

A photograph of a park path. In the foreground, a concrete sidewalk leads to a set of three steps. To the left of the steps is a low, dark, textured wall. Beyond the wall is a grassy area with bare trees. In the background, a paved path leads into a wooded area. Two people are walking away on the path, and two people are standing on the sidewalk in the foreground, one with a small dog.

Remember our dust...

*Poems for Lent and
Easter Week*

Matthew Pullar

*As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
(Psalm 103:13-14)*

*The poems in this sequence were inspired by N.T.
Wright's "Lent for Everyone: Year A", a series of
devotional readings on the Gospel of Matthew.*

Ash Wednesday

Ash marks the face where the image was lost;
dust marks the skin once shaped from it.

Ash marks the doors to these bodies of dirt;
grace marks the scars skinned upon it.

Death marks the flesh once inspired by Life;
Life pays the cost to respire it.

Steps mark the knees bent upon them in prayer;
hope marks the soul there repining.

Thursday After Ash Wednesday

The soil says that we are dust;
In dust and soil we stand.
A voice from in the wilderness
Calls out, *Prepare the way...*

In dust a child lays its head,
In sawdust whittles wood
And takes on ash and dust for us
And washes in the sea.

In ash and dust we wait for You;
Our soiled souls now wait.
You take our ash, You take our dust
And wash us as You bleed.

Friday After Ash Wednesday

Grain sown in soil to make us bread;
Man shall not live by bread alone.
The kingdoms of the earth are dust;
The Son of Heaven left His throne.

Our bones are brittle and will break;
All of your bones will stay in place.
The earth has cliffs to claim our lives.
My heart says of You, *Seek His face!*

The desert eats for forty days;
Yet He will guard You with His wings.

O God, remember: we are dust;
Beneath Your wings, we sing.

Saturday After Ash Wednesday

Elemental, yet
controlling element -
He who shapes dust also
sweeps the seas, surveys their tides,

searches land and sea,
eyes attuned to every wave,
scanning hearts and scouring minds,
seeking men like fish.

And then His hook goes out:
Follow me. Can men defy
the voice which once made light to be
and knows the heart's abyss?

Elemental yet reshaping elements:
changing stone hearts to flesh,
remaking dull bones,
teaching numb feet to follow.

First Sunday of Lent

So bones, built to follow, ache
When trapped inside guilt's cave.

Tongues, carved to praise, grow numb
When, dry and thick with sin, they lie in silence.

And hearts, taught to turn upwards in trust,
Grow ashen when no light has space to shine.

Open, heart. Untangle, tongue. Bones, rejoice.
Redemption light shines into every hoping heart...

Monday of First Week

Now grace topsy-turves the world:
mountain-top-truths speak to violent hearts
declaring the way which turns cheek to foe
and blesses the poor in spirit, the meek,
the hungry, the thirsty, the peaceful, the weak.

Blessed are you: words strangely fitted,
a garment much brighter than all its surrounds.
A whisper of pain, a shout of good fortune,
forth from a mouth which never spoke threats
and lay down the gauntlet of truth before those
who only had swords for tongues.

Tuesday of First Week

Our Father –
we are made of clay –
Our Father –
in heaven – in hearts – in
Heaven to hearts, our
Father who art in heaven –

Hallowed be
Your name –
we pray, Your name we pray,
your kingdom come,
your will be done –
we pray your name, your will.
O come...

Your kingdom come
to bowls of dust,
to men of clay –
give us this day
the bread we need,
the bread You knead –
your kingdom come to us.

O Father, bring
your kingdom down –
to hollow hearts –
hallowed You are –
reshape our clay –
give us each day –
Our Father, here, in heaven.

Wednesday of First Week

Roots grow deep in rich or sickened soil;
Trees bear fruit to turn their insides out.

Many come with leaves which win, beguile:
Look again when fruit's season arrives...

Plant yourself in soil, rich and deep;
Watch the good fruit burst forth from your stems.

Do not let gloss or sheen of leaves deceive:
Only roots which draw from Him will live.

Thursday of First Week

And He commands:
 the wind obeys,
the pigs all plunge
 to the sea;

the waves subside,
 the demons cry;
our hearts are full
 of questions.

Who is this man
 that He commands
the wind, the seas
 and demons?

Follow where
 His boat will lead;
follow into
 His kingdom.

Friday of First Week

The old garment is bursting;
the new patch will not fit.

