

Day is Done

A LENTEN JOURNEY

Rev. Jennie Gordon



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Day is done

AN INVITATION

Come with me on a Lenten journey through 40 days of poetry and wondering, with weekly expeditions into the sacred text. It's not a study, it's a journey. Where will the Spirit lead you? Where will you find yourself?

Firstly, a bit of background. There I was, in 2015, going through a tough time, living alone with a crazy dog in a farmhouse, in a vineyard. Jan Richardson (www.janrichardson.com) offered an online 'beloved' Lenten retreat, and I subscribed, grateful for a companion on the path. Each evening, when the day was done, I wrote a poem based on the theme word for the week and found an image that resonated and posted them on my blog. Here are the poems, the images and the seven theme words.

A decade later these poems hold their shape and have lost some of their sting, so come with me, I want to share them with you. Set aside a time each day, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Saturday. Sit with the poem and the image for the day. Journal, draw, play, sing, move or just sit with them. You might want to get a weekly group together or join one online. On Ash Wednesday, and each Sunday, each 'little Easter', I've used the gospel reading from the Revised Common Lectionary for Year C as they connect with the theme word for the week to lead you into conversation.

If you want to get in touch, or join an online group, please email me: revjenniegordon@gmail.com. This publication is downloadable from <https://victas.uca.org.au/weekly-worship/>

Blessings on your path,



Rev. Jennie Gordon

St John's Uniting Church,
Cowes, Millowl, Phillip Island.

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Begin

It's Ash Wednesday and we are about to embark on a Lenten journey together.

Let's begin where we are. Where are you?

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

You probably will not go and shout your prayers on the street corners, or accompany them with trumpet blasts, so who will you share this Lenten journey with? How will you share it? If you've got a group together, what do you expect from each other when you meet, in person or online?

There's an intimacy in the connection between us and 'the Father', (you might use different names for the Holy.) As we begin, how does this secret, behind-closed-doors connection become tangible for you where you are, and where you might be going?

Can you recall a time when you were preparing to begin a significant journey, a pilgrimage, an adventure, a course of study or even a relationship? What did you do to prepare? As we lay out what we think we need, there are things we must leave behind. Take some time to lay out what you need for this Lenten journey, and what you need to leave behind.

Maybe you need to let go of the heavy burden of guilt or regret.

Maybe you would like to let go of the way you always put yourself down or criticise others.

Maybe you would like to let go of overthinking everything and missing the moments of joy that come your way.

One way of doing this might be to write those things you do not want to bring with you on a piece of paper and then safely burn the paper, turn it into ash. When it's cool you can mix it with oil to mark this beginning. It's Ash Wednesday, make an ash cross on your forehead.

Come on, come with me.

Let's begin with the poem and image for today.

BEGIN WEEK ONE, DAY ONE

Ash Cross

burnt regrets
consumed and what survives
smears like abandoned fear
left in the corners
of someone else's house

