Glimpsing Glory



Poems by Keith Spence

GLIMPSING GLORY

"The Spirit of God is around you in the air that you breathe -His glory in the light that you see; and in the fruitfulness of the earth and the joy of its creatures."

> (John Ruskin : carved onto his memorial, Friars Crag, Keswick , Cumbria)

This set of poems takes in growing old, nature, politics, space travel and odd reflections on the quirks of modern living as seen from an octogenarian's perspective. A world growing increasingly dangerous, but shot through with faith, hope, and (amazingly) charity.

The poem with this as its title goes with the cover photo of Derwentwater, the beautiful lake at Keswick, taken in the evening light. My place of pilgrimage and renewal.

Keith Spence

GLIMPSING GLORY

Suddenly, there it is was, unexpected, a trick of the light perhaps; a window into eternity opened so quietly you hardly notice.

A silent voice across the water stirring old memories, and deep shadows speak of death vanquished by life.

Just for a moment time stops and we bask in wonder, by a Galilean lake perhaps, meeting a risen presence ?

LOST IN SPACE

We are all travellers in space and time, marking routes with dates and signs, mind maps constructed over the years are covered with clear familiar lines.

But, when minds slip their bounds, we encounter the strange blind guide who is always checking dates and time, seeking a hidden path ahead.

And *now* creates a fog of unknowing, a daily search for a compass reading, lost in space with no signs to reveal just where our course is leading.

Hesitation in speaking grows from uncertainty of absence, and slowly, eyes light dims as our memory fails a link with today, despite all trying.

So does old age wither understanding, the known and trusted shrinking fast, each day taking us down lonely paths, as meaning flickers and does not last.

Like space explorers on a voyage out, to the extremes of time and memory, growing away from our known home, is deep lonely silence, lost to history.

EPITAPH FOR AMY

I lie still in the singing grass, under the melting sun. I am what I would be; part of the living earth beyond the pain of separation.

Living a quiet life unnoticed by others in a childhood hurt by adults, now she is welcome in nature's cool embrace.

A DAY AT A TIME

Grey skies over wet pavements, sparrows chattering in the trees, cars revving at the traffic lights, leaves blowing in the breeze.

Monday to Friday was working, Saturday a trip to the town, now each day just feels the same, it really is getting me down!

Planning our time is important, if we're not required to work, making each day a bit special, telling yourself, you're no shirk.

Breaking the rules of routine, is a necessary part of each day, being creative and thinking, now, how can I turn it my way?

Retirement can be a blessing if we look each day in the face, and ask how best we can use it, once we have left the rat race.

A time for family and friends, relationships mattering more than gaining goals that we set, always rushing out of the door!

SILENCE

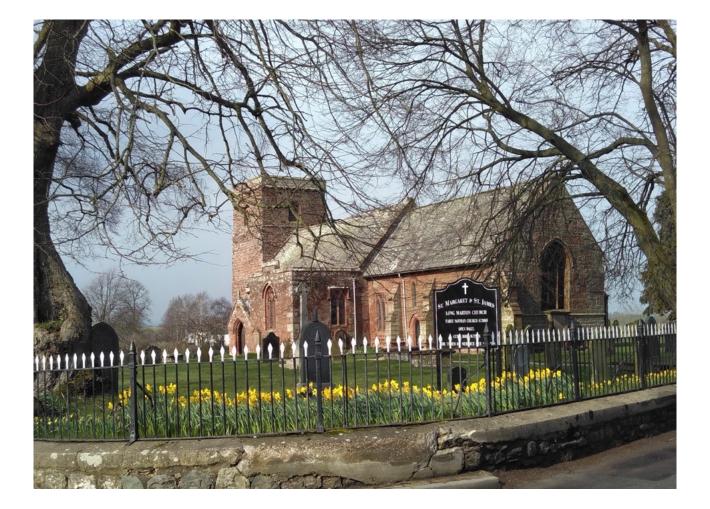
Gates are stiff with rust as you heave them to the side and take an overgrown path between graves, with cut lichened letters now indecipherable in the sun slanting over the ancient roof.

Here over nine hundred years the name of Christ was spoken with reverence and acclaim by villagers born to the soil and uncertainty of indentured work for Squire and Priest alike.

The old oak door stiff and stuck with the weight of years creaks open to the echoing footsteps of the empty nave and choir filled with dusty air not song the congregation now all gone.

The shifting sands of faith are blowing away from this place leaving just a faint echo of the chanted prayers that marked Christian year from darkness into the Easter dawn and on.

Local people no longer gather as faith and prayer depart the silent sentinel building with all the waiting souls in graves around the tower watching a modern exodus of unbelief.



