright eyes, Vanya seemed to see those blue saucers painted with yellow flowers, smell the scent of fresh pasture grass, and hear the sounds of birds and insects. Yet here in this place, everything was raw, deconstructed, unadorned. And the sound he heard was wild dogs fighting in the distance, close to the mountains.

Vanya’s mouth ached for the taste of that saucer tea, sweet with honey. His heart yearned to hear the infectious laughter of his sister. But now the demanding buzz of Levy’s whisper behind him brought him back to the present once more. He jabbed Vanya’s shoulder hard. Vanya looked at the old woman as she spoke.

“Here, take bread. My gift,” she said to Vanya.

“What have you put in it, poison? Glass? Or is there a bomb hidden inside your skirt that will explode when I take it?”

Vanya stuck out his open fist as if to grab her hand.

The old woman shook her head. Her fingers were gnarled from arthritis and hard work. Awkwardly, she tore off a chunk from the loaf and put it up to his mouth.

Like a baby bird, Vanya opened his mouth. He wasn’t hungry, but how could he resist freshly made bread kneaded and

baked by these outstretched hands?

“See,” she said. “Good.”

After a few minutes, still chewing, Vanya felt like a boy again, curious about life’s questions.

“But why?” He asked her. “Why give me, your enemy, a gift? Aren’t you hungry yourself? What about your family? Do you have so much that you can give it away to those who destroy your home or murder your people?” He was thinking about his own destroyed home, his own murdered people.

The old woman’s eyes looked beyond Vanya. Time and sound stopped. There was only this woman and her offering. Then she spoke. Vanya bent his head closer, trying to grasp her old-fashioned phrasing, her gravelly voice.

“You are a soldier,” she said. “For many days, I watch soldiers march back and forth in front of my home. One day, you will come, marching, and that will not be enough. You will be drunk or showing off, and you will come with more soldiers, maybe your captain, into my home, and what you want, you will take, and what you don’t take, you will break.” She pulled her shawl closer around her shoulders. “This is war. I know what happens during war. Many times fighting, I have lived through.”

Without realizing he had moved, Vanya sat down beside her on the wrecked truck bed, his rifle resting against his leg. Levy moved closer, kept his ri-

Better to Give

fle pointed at the old woman, but remained standing.

“So,” the old woman said, “I give you this bread. You can take anything you want from me, but you cannot take this bread because I give it to you. I bake early, in morning.”

She picked up the loaf of bread and laid it on Vanya’s lap. “You cannot take. I give.”

Though the air was freezing and snow was on the ground, it seemed to Vanya that a warm breath came from the bread. A breath of forgiveness and peace—a breath of sanity.

As the old woman started to get up, Vanya heard the sharp bark of his comrade’s voice behind him, and out of the corner of his eye, he saw the cold barrel of Levy’s rifle leveled beside his shoulder.

“Sit down. Don’t move,” Levy commanded.

The old woman did neither. She patted Vanya on the arm and began to shuffle away. Vanya put his hand on Levy’s gun and gently pulled it toward the ground. She’s okay,” he said. “Leave her alone.”

Though Levy said nothing, Vanya felt his comrade’s snort of contempt.

Vanya tore off a hunk of the bread’s crust. He remembered, as a little boy, the way his grandmother had patted his head and fed him the best bits from her soup bowl. The way she had shown him how to wipe a piece of bread around the rim of his bowl and eat it, not wasting a drop. Without turning his head, he reached

over his shoulder to pass the loaf to Levy.

Suddenly, a blast that sounded like Armageddon shattered the silence. Vanya shook his head stupidly, confused. His own rifle still lay against his leg, pointed at the ground. His lap was now sprinkled with something white and red. A sharp, acrid odor filled the air.

Something lay ahead of him on the road—a grey scattered something, colorless except for a slash of bright wet red and a dusting of falling white snowflakes.

Around him, the scraggled trees bent to the earth, and the ruined houses lay in piles, defeated.

**She picked up the loaf of bread
and laid it on Vanya’s lap.**

“You cannot take. I give.”

One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three. Vanya breathed in and out until his head cleared and a breeze blew away the smoke. He saw the bundle appear to move and again heard Levy’s rifle fire like the bark of a wild dog. The dense sky draped over them like a thick blanket. The bundle—did it move, or was it the wind?

Behind him, Vanya felt a tap on his shoulder. Levy handed him a chunk of bread.

