

**NOT POSSIBLE**  
***Sermon for Pentecost 10A-Mt 15:21-28***  
LPC, 8/17/14

If you read my Rector's Study column in this month's *Table Rock Talk*, you know that in my recent seminary studies I took a class called Spirituality, Liturgy and the Arts, in which I was challenged, among other things, to bring poetry into the life of my church. The column described my love-hate relationship with poetry, but also some arguments relating poetry to spirituality and theology.

Poetry is like the sacraments in that it uses outward and visible forms, words, to convey inward and spiritual grace. Scientists observing brain activity have seen that the same part of the brain that flashes alive when people pray is the same part that flashes when people compose or read poetry.

Poetry, like all the arts, has an ecstatic component – the ability to draw a person out of himself or herself. Again, like all the arts, poetry comes from an intensely creative but terribly vulnerable part of people. But think on these things. When human beings are creative, they are like God. When people are vulnerable they are open to God.

This book, *Annunciations: Poems out of Scripture*, is an anthology of poems written by my poetry professor at seminary, Kathleen Henderson Staudt. All but two of the poems in this book are inspired by specific Bible readings. (The last two are inspired by worship experiences.) In her introduction, Kathy cites as one of her guides the meditative practice of “enter[ing] a passage from Scripture, becoming a character, experiencing the setting, and entering into conversations in order to discover new dimensions of the story, and thus to become more aware of where divine life meets and enters our everyday life and work.”

What she describes here is nothing more nor less than the Ignatian model of Bible study. This is a method encouraged by St. Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. The gist of this method is this: employ the imagination to become an actor in the scene described by Scripture. There are spiritual riches to be found here, especially if a person has the time to move around and try out the roles of several people in the story.

The narrative parts of Scripture are best for this exercise, for obvious reasons. And so, since our lectionary today presents us with a narrative, with the encouragement of my seminary experience behind me, I decided to try to interpret today's Gospel lesson in poetry for you.

I considered describing my method in rendering this passage poetically in order to encourage you to approach praying from scripture this way. But I decided this is not necessary. Besides, a magician never explains his tricks and a joke that has to be explained ceases to be funny. And so without further ado, I offer you a poem entitled “Not Possible,” inspired by this Sunday's Gospel reading.

The midwife smiled: a perfect child, the bleeding stopped.  
Oh, she was right: my perfect brightstar little one –  
the seizures can't undo her perfectness.  
That is not possible.  
The midwife's lie was this: the bleeding never stops.

“Demons,” say the Holy Men,  
not worth their manly Hebrew time,  
their wisdom weak against my love.

But this God of whom they speak –  
defender of the orphan, comforter of widows, light to nations,  
slow to anger, swift to heal—this One made Old Sarah laugh.  
By such a One it surely is not possible my love will go unheard.

And now and here, my godforsaken corner of the world,  
He comes, the One, the Son, they say,  
of this One God who won't shrug off  
a mongrel bitch who comes in trust and love.

Meek and humble he's supposed to be,  
and yet like all the rest a posse closes ranks.  
Though on my native turf, I am a foreigner to them.  
This is not possible.

And so beneath their waving, kosher arms  
I'm not too proud to bow and speak to him.  
His voice is gentle but the words demean.  
This is not possible.

More possible that I should shrug my dignity  
than that this Son should withhold mercy  
and so I bow again, will bow until  
the sun shall bleed away and be no more.

It is not possible that love should be refused.  
He calls this faith, but all I know is love.