Well-known threads fray everywhere;
holes take place of whole.

Who is this man? He takes the dross

and debris, sits and eats with them?

*He takes our pious sackcloth and
flings it on the heap where sin should be.*

Reversal confuses: the bridegroom stands
before head-scratching guests,

waiting fulfilled, sickness granted answers,
yet fasting where He should find feasting.

Saturday of First Week

And who is He who shines upon mountains,
walks and talks with the prophets of old,
yet stands without tabernacle?

Who is He whom hills and fields adore,
to whom sun defers when light's of need,
the one true radiance of day?

And who is He who bids mouths be closed,
who commands the demons' silence,
who climbs down this hill of glory?

Who is He who spans the heights of day
yet descends that He might know the night,
and walks alone to death?

Second Sunday of Lent

Do the hills bring comfort?
Soon He will ascend His penultimate hill,
crown on brow, chest weighed down,
wrath upon His soul.

From where will come His aid?
He leaves the tabernacle, the comfort
of union, the certainty of feet
which cannot stumble.

I lift up mine eyes...
The glorious handiwork of hands soon scarred
stretch into horizon, the resting stool
of feet bent upon a cross...

Monday of Second Week

Meanwhile, walk:
there are villages sick

with demons and dust:
cast out the demons, shake

the dust from your feet. Speak
the powerful truth:

The kingdom is here! You
are the hands and feet of this

kingdom. See
how the hands and feet

will be pierced.

Tuesday of Second Week

No greater than our Master, but
like Him, walking in His steps, we

hear the snarls, the accusations,
watch the backs turn as we near,

see the rulers run to the trenches
and hear our names sworn in fear.

Walk: the Cross has its many stations
and the road is long and sore.

Look, look up: the nations turn their heartbeats
to the Son of Man in His glory.

Wednesday of Second Week

A reed blows in the wilderness; it flies
and flaps about vacuously.

The lame walk, the blind see:

Are you the one we are waiting for?

John languishes, Herod steams,

The noon is long and dry.

The Son of Man still will not mourn;

He belongs to another day.

Thursday of Second Week

What is this day?
The lame walk, the blind see, the demons flee –
and silent He does not lift His voice to shout.

While one reed flaps,
the bruised reed stands tall, unbroken;
there's flame still in the smouldering wick -

Yet the one
who stretched out the heavens with His palms
lifts His finger to His lips to hush...

He will not falter:
the mouth of hell snickers and licks
its lips, yet He walks furtively.

The prison doors groan.
What is this day? The sun has not yet risen,
jubilee hangs anxious in the wind...

Friday of Second Week

Where is the strong man?
He writhes about as though he had power
but he himself knows he is bound.

What is this power?
It stands before the divided heart,
compelling with its tenacious purity.

Where is the good fruit?
Trees feign their own flourishing,
yet the truth will cast out the rotten.

Who is this healer?
If by the spirit of God he casts out the foul,
then the kingdom stands, flesh-clad, before you.

Saturday of Second Week

So the kingdom comes in mustard-seed smallness

microscopic yeast invading our flatness

prehistoric treasure hidden in fallow ground

trees unfolding out from roots too deep to see

imperceptible life defying noisy death

the now-and-not-yetness of ever-active grace.

Third Sunday of Lent

Meanwhile
we clutch unflinching rock with closed fists,
willing water with dusty souls,
palms closed
and eyes fixed groundward.

Somehow
our hearts lock over each passing grief and seal
themselves around each rock
as though
our minds could read eternal.

Although
streams do not yet flow out from the ashen earth,
come sing: His hands have formed
dry ground
and the wild stirring of the seas.

Monday of Third Week

Yes, the seas stir;
the Son, walking atop the waves, does not mind,
a sovereign treading the puddles of His soil.

We, quaking in the boat
or sinking with the self-consciousness of faith,
look aghast and fret. *Teacher! The waves consume...*

But see how He strides.

See the waves bend and break at His touch.
See Peter stand again, drenched in doubt, shaking with truth.

Do not be afraid.

He remembers we are dust, drifting atop the earth's waves.
Watch and see: He does a new thing. Rise and believe.

Tuesday of Third Week

Rise from the ash-heap. Rise from Law.
Lift your eyes to see –

Turn your eyes to see
where calluses and pious scabs abound,

where hearts are hardened, hands dried from much washing
which does nothing to purify –

turn. Turn your hearts to purify,
turn to the Son, to the slow rising of the Son.

Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be consumed...
Your hearts are not so clean;

your hearts are hard, so clean
your hands and turn your hearts towards the Son...

Wednesday of Third Week

Son of David:
the children drop their scraps to the ground;
the feast passes by, unnoticed.

Son of David:
faith bursts out from unexpected ground.
Where are those with faith of a child?

Son of David,
I am needy. Hear the cry of dogs
waiting at the children's side.

Son of David:
stretch out Your sovereign arm
to take in the lost sheep, the dogs.

Thursday of Third Week

Son of David, immortal king, why –
Shoot from stump of Jesse, how –
Anointed one, long-promised ruler –

Where is victory? Where your crown?

Losing life to save it, why –
Eyes bent towards the grave, what for –
Die that life may glorious reign –

Our minds cannot contain

Friday of Third Week

Our minds cannot contain
something so small, so
microscopic, yet
Universe sustained within –

a mustard seed
which sees the mountain,
sees despair beneath its foot
and says to it, Now move.

O God. The mountain blocks our view.
The heights have dizzied;
the depths distress.
Open your seed within.

Saturday of Third Week

Yet we close
our hearts to the man
who cuts us off driving
or sits in our seat.

And we close up the access
and passage to remorse
when the sins of our fathers
still fester in minds:

the servant who casts
his debtor into

the prison from which
he too has been freed.

Father, forgive.
Our hearts bear our grievances,
medals of pride
and stones built inside.

Jesus, reteach
our grudge-bearing fists
to open themselves
in Your jubilee.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

And we need want
nothing.

Though the mountains rise to threaten,
though the Temple sways and falls –
we trust.

Our Shepherd leads;
We know His voice.

Though our enemies writhe
and demons laugh exultant –
look:

a table stands where least expected.
We dine, victorious.

Monday of Fourth Week

But whose victory?
And how the victory won?

A camel approaches the needle's eye;
Money glints in place of God...

All these have I done since I was a child –
Still one thing is needed, and here lies pain.

The victory walks ahead to death.
Enemies watch and wait.

Tuesday of Fourth Week

And what is this that we now hear?
The workers who arrived too late –
the lazy, the beggars, the weak, the lame –
have won the Master's favour and
have earned equal pay.

What is this that he proclaims,
this carpenter with hands of dust?
The children step aside while dogs
who surely are not fit for crumbs
have places at the feast.

The first are last, the last are first;
grumbles sound in stony hearts.
But broken hearts which yawn and weep
abound in joy, and even stone
can soon be rolled away.

Wednesday of Fourth Week

The blind, the lame, are let inside;
the cursed now are blessed.
The king in triumph rides upon
a humble donkey's colt.

The temple tables overturned,
the mind thrown into chaos,
prophecies are rendered true
in forms that chill our hearts.

The unexpected king burns bright
with anger at the sham.
He knows the depths of truest Law
and dies to see it kept.

Thursday of Fourth Week

Look, the son comes;
the farmers steam at the sight.
The vineyard is theirs! He has no place.
Stone the son; kill the heir.
The vineyard is red with blood.

Look, the Son comes;
the farmers quake at the sight.
Rejected, now the cornerstone:
the vineyard's His. He takes His place.
The blood-red Son ascends.

Friday of Fourth Week

And there is feasting!
The slaves go out to call the guests:
Come, come, to the wedding feast of the Son!

The guests hold back.
They have fields to examine, work to do,
slaves to maim and kill...

Villages burn, opportunities lost.
The call goes out to all who'd hear:
Bring in the beggars and the lame. Come, come, to the feast!

And there is feasting.
The guests ripple with joy. Yet all
must enter clothed by the Son.

Saturday of Fourth Week

Some will say: *Had we been
alive then, we would not have killed
the prophets or despised their words.*
Yet the Truth stands to rebuke.

In every heart, the secret depths
defy what shines with grace before us,
takes, destroys, the tender things
and carves a throne from bones.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem:
the fire comes; the mother longs
to cover you up with her wings.
Yet in your heart you run.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Until we know the depths
Until we know our depth of sin
Until we know the depths we fall
Until we know the deep

Until we know the fear
Until we know to fear the One
Who rightly could cast us astray
Into the depths we seek

Until we know to wait
Until we know to wait and trust
Until we know to trust, the weight
Will deepen where we sink

Until we know to hope
Until we know our hopelessness
Until we know to hope beyond
Our sinking hopelessness

Until we know to cry
Until we know the cry of pain
Which Love lets out on our behalf
Until then, we are dry.