THE WAITING ROOM

Since covid intruded into our lives distance has become a priority, so visiting the doctor the other day, chairs were set out in necessity two metres apart, making a chat rather a scarcity.

Waiting room etiquette enforces silence that can be profound, slouched in our personal space, but for coughing there's no sound we wait for our turn, each of us by politeness bound.

Waiting has become a condition of being a responsible person, in shops, on the train, in a bar we all stand in line as a nation, denouncing those who are pushy for causing a commotion.

Will it be like this at the end, an obedient line at the gate? Waiting our turn for St. Peter to tell us who is too late. Or will someone break ranks, to find a different fate?

MATINEES

Childhood, a delight in weekly films, the trip to the cinema with my dad, the darkness inside beckoning me to Chaplin, or tough Alan Ladd.

The world expanding before me in black and white or deep colour, goodies and baddies clearly drawn, and new heroes ready to discover.

American westerns the favourites, baddies nearly always lost out, handsome, brave sheriffs inspired me to follow, and act it all out.

Running from the cinema home, fast as little legs could carry me, my six-shooter blazing at bandits, in panic as they tried to flee.

What a joy to be a hero instead of an asthmatic and cowardly kid, able to rise to greatness through imagination, all weaknesses hid.

TWO DOVES

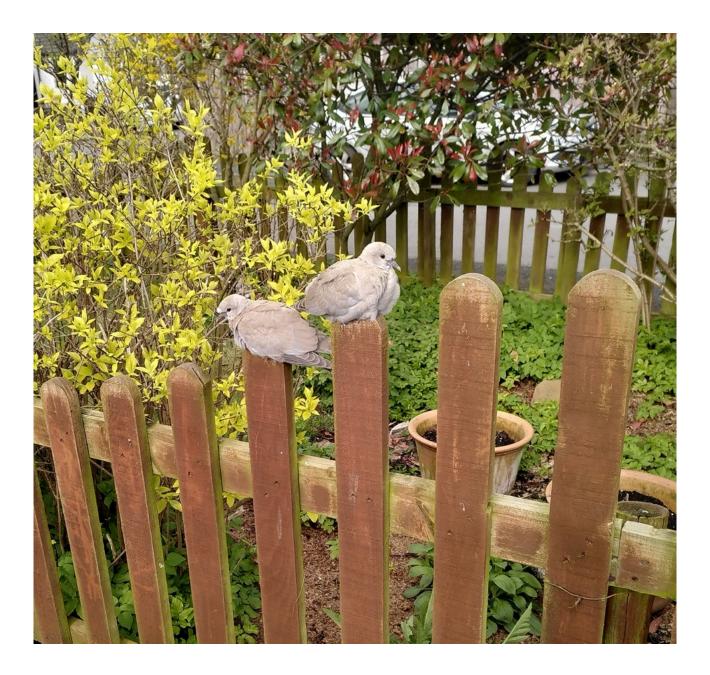
Cupboard love, they come so often in our garden flying down to feed with a whoop to sit on the perch, heads bobbing, looking for seed.

They are our feathered friends, visitors from planet earth; making the most of our food tucking in for all their worth.

Good to be greeted at the door by little avian neighbours, visiting everyone in the Close sharing wide their favours.

Poor it would be without them no more daily visiting us, feeding the doves, and other birds gives our lives a plus.

With garden feeding stations we have tamed wild birds; now we must protect them with actions not just words.



SPRING SONG

In the still crystal air of evening above rooftops touching the sky

a solo blackbird sings with a cascade of notes piercing the night.

Is this drawn from nature's necessity that he must sing alone?

Surely such music is meant for more than survival of genes.

He lifts us with his song from mundane life to share his simple joy.

Life is much more than survival, he says, let's sing every day.

MUSIC

Wonder who sang the first song, who blew notes on a bone flute? Where did the impulse originate to feel living air vibrate?

Ancestors were ruled by iron necessity for food and shelter. Yet, we hear their voices still in caves with running water.

Perhaps music was like food, with every sound of feasting. A high celebration of existence transforming every meeting.

Now, music is the glue of life attached to everyday things. Shopping, TV, films, radio, giving the banal new wings.

If music be the food we crave are we growing tune obese? Unable to function without a rhythm that will please.

Maybe send a jingle offering, in probes for outer space. To let alien creatures know we're a sophisticated race.

IS THERE LIFE?

Another rocket blasts off into the sky sucking air into it's flying force, aimed at the limitless silence of the galaxy.

How desperate we are to find some form of life like ours, who knows, another species altogether but sentient and alive.