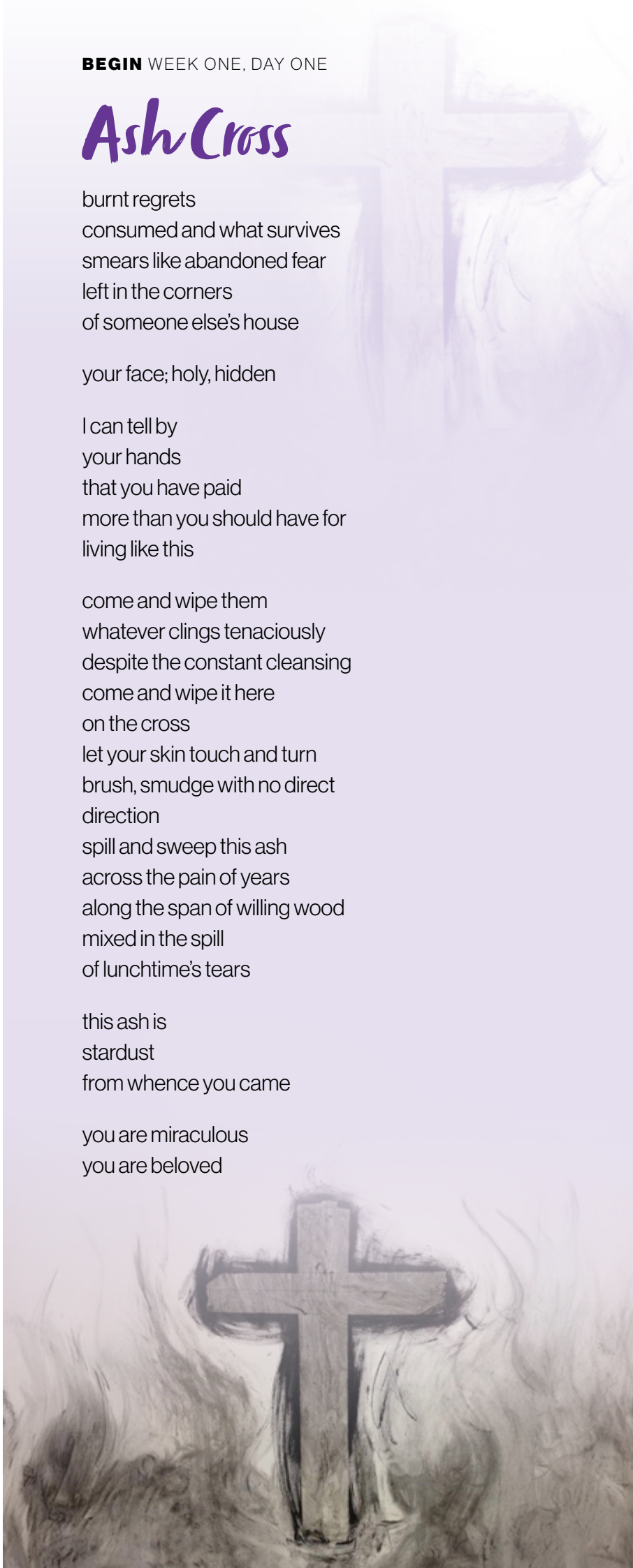
your face; holy, hidden

I can tell by
your hands
that you have paid
more than you should have for
living like this

come and wipe them
whatever clings tenaciously
despite the constant cleansing
come and wipe it here
on the cross
let your skin touch and turn
brush, smudge with no direct
direction
spill and sweep this ash
across the pain of years
along the span of willing wood
mixed in the spill
of lunchtime's tears