Monday of Fifth Week

Until the day when all's made new:
desolation; Temples fall.
Before the shining of the Son:
run into the hills.

Until the brightness of the dawn:
darkness seems to rule the day.
Before the great Light of the World:
wait, in patient hope.

Tuesday of Fifth Week

Wait, and serve.
The household needs food
and the garden needs pruning;
the vineyard needs tending,

the truth must be stored.

Serve, and trust.
The master, though absent,
both sees and will honour
your everyday efforts
in deed and in heart.

Trust, and fear.
He won't be long coming
though days seem to pass.
The day is soon dawning,
the Day that reveals.

Wednesday of Fifth Week

And it will reveal
who has taken talents, hid
them in the frugal field,
who has sown what has been given
and let small things grow.

And it will reveal
the hearts of those who plant and reap,
the hearts of servants great
and small, the motives of the heart's
dark countries. The light

will reveal, it will
shine into chasms, abscesses,
show forth the truth of what
we did while left unto our own
devices and desires. Let
the truth shine brightly in.

Thursday of Fifth Week

Look, the shepherd separates:
sheep from goats He divides,
bone and marrow He prises open,
hearts' deep secrets He dissects.

Look, the true ones walk
through streets and feed the poor.
The children give their food to dogs,

the princes clothe the naked...

Look; deep inside, now look.
Secret acts reveal our secret thoughts.
When none around you look, He sees.
The shepherd separates.

Friday of Fifth Week

Look:
see the woman with her oil and hair;
see His feet (they're not yet scarred);
see the gasp upon your face;
see His searching eyes.

Listen:
He spoke to you of the Son of Man;
He spoke of death and burial;
He spoke of Paschal, Exodus;
He spoke; you did not hear.

Learn:
He stands to tell you all the truth;
He stands beside the lavish act;
He stands against what we expect;
He stands soon in our place.

Saturday of Fifth Week

Sit with Him; eat with Him;
dip the bread, by His side –
Surely Lord not I?

Walk with Him through olive trees;
fall asleep and fail to pray;
watch as one of you betrays –
Surely Lord not I?

Warm yourself by cosy fires;
answer truth with spitting lies;
listen as the cock crows; *Thrice*
you will deny me. Adamant:
Surely Lord not I?

Watch as thorns are made His crown;

see the dice cast for His clothes;
see them spit and mock and dance;
see them cast their king aside;
*Surely Lord, surely Lord,
surely Lord, not I?*

See Him breathe with aching breath;
see Him lift Himself and gasp;
see Him turn His gaze to sky;
see Him ask in agony:
*Forgive them, Father, they know not
what they now do. See; watch and weep:
Surely Lord, surely Lord,
surely, Lord, not I?*

See Him cast death, weak, aside;
see Him take on life and rise.
See Him lift the cursed ones too
and take them through His life and death;
see Him give His death to them
and give His life and give His pain
and give His life to live again.
*Surely Lord, surely Lord,
surely, Lord, not I?*

Palm Sunday

This is the day that the LORD has made:
My soul is weary; my heart is faint.

This is the righteous gate of the LORD:
I hear the slander of many.

The LORD has done this;
it is marvellous to our eyes:
My life is consumed in anguish.

O LORD, save us. Grant us success:
My times, O God, are in Your hands.

Blessed is he who comes in the name –
To the *LORD* I lift my soul.

Monday of Holy Week

And now we lift
this bread, this wine
born from dust,
 tilled in soil,

fermented,
 kneaded,

baked: now break

this bread
 and rend

your hearts, your hands.

 You look
one to another,
 say,

“Not I?” Yet surely you, before
the night
 is done
will swear
 you never ate this bread.

This bread for you
 is broken.

This blood for you
 is spilt.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Yet dust we are we cannot stay
awake and pray (the flesh is weak)
and dust we are we walk away
and hide ourselves in dull deceit.

And dust He is yet more than dust
transfigured with the Father’s grief;
our dust He takes up to the Cross
and dies beside a thief.

Wednesday of Holy Week

But listen as they question Him;
listen as they plot and lie.
Listen: by the fireside,
Peter lies and cries.

