

Easter Sunday Evening, March 31, 2013

by Robert K. Wallace

My mother Barbara died on Good Friday a decade ago
near Puget Sound, a long continent away,
as I am today a broad ocean away
from my high school friend Mary,
her children and her grandchildren
at her bedside near Lake Geneva
on what is probably her last Easter.

This week I sang with my choir
at Trinity Church, Covington,
on Maundy Thursday, on Easter Eve,
and in a glorious Easter service today,
the liturgy, the ritual, the two thousand years
of human communion sustaining us all
as souls and as selves, no matter what fears
or hopes we bring to the kneeling rail.
Of all that sustained and uplifted me
in all three services, the children
made maybe the deepest impression,
especially the female teenage acolytes
who carried the cross and the scripture,
lit the candles and transported the wine,
and today on Easter Day swung
the long Resurrection ribbon, shook
the jangly tintabularium, and read
the second lesson—as our altar,
its cross stripped and shrouded on Thursday,
and blessed by our new bishop on Easter Eve,
rang with hosannas of new life today.

On the way to the floodwall
well before sundown this evening
the sky was high and wide
and bright blue, making the
scattered clouds even whiter,
the kind of day we've not seen
since last Spring, it seems.
So much to see before I get to the wall,
especially the bare tree branches showing
the skeletal strength that for me
is one of the beauties of winter,
in today's slanting afternoon light
casting sharp shadows onto each house
in their path, three such trees
on my three blocks of O'Fallon

imposing their distinctive shapes
on each glowing red-brick façade.

Green, I'd forgotten how green,
was the new spring grass
blanketing the wall that falls away
from the walking path in all directions,
an ever-present pleasure for the eye
while trying to feel the changes
that weeks of absence have always
brought to this rounded mound
whose perfect placement gives
us equal access to the riverside
or cityside actions or alterations,
the first attraction for me being
again those skeletal trees now nested
among Dayton's compact dwellings
whose sides are flooded with Sunday light
when not laced with shadows from trees
between them and the lowering sun.

Over on the river side
I wondered what would be new
after seeing truck after truck
running down toward the river
these last few weeks.
The first thing the slanting sun
revealed below the spring green floodwall
as I turned to look upstream
was a huge mountain of dirt near
the tractors that helped to make it,
powerful machines getting a special
Sunday Sabbath on Easter Day,
not a single sign of movement
down in the construction zone
the whole length of my walk,
the lack of action on the ground,
however, made up for by the
surprise of an Easter day barge,
three wide by five long riding high,
going upriver with a westerly breeze,
one of the quickest transits
against the current I'd ever seen.
Up with me on the wall dogs
and joggers made the most
of the bright light, the warm air,
and an atmosphere cleansed
by recent rains of the pollution
that sometimes hangs so heavy

that you fear young lungs
will feel it or wonder if your eyes,
or Nature itself, is losing focus.

Our Easter sermon today emphasized
how one of the gospels ended
the scene at Christ's vacated
tomb with the women only
shocked and stunned, not at all
certain of what had transpired, later
amendments to the original
text replacing faithful doubt
with the assurance of dogma,
robbing the true seeker
of the blessing of surprise
or the mystery of true witness.
True faith, our fine new minister
opined, is never certain,
but opens eyes and ears
and hearts to the flood of actual
experience, whatever the source
or however unexpected.
It's not so different, really,
from walking the wall,
whatever the weather,
encountering who or what may transpire,
living the moment with whatever
revelation the moment affords,
even when today, for example,
I heard those Canada honkers
that like to fly out from the Ohio shore
as the setting sun is heading for the west,
often rising right over me in a weaving V
before I can get my camera up on them,
but today they never rise from the shadow
into the high, bright air, instead their
sound alone showing me they are here,
in the shadowed valley, with me.

Of those things *I did* see
on the riverside today, my eyes
kept returning to the deep ruts
and troughs made by the trucks
and tractors that had been making
that mountain of dirt, witness to
all the work they had been doing
even though all was at rest today.
The sermon on Easter Eve
had begun with the passage in Genesis

in which the plants and animals
 who will survive the flood
 in Noah's ark are equipped
 not only with life itself but
 with the seeds that will generate
 more life long after their bodies
 are withered and gone.
 If something wonderful ever does rise
 outside this floodwall one day,
 it will be because the men
 who drove the tractors
 left their marks in the right place
 at the right time even though
 we will never know it after they,
 and all the tracks they made, are long gone.

And, oh yes, the music our choir sang.
 On Maundy Thursday my buddy Jim and I
 got to sing once more the bass-baritone
 line of Durufle's *Ubi Caritas*, based
 on a tenth-century French hymn.
 For the new bishop on Easter Eve
 we sang Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus*,
 in which deer seeks the flowing water
 as the soul seeks its god,
 its polyphonic melody
 flowing out of an old Gregorian chant.
 My favorite of all our Easter hymns today
 was Now the *Green Blade Riseth*,
from the Buried Grain, in which
 the rhythm of the returning Spring
 and the risen Christ are in perfect harmony.



photo by Robert K. Wallace