this ash is
stardust
from whence you came

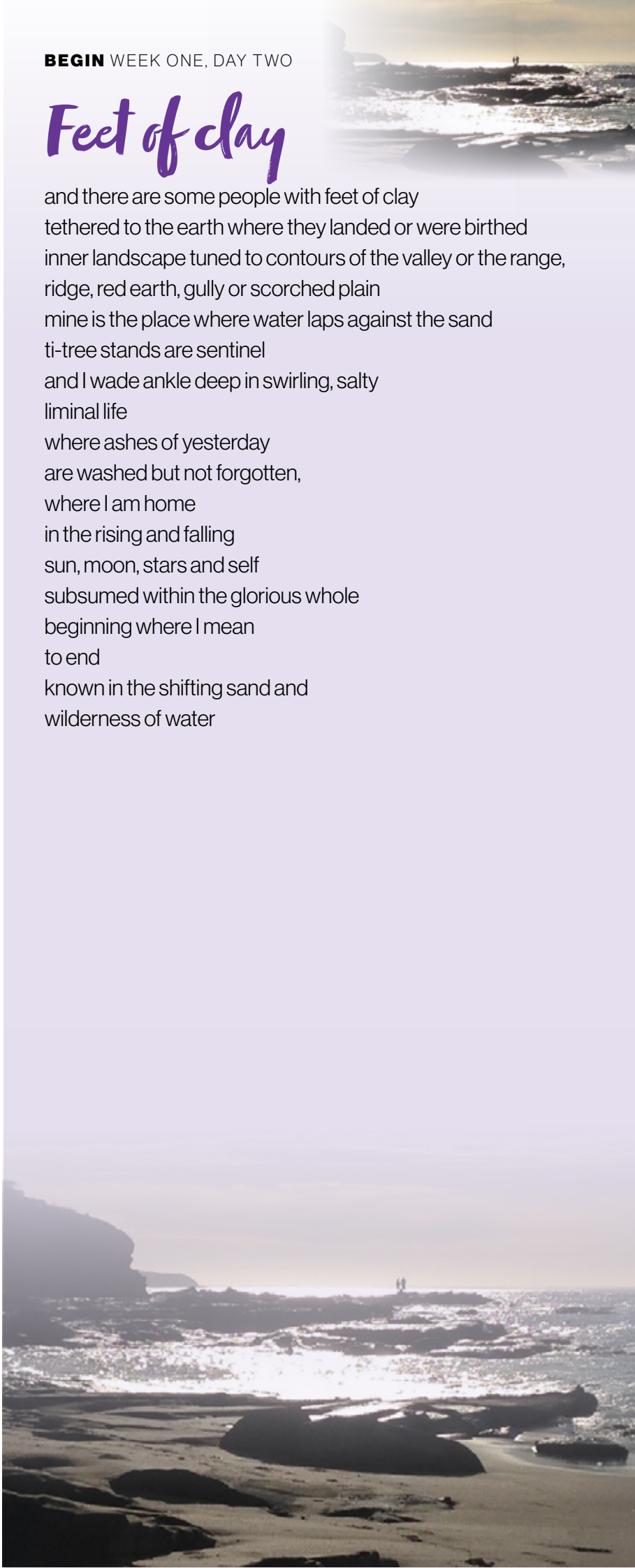
you are miraculous
you are beloved

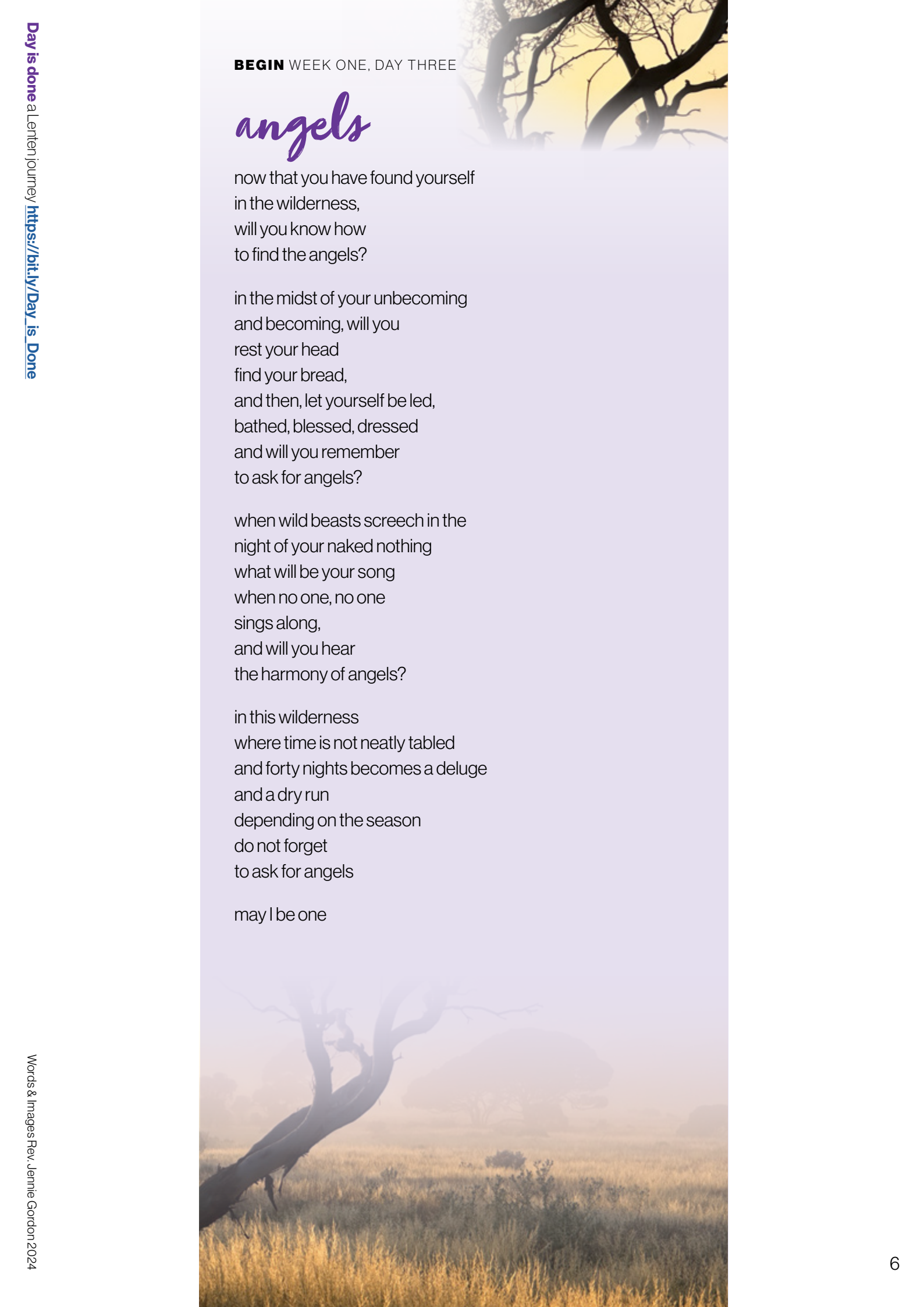


BEGIN WEEK ONE, DAY TWO

Feet of clay

and there are some people with feet of clay
tethered to the earth where they landed or were birthed
inner landscape tuned to contours of the valley or the range,
ridge, red earth, gully or scorched plain
mine is the place where water laps against the sand
ti-tree stands are sentinel
and I wade ankle deep in swirling, salty
liminal life
where ashes of yesterday
are washed but not forgotten,
where I am home
in the rising and falling
sun, moon, stars and self
subsumed within the glorious whole
beginning where I mean
to end
known in the shifting sand and
wilderness of water





BEGIN WEEK ONE, DAY THREE

angels

now that you have found yourself
in the wilderness,
will you know how
to find the angels?

in the midst of your unbecoming
and becoming, will you
rest your head
find your bread,
and then, let yourself be led,
bathed, blessed, dressed
and will you remember
to ask for angels?

when wild beasts screech in the
night of your naked nothing
what will be your song
when no one, no one
sings along,
and will you hear
the harmony of angels?