How cold the sky seems when we peer beyond the thin sheet that covers our blue green world to see winking lights.

Imagination delivers monsters, little green men to our minds, as we think what lies out there beyond the earth's pull.

Maybe we will never find life on other planets, circling round the endless dance of time that holds us all in thrall.

We alone, the creatures of earth shaped by our star's flaming life, pursue our limited path until the darkness closes.

But, at least we challenged time seeking immortality and fame, reaching out to conquer space, with transient intelligence.

TIME TRAVELLERS

There , the sudden shadow passing across a window, marking the arrival of our miraculous visitors, the martins.

How is it possible, I think for them to navigate continents and oceans and not be late, our martins.

They feel like family now, coming every year to nest under our roof, to be so near, the martins.

We are a tiny dot in space, hardly a rendezvous, and yet they come again greeting us anew, our martins.

They honour us with cries that are wild and free, given despite our spoiling nature's generosity, the martins.

Time travellers from the past reminding us , we are earth's children just like them, our martins.

LONG MARTON ROAD

This country road pursues its way between old hedges, fields and dry stone walls, with mud churned edges from the constant tractors.

Linking farms and villages it weaves its way from Long Marton church, past the hamlet of Brampton to old Appleby town.

Once a year it shrugs off the dull, everyday, traffic going to and fro, to show a bright unexpected gaiety, renewed by spring's magic.

Along the straight to Clickham, the daffodils all break cover, lining the grassy verges with their triumphant trumpets nodding in tune.

Rumour has it they were planted by a devoted lady, who took her time to sow a lasting legacy of colour to start the year.

True or not, they proudly wear their annual coats of yellow, small guards in formation, lining the way for our journeys.



PRIVATE

You see it everywhere, the sign of personal possession, my plot, my field, my estate, my realm, keep out!

Of course, it is nothing new. It is as old as the barons and battling kings sorting out the conquered loot .

The fact is most of the fighting was done by the selfsame peasants whose land was stolen by their superiors.

And so throughout history the poor have been pushed aside by grasping aristocrats and rich adventurers.

Of course they fought back, with rebellions, marches, petitions, strikes, each meeting the same rejection.

Their songs tell the story: "It's the rich what gets the gravy and the poor what gets the blame"; music consolation.

The right to roam, the right to camp, the right to graze your animals, fundamental rights overturned by law.

So now, if we are granted permission to enter a 'private' place, we feel privileged instead of being at war.

Space is a political weapon, surrounded in secrecy and financial exploitation by the rich and greedy.

Land, property, companies, all means of expressing domination of the few over the many needy.

SPEECHLESS

A conversation on a train or in the local shop, will come up with phrases that bring me to a stop.

Our daily interactions are peppered quite a lot with words such as 'like' or frequently, 'you what?'

Another popular expression is a secretive little phrase, 'you know', said with the speaker's knowing gaze.

Our ability to communicate has been critically affected, by social media language where brevity is expected.

So flowing English diction built upon sound grammar, gives way to abbreviation in the modern manner.

Expressions of emotion are little cartoon faces, added to a message for words each now replaces.

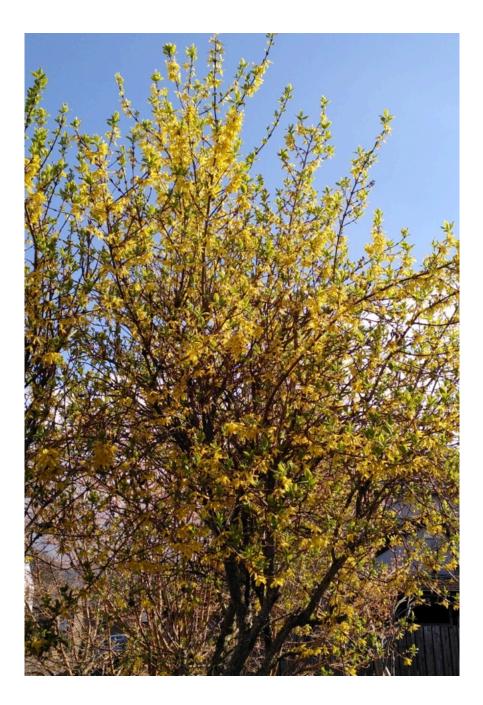
In the future closing in will we have lost speech, and use only symbols for a meaning out of reach?

FORSYTHIA

Yellow is the colour of spring from daffodils to the aconite, and overhead the long arches of forsythia catches the light.

No transformation so complete as this lowly tree accomplishes, all winter long a scrubby bush, now a sunlit crown it flourishes.