Watch as, dust, we crumble down;
watch the Son of Man, betrayed,
tell the truth, secure His death
and die for dust He made.

Has anything like this been seen?
The eternal enters time,
ascending thrones, accepting death,
fracturing rhyme.

Maundy Thursday

A new command I give to you
High Priests gather; darkness looms
That you love as I've loved you
Pilate's wife now dreams...

Love your enemies and pray
Judas gives back bloody coins
Blessed are the merciful
The High Priests buy a field

This is how all men will know
Pilate struts; the people shout
That you are all my followers
Judas hangs in shame.

If you have love, one to another
"Shall I give him back to you?"
A new command I give to you
"Crucify!" they scream.

Good Friday

They took him down to Golgotha,
to Golgotha, the place of skulls;
they set him in between two thieves
and hurled disease on him.

They struck his face and speared his side
at Golgotha, at Golgotha;
they called him king and laughed at him
and cursed him on the tree.

The earth, it shook at Golgotha,
at Golgotha, the place of skulls;
the dead arose, the sky was dead
and soldiers stared at him.

They said he was the Son of God,
at Golgotha, at Golgotha;
he bled and died at Golgotha,
accursed, upon a tree.

Holy Saturday

Down, they took his body down;
Joseph, Nicodemus took
him to the tomb reserved for him
and soldiers stood and watched.

There they stood; the soldiers stood,
to see what ruse might there unfold.
suspicious, victory not quite won,
the soldiers stood in wait.

Dark took hold, the sky asleep,
the faithful in their hiding holes,
only women weeping, with
firm vigil in their hearts.

Easter Sunday

Rock-hard hearts: stone rolled away;
see God shake us in His way.

Unseeing eyes: look and know;
cast off doubt at heaven's show.

Fearful feet: stop and see
the empty tomb, the mystery.

Dust-born flesh: He knows and heals.
The heavens ring with Easter peals...

And all our stony, ashen flesh
is changed now in His endlessness.

Easter Monday

The priests conspire. Money changes hands.
Even still, the truth must be buried in dark.

And yet it bursts forth. Indomitable, it rises:
a spring-bloom which cannot be killed...

When the first-fruits sprout, the harvest follows.
The best-laid plans of priests and men

cannot contain what God has raised.
See, it shatters every earthly tomb.

Easter Tuesday

It shatters; it transfigures:
from dust, His kingdom
lifts up dust, exalts our frame,
remembers, changes, in His name,
breathes new life into dry bones,
reanimates the dead.

Eleven dusty men, arise:
the mountain-top reveals your king.
All authority given Him,
He gives to you. Lift feeble feet;
He gives His message now to you.
The kingdom – shout it! – now is here.

Amidst the dust of here and now,
be His hands and feet.

Easter Wednesday

Some wise men follow, some betray;
some see the star, some walk astray.
Some kings will bow, some kings will kill;
some men will starve, some have their fill.
Some hearts will turn to rock; some stones

will call in praise before His throne.
Our folly becomes wise in Him;
bow down, world's wise men; know your king.

Easter Thursday

And He reigns!
He reigns in light and in quiet,
in death and in life,
in depth and in height.

He reigns in plenty,
He reigns in drought.
He reigns in our faith, reigns in our doubt
and nothing is too big for Him
who rose from death a shining King...

Put to death your anguished griefs:
the king who died now lives again
and all time's tattered woes and fears
can no longer bind His faithful sons.

Easter Friday

The seed
sown in good soil
dies, yet gives life
thirty, sixty, one hundred times over.

Some seed
will scatter, be lost,
when cares and trials come
to choke, to scorch like sun's temptation.

Yet seed
which dies gladly
is more than seed, more than earth,
more than the narrowness of our dust's conceptions...

Easter Saturday

O God

who burned as pillar
led as cloud
and carved Law into stone

who breathed into dust
who shaped our dust
who took on dust
who washed our dust:

fulfil in us

what in our dusty, stony hearts
cannot be found:
Your Law, Your truth, Your
life, Your breath –

O God, fulfil

our hearts; our hearts
are stone; our minds
are ash; our souls
cleave to the dust;

O God, forget

not all our dust. Fulfil in us
Your Law; revive
our bony hearts.
O God, revive –
revive in us

what once, O God,
breathed life in us:
Your breath, in dust;
remember us –

remember, Lord,
our dust.