in this wilderness
where time is not neatly tabled
and forty nights becomes a deluge
and a dry run
depending on the season
do not forget
to ask for angels

may I be one

BEGIN WEEK ONE, DAY FOUR

seeing home

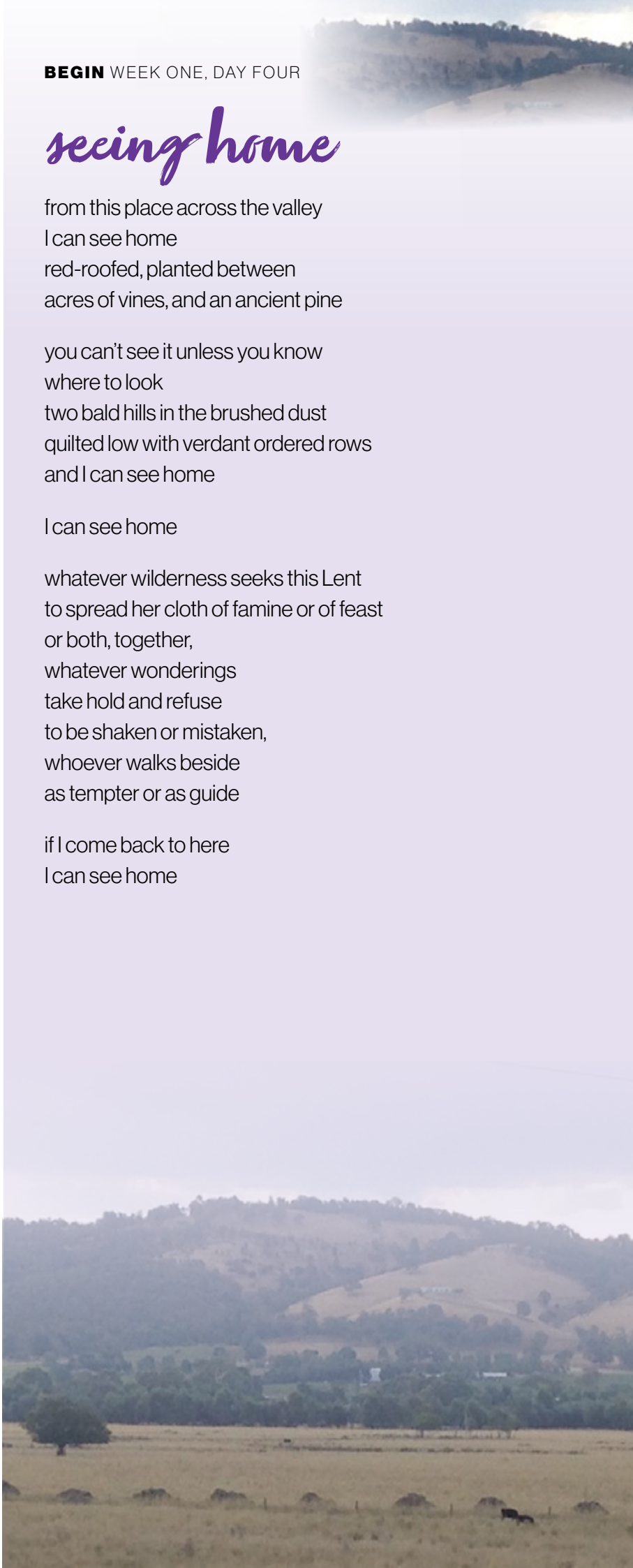
from this place across the valley
I can see home
red-roofed, planted between
acres of vines, and an ancient pine

you can't see it unless you know
where to look
two bald hills in the brushed dust
quilted low with verdant ordered rows
and I can see home

I can see home

whatever wilderness seeks this Lent
to spread her cloth of famine or of feast
or both, together,
whatever wonderings
take hold and refuse
to be shaken or mistaken,
whoever walks beside
as tempter or as guide

if I come back to here
I can see home



Memory

It's the first Sunday in Lent.

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Luke 4: 1-13

Following his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days. When Jesus was at his most vulnerable and tempted by the devil, he used words of scripture from his memory to give him strength and counter the temptation.

Here you are on your own Lenten wilderness journey. At a time when you were most vulnerable, what words of scripture give you strength? What memory do you find within your faith story to sustain you? Is there a bible verse, a hymn or a poem that you have committed to memory to bring out when it's needed?

It's important to note that in this reading the devil also appears to use scripture from memory. Do you recall a time when scripture has been used as a weapon against you, to diminish or dismiss you, or as a way of tempting you to follow a path that feels unsafe?

We carry our memories with us, in our stories and in our bodies. There are recollections of tangible delights, there for us to revisit. They are visible and invisible scars. Our families and friends also carry our memories with us and for us. What happens when those people are no longer there, or our memory begins to fail? Are we dis-membered?

Jesus took the bread and the cup and said, 'do this to re-member me.'

How do we re-member?

Maybe you could write a memory prayer or find one to keep within you.

As we journey on, led by the Spirit, we acknowledge the power of memory.

memory

who will walk with me
down the long road
of remembering
now that all the story keepers
are gone

who will open the door
to yesterday's garden
and sort the portents
from the pretense
now all the flowers have withered
to dust
and the frogs no longer
sing the way to water

who will know
what simple word makes laughter
out of darkness
and melodic rhymes
from this dissonance
and distance

you who formed and fed me
in secret
you who walked this way
before
and now
and evermore

you will open doors
spread moonlight like a feast
on the cloth of each night's deep
and on the wings of morning
you will bring the tea and toast
and tales of all tomorrows
knit from our fine remembering

and I will be
with you
and you will be
my memory

MEMORY WEEKTWO, DAY SIX

patches

I have noticed you lately
sitting silently
in the corner of my quiet
house
needle in hand
sewing patches of the past
together

with care and keen attention
you take one thin fragment
fabric of love
remnant of loss
and longing
held in numerous boxes
too hard to open
too heavy to discard

