

Nocturne for Late Autumn
(Meditation on Isaiah 40.6-8)

THE WIND BLOWS... It blows steady and hard. I don't need a compass to tell me that it comes mostly from the north, for it blows cold. I watch as it demands the ancient cottonwood's branches to bow in obeisance to its sovereign power. On a dime, the wind's direction pivots. And its force is directed towards me. It pushes against me. The wind burrows through my jacket, my sweatshirt, my gloves -- the clothing that is supposed to insulate me from its force. I feel as it pushes and pushes hard against my body, against my soul.

The leaves, the dry leaves scatter. The wind drives them across the barren ground along with the falling snow. Just weeks ago, those leaves still hung from the branches of the trees and bushes — showing off their panoply of colors. Gold. Crimson. Russet. Saffron. exquisite as it was. And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The night rushes in. It comes with an irresistible, overwhelming force. From where I stand, the night seems to gallop towards me. It charges over the horizon like a restless horse. I find the quickly falling darkness at once compelling but also humbling (for I am powerless to slow or stop its sovereign force). I look at my watch. 5:17. It is going to be a long way through the night. A long time until morning comes.

THE SHADOWS COME... The shadows come, hurrying along with the night. They rush over and across the hardscrabble landscape of my soul. I feel the shades close over and around me. They push, like the night, with a sovereign, overpowering force. And amid the gathering shadows, I feel the gravitational force of my own mortality. The time that is mine, that has been entrusted to my mortal existence slips away like the fading fingers of daylight. And the shadows swiftly take their place. They come. The shadows come, irresistibly.

My thoughts scatter. Most of them are as fleeting and valueless as the dry leaves cast before the wind. It is funny, isn't it, what time does to the grandest plans and schemes? The things I thought and imagined and believed to be important: they for

a time dazzled me like the brightly colored leaves of Autumn. It was so easy to be led astray by such a beauty at once same time so gathering shadows my once important are casually flung

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

fragile, fleeting beauty -- so glorious and at the transient. Here, in the of this late October's day, and compelling thoughts into the night by the wind.

The Spirit roars. Like its meteorological counterpart, the Spirit pushes first in one direction and then another. Like a chinook, it roars downslope from some mountainous height. I feel the Spirit as I feel the wind sweep, sovereign and free, across the hills and valleys, the prairies and plains of my so-called life. I watch as it swirls together the scattered detritus of my life and flings it first in one direction and then in a hundred thousand others. There is no shelter, no protection, no immunity from the Spirit's sovereign power.

I WOULD DESPAIR... At once, I would despair. For I realize (as I regularly must realize) that my existence -- like the existence of every mortal thing -- is understood most fully, most completely, most absolutely in contrast to that of the divine. For I realize that my destiny is to follow the trajectory of the grass, the flower, and the once-glorious leaves of Autumn. In the windy darkness I feel the weight of my mortal vulnerability. I would despair.

Except I also remember the promise of the also fully God. In the gathering shadows, that memorial offers light. And in the cold of this late Autumn's evening, it brings warmth as well. I savor the grace borne of this promise. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away¹.* The wind (or is it the Spirit?) blows, steady and strong. In the autumn dusk, so many things get cast away. But I gather the Lord's promise of his ever-standing Word. And I hold it close to my heart.

Tim Lanham, Pastor

¹ These words can be found in Matthew 24.35, Mark 13.31, and Luke 21.33.