Better to Give

“Take it. Tastes good,” Levy said.

Vanya’s trembling legs dumped him on the cold, snow-covered ground. The memory of his grandmother and his sister sat black and heavy as stones. The war had taken everything from him and had given nothing back. But in his mouth, the salty taste of the bread was solid and good. The freezing air around him smelled dense and frigid.

Vanya got back on his feet and reached out his hand for more bread. Levy handed him the loaf. Vanya tore off a chunk and gave it back.

**He imagined that is where
her family lived.**

He bowed his head and walked to where the old woman lodged the chunk of bread into her skirt pocket, took off his heavy soldier’s coat, and wrapped it around her. Then he picked her up, made the sign of the cross over her and started carrying her toward a clump of tiny houses in the distance. He imagined that’s where her family lived. He seemed to see a picture of his sister’s body lying twisted and discarded on the dirty ground, his grandmother motionless beside her.

Behind him, Levy called out, “What, are you going to bury every one of the enemy that is killed?”



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Until There Is Love

by Tim Buckley

Until there is love,
believe in love.

Or, until belief settles in you
like a small anvil,
weighing in the pit
of the pit of your gut,
allow the mist of wonder
to wet your eyes,
to settle like dew on your
upturned palms and,
face to the sky,
simply wonder.

But if picking through the rags
of life and limitations
prevents your mind to wonder,
perhaps one of those
tatters will halt your search,
stop you mid stride,

whether because it reminds you
of someone you lost,
or because it brings to mind
that the pit in the pit of your gut
wants something urgently.

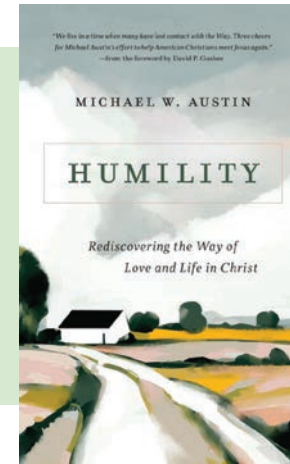
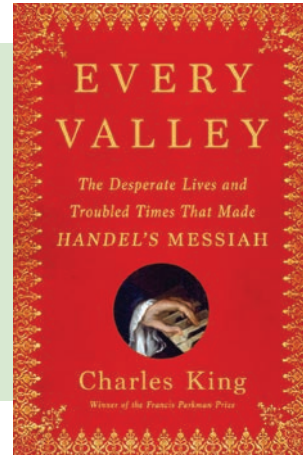
Is it protein or another source,
that moment, when hunger calls?

An egg breaks open and,
wonderstruck,
eyes to the sky,
palms to the sky,
a mist forms,
droplets on each hair,
a wash of comfort,
a sense of belonging.
A belief is born,
In love.

EVERY VALLEY

The Desperate Lives and Troubled Times That Made Handel's Messiah
by Charles King

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HUMILITY

Rediscovering the Way of Love and Life in Christ
by Michael W. Austin

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TODAY!

The Best Day of the Rest of My Life
by Kevin Burns & Kevin Riggs

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Unconscious Bias

A Journey of Learning to See
by Brian D. McLaren & Sam L. Street

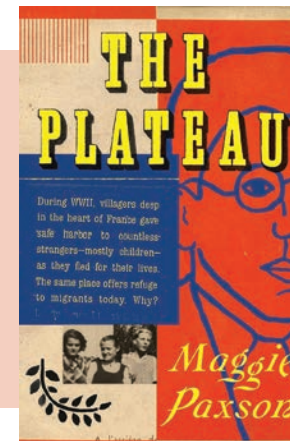
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Crown of Creation

Masterpieces and their stories / Museum of Humanity
by Ruben Timman

CLICK or SCAN



The Plateau

During WWII, villagers deep in the heart of France gave safe harbor to countless strangers.

by Maggie Paxson

CLICK or SCAN



*“With malice toward none
with charity for all with firmness in
the right as God gives us to see the
right let us strive on to finish the
work we are in to bind up the nation’s
wounds, to care for him who shall
have borne the battle and for his
widow and his orphan—to do all
which may achieve and cherish a just
and lasting peace among ourselves
and with all nations.”*


Abraham Lincoln

The stains of Medgar Evers blood are still visible on the driveway at his home in Jackson, Mississippi



goodness.

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co-founder & creative director
Tim B. Gilman

co-founder & editor
Christine M. Gilman

design & production
timmyroland.com

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