then holding it to your face
like the cheek of a baby
you let the tale tell itself
out
as you listen to the weave
the wave and the sweep
of this storyline
of mine

and when it's done
you neaten the edges
and add it
to the quilt
around your knees

maybe I should
move your chair
out

where
you can get some air



MEMORY WEEKTWO, DAY SEVEN

that word

let that word
that slips from lips
unpressed by coffee,
light or lover
in the first burst of morning,
let it be
love

let that word
that half forgets morning prayers
running up and down the stairs
don't be late
do your hair
where are my keys, please
let it be
love

let that word
that jumps ahead
in the line, every time
let it be
love

let that word
that's just too hard
to sing or to be heard
until you find
the perfect day-long song
let it be
love

let that word
that sits on sips of evening's rim
as night moves in
and candles flick a flame, a name
let it be
love

let that word
be told of her
when she no longer
wakes, takes or speaks
let it be love



MEMORY WEEKTWO, DAY EIGHT

hope

in the days to come
if you remember rightly
there was a way of being
true
that meant that you leant
gently on the shoulder
of grace
in all her guises

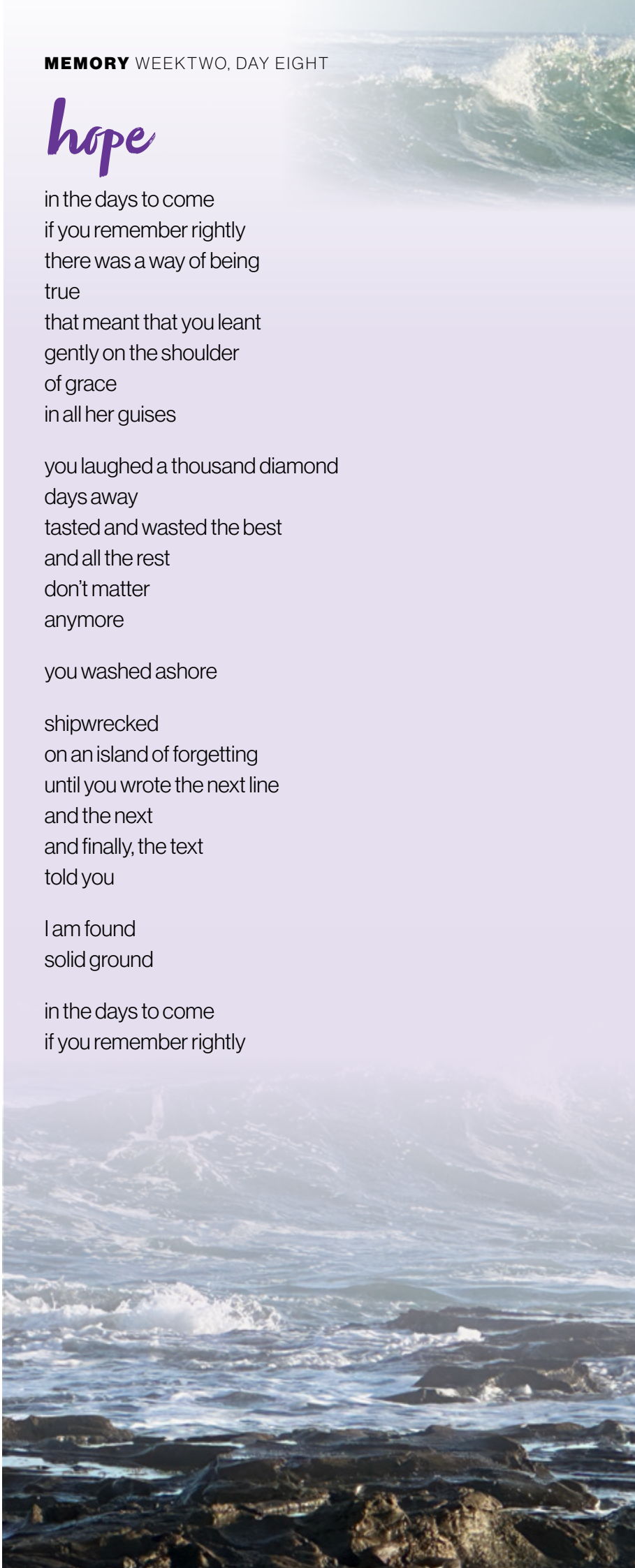
you laughed a thousand diamond
days away
tasted and wasted the best
and all the rest
don't matter
anymore

you washed ashore

shipwrecked
on an island of forgetting
until you wrote the next line
and the next
and finally, the text
told you