I wish I could match its grace, transform myself each spring, suddenly acquire a radiant hue, and cause the birds to sing!



FREE SPEECH

Say what you want, don't hold back, make a noise, go on the attack; it's free country, so we can all shout our latest slogans with no doubt.

But, be warned if you're not royal, denying the King, it's not loyal, police will certainly put you away if "He's not my King", is what you say.

Pity the poor lady in a picture hat, standing too near the demo, that demanded a stop to fossil fuel, she was arrested too, which was cruel.

Why not extend the arresting spree, to the Home Secretary, when she incites us with inflammatory speech to criminalise children on a beach?

Travelling alone, all seeking safety, in desperate boats, they can't see why politicians refuse safe travel, worried majorities may unravel.

It's not free when you can't protest about monarchy, or what's best to stop a stampede to climate crash, mouthing 'freedom' just won't wash.

CROWNING MOMENT (Coronation of Charles III May 6th 2023)

Sun bouncing off a golden coach horses dancing in their plumes, flags waving in children's hands, bands displaying martial tunes, celebrate a change of monarch as Charles becomes the king.

The Abbey resplendently garbed all polished and echoing praise, the guests arriving expectant to hear musicians and choirs raise their fanfare of orchestrated joy as Charles becomes the King.

Archbishops, Bishops, Deans and full-vested clerics pay homage in the church's old sacraments, God-given rituals that manage to keep a new monarch on edge as Charles becomes the King.

Not the pomp and dressing up, nor even the priceless crowns, convey the meaning of the day as a silent man kneeling down, before the One who judges all as Charles becomes the King.

VIA DOLOROSA

'A man called Simon, from Cyrene, was passing by ... they pressed him into service to carry his cross...' (Mark's Gospel Ch. 15, verse 21)

At Easter the churches place a large cross on Penrith Beacon. Around our world the cross is still being carried.

In the city's crowded square, busy crowds pass unaware of the shrouded figure sitting there, homeless on via dolorosa.

In the tumult on the beach, when the migrants reach the wet and weary end of a search, for safety on via dolorosa.

In the panicked atmosphere, of an A & E ward where medics juggle needs and fear, hundreds are on via dolorosa.

In all places of human pain there history repeats again the suffering of people who remain, on the hard via dolorosa.



FINDING GOD

There is no booming voice no blazing light, just a quiet disturbing of my inner sight.

I thought it was a journey through hostile land, a testing of my devotion, nothing in my hand.

Here, on this occasion without any warning, a Presence with me like a new dawning.

I need not search or ask further explanation, life unfolds completed no rationalisation.

Paul spoke of it long ago in his Greek apology, "In Him we live and move" beyond any theology .

ROB'S MARATHON

(The inaugural Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon, May 2023)

An ultimate test of strength, of our legs endurance, a punishing of lung power, certainly not a dance!

So many people want to do this mythical old race twenty six miles and over they're willing to embrace.

Then along comes a man with a different test, running for an ill friend, he's one of the best.

Kevin Sinfield is his name, Rob Burrow is his friend, players in Leeds Rhinos, until Rob's career end.

Trapped by motor neurone, Rob had to call it a day, but Kevin started running raising money on the way.

In ultra-marathons Kevin raised 8 million pounds, at the Leeds marathon took Rob's wheelchair round.

They finished it together, Kevin carried Rob home, two friends battling fate, as crowds cheered them on.

FULL MOON

An old church rises, candle-like, softly lighting the town below, houses tumbling down the slope towards the twinkling lights of the harbour, where bobbing boats catch the light of the full moon in the sky.

Italy by the Mediterranean in full summer, bars all full with holidaymakers making the most of the evening's pleasures, wine, food and music, time on hold while Bacchus holds court.

The moon, so potent as the mover of oceans, carries no sway here, just the old luminous heart of human romance, where desire is wakened in the warm embrace of night.

Bound by gravity's motion all life flourishes and dies in its turn, but rises to new heights with each generation, and love like moonlight clear rises above time.



BEING OLD

The Biblical formula was three score years and ten, apart from mythical types like Methuselah who had a heavenly formula.

In our enlightened age we now can top time's chart, with more centenarians than ever before, due to better health and food.

But, what does it mean to grow old and live longer, other than to read aloud the obituaries of friends who didn't make it?

Does wisdom come easier, with a clearer perspective on our human condition, giving us brighter hope for future advances?

Not necessarily, you see the longer we live there is more to regret, hard to ignore follies, with some downright evils.

The trick is to enjoy each and every day for what it brings of laughter and human love, and celebrate our living.