

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 lichen 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.