I am found
solid ground

in the days to come
if you remember rightly



day is done

this is the meal
where history and hope
gather in the unmasked
now of our
candle-lit communing

in the broken body
and the spilt wine
every time
every single time
you rupture our deep defences
and reveal yourself
to us, in us, through us

and we lean back
remembering
threading tales
of ancient tongue
renewed in the telling
held in the hearing
braided with our own
sacred stories of presence
and mystery

and we lean into
remembering
all the tomorrows
where you held us
in places yet to be imagined
where you gave us
treasures yet to be unearthed
where you called us
to faces yet to be unveiled

in this thin place
of grace
with bread of blessing
and wine of life
you re-member us and we
re-member you
and we are one

now and then
when day is done



under an oak

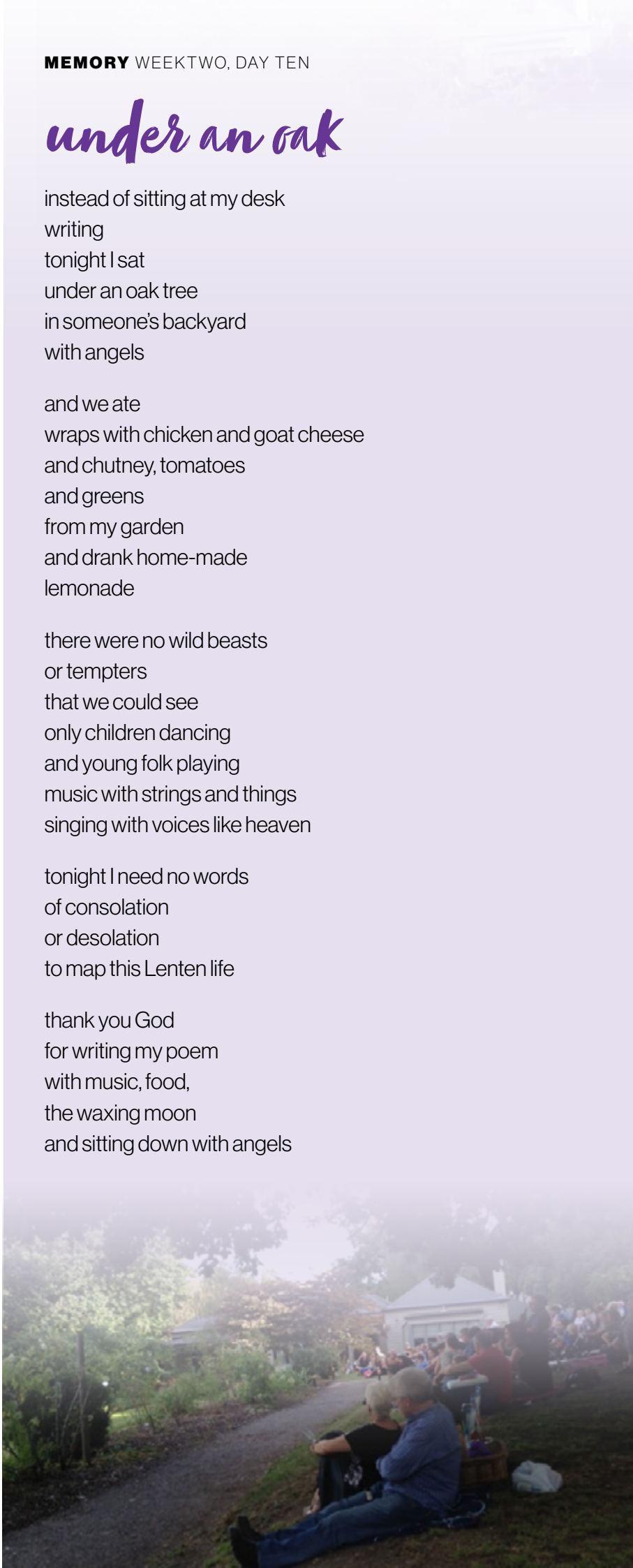
instead of sitting at my desk
writing
tonight I sat
under an oak tree
in someone's backyard
with angels

and we ate
wraps with chicken and goat cheese
and chutney, tomatoes
and greens
from my garden
and drank home-made
lemonade

there were no wild beasts
or tempters
that we could see
only children dancing
and young folk playing
music with strings and things
singing with voices like heaven

tonight I need no words
of consolation
or desolation
to map this Lenten life

thank you God
for writing my poem
with music, food,
the waxing moon
and sitting down with angels



Body

It's the second Sunday in Lent.

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Luke 13:31-35

Jesus is warned, he is under threat of death. This body of incarnate love is in danger of being destroyed by the power of hatred and fear and Jesus responds with lament. Not for himself but for Jerusalem. Lament turns to longing and Jesus is the hen, yearning to collect her brood under her wing. This is a visceral response of a mother. To ache with all her outstretched capacity to shield her offspring, with no note of self-protection. The longing turns back to stark lament, 'and you were not willing.'

Jesus said, 'this is my body, broken for you.'

We are keepers of the longer story. We know what happens to Jesus. We are children of the resurrection. But this still gets us where it hurts.

This text belongs in the body. It hits us in the gut. It has violence and pain, physical and emotional. We want to scurry like chickens and find the soft, downy shelter of a maternal embrace and hide away.

Who do you ache to protect and where do you feel that?

What happens when you stretch out to offer shelter?

What stories do you hold of comfort and embrace, brokenness and longing?

Maybe you could share a photo that answers one or more of these questions.

Maybe you could carry it with you this week.

As we journey on, we acknowledge the vulnerability and beauty of the body.

