



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

“How to Love a City”

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“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7, NRSV)

You have to love the grit
and grace of it, the greatness and the pace of it. A city
sprawls and teems and hides so many lives,
while new builds rise in vacant space,
high heels tap past empty faces.
Undressed windows cause averted eyes.
We can't see our reflections through the grime.

Exiles all, we long for home,
lost and tossed ashore and flung afield or run aground,
our refugee encampment overrun with weary strangers, all
awaiting entrance to the new Jerusalem.
A city sprawls unchecked, unseen, unloved. Our growth
comprises progress and demise. Undiscovered alleys
lie where little light creeps in, concealing human waste and desperate lives.
Questions we don't want to ask wait on corners guarding trash. We hurry past so
many miss the shining diamonds layered deep in city muck,
the strongest tools on earth, disguised by dirt.

We decided density was wealth, might make us strong
and safe to have our way, but through our walls,
the sirens wail and voices call from outside in.
We're closer than we thought, our boundaries thin;
the city mumbles, shouts, and moans—a susurrations
of discordant tones. Here in this concentrated overlap of lives
we writhe in murmurations, one chaotic twisted knot of souls.

We must have faith
in action,
for ancient words and deeds all fail
to fan the flame of hope
that lights the way to love and transmutation.
Communion must require more, so
true faith moves, ebbs out of quiet estuaries,
slips from soaring sanctuaries to flow
through the gates of the city.
Strain to hear the distant drumbeat
calling you in muffled thumps to move
your feet your hands your hearts your eyes.

All rise and do, instead of thinking thoughts and praying prayers alone.
Our welfare is conjoined so we can join
to turn the inundating tide that floods our home.
Raise sandbags in undaunted rhythm side by side,
backs bent in breaking labor. Quick now; don't waste time,
for water always finds another way.

So go into the hard places, to the dark spaces, stay
and speak your name and ask to hear the stories told.
In all the godforsaken places only God has not forsaken,
find where the beloved children hide,
and ask their help to shed your skin, leave all you carry.
Expose the shortcuts, bravely sharing passwords only you have ever
known, your talismans and treasured rings, cloaks and swords, all precious
things you thought you purchased fairly—just unholy bargains made at birth.
Love requires that we travel light.

Cast off yourself, your self-complacency, your certainty of place, a
painful deconstruction to debride our outer layer,
but to love a city we must wear a different, thicker skin and trust our
unknown kin will know us all the better still.
We share one face, one worth that flows from our creation,
And this is how we recognize when we find home.

Beneath the city lie our scattered bones,
ashes, potsherds, old foundations, covered over by the dust of time. Excavate the sites,
rework the plans, and seek the city welfare now. For one day we will all come home,
our tribes made whole, our homes made strong. And we will sing and dance once more,
in intricate expressions of our joy.
One vibrant, undiminished city built by love.

We are a city at the crossroads,
a people at the crosswalk, fooled by the false talk that swirls
on separate sides. We stand on our corners, watch traffic
dividing this place we're residing and hide from each other right here in plain
sight. Step over the broken glass, passing old promises, here where streets intersect, we
can diverge.
Move in directions where earth lies unpaved.
We can wait for the light here
Or walk.