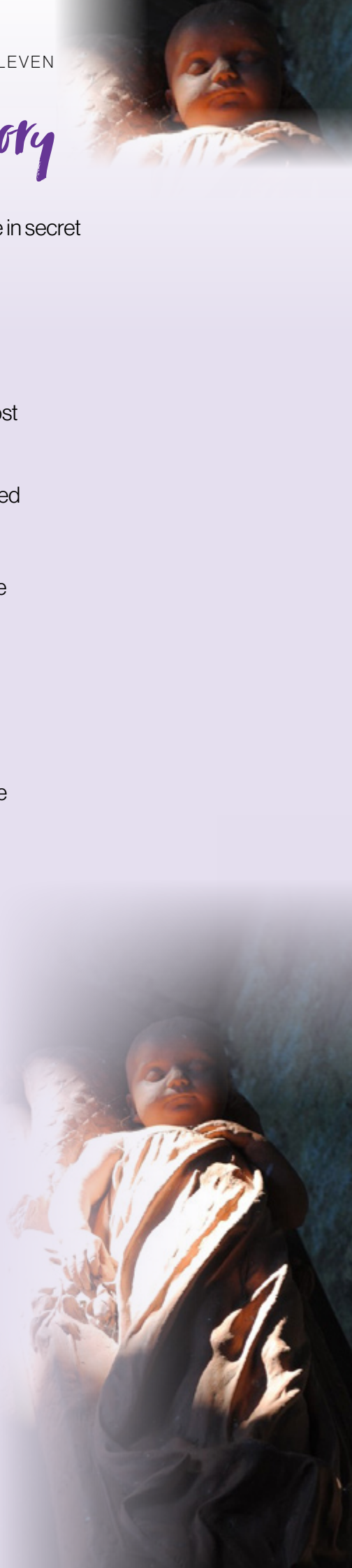
body memory

this body that birthed you
remembers when you were in secret
unseen but stirring
flutters and then feet
under the ribs
demanding room to grow
persistently present
transforming your willing host

this body that birthed you
remembers when you arrived
the ride, the waves of pain
the struggle
the shrinking of the universe
to one single moment
your kairos time
stardust manifest
incarnate, miraculous

this body that birthed you
remembers when you woke
screaming in the night
so many nights
sitting in a rocking chair
the only ones awake
in the whole world
feeding you with my self
milk and love and songs
of hope and home

this body that birthed you
remembers you
bears your scars
knows your fears
your smell, your touch
the sound of your laughter
you will never be lost
abandoned or erased
you are beloved
this body that birthed you
remembers



broken

I took all my broken
to the river
and met you on the grass
and you had brought
your load
of broken too
and we sat and shared
a silence for two

two's company when
there is more than plenty
of broken

and the river
listened and ran
deep, muddy and wide
impeccably polite

leafy light bounced
from ripples pulsing
snaking up the trunk
of a sentient eucalypt

while words took flight
like ducks
water walking before lift off
miraculous and impossible
settling into stillness in the centre
still broken
broken stillness
broken still

and somehow in the sitting
the broken became less
of a burden
and more of a door

and we walked through
together

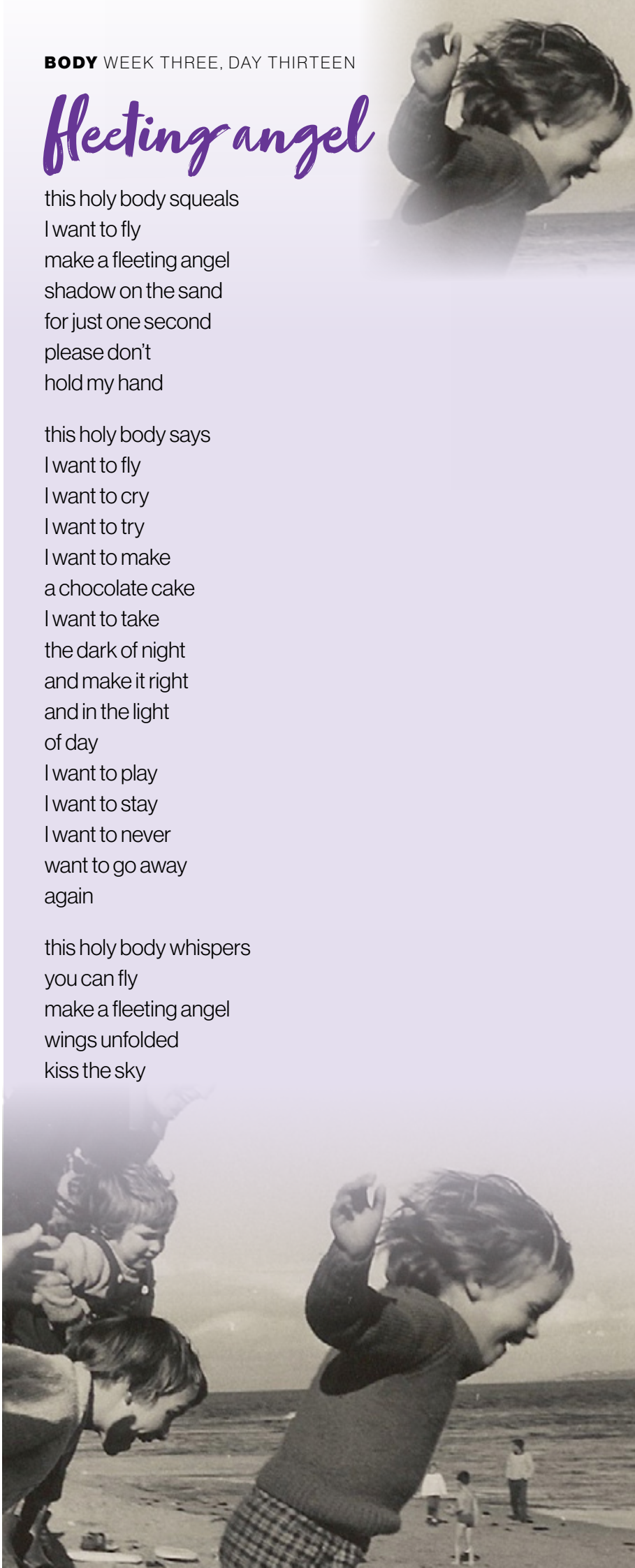
BODY WEEK THREE, DAY THIRTEEN

fleeting angel

this holy body squeals
I want to fly
make a fleeting angel
shadow on the sand
for just one second
please don't
hold my hand

this holy body says
I want to fly
I want to cry
I want to try
I want to make
a chocolate cake
I want to take
the dark of night
and make it right
and in the light
of day
I want to play
I want to stay
I want to never
want to go away
again

this holy body whispers
you can fly
make a fleeting angel
wings unfolded
kiss the sky



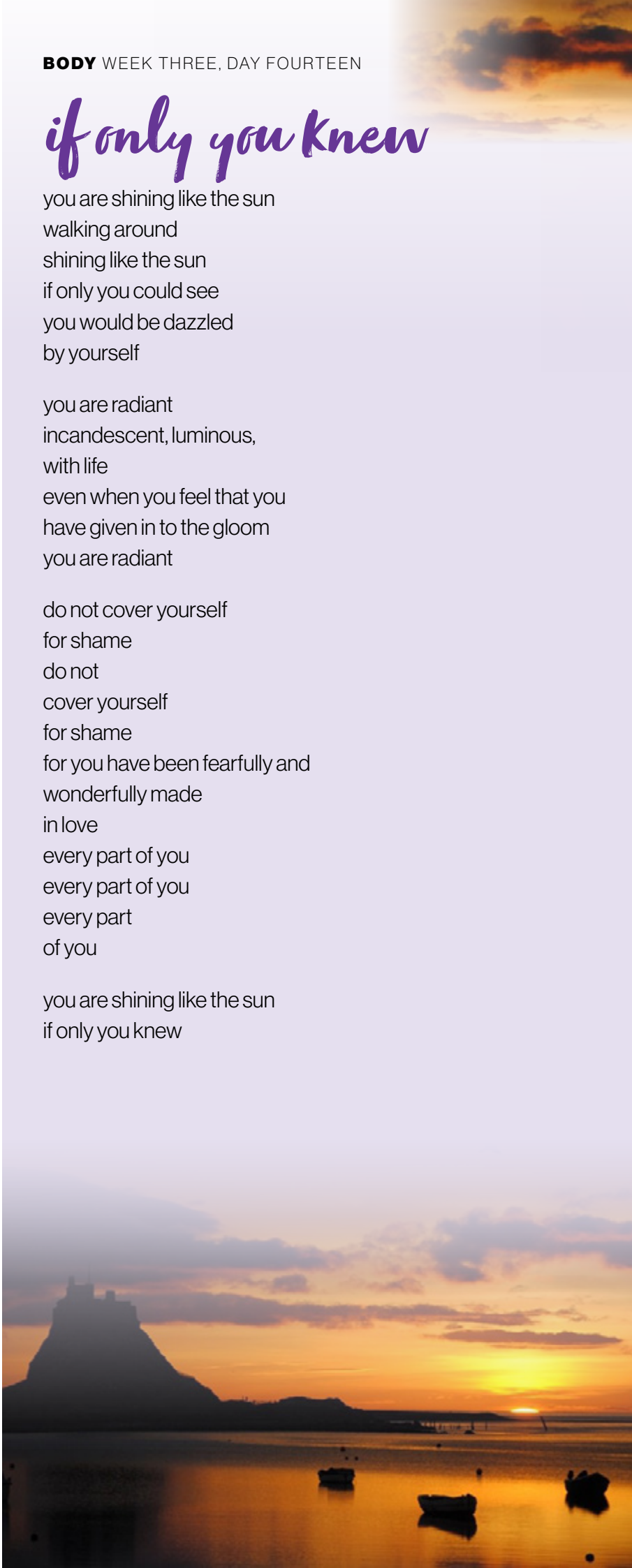
if only you knew

you are shining like the sun
walking around
shining like the sun
if only you could see
you would be dazzled
by yourself

you are radiant
incandescent, luminous,
with life
even when you feel that you
have given in to the gloom
you are radiant

do not cover yourself
for shame
do not
cover yourself
for shame
for you have been fearfully and
wonderfully made
in love
every part of you
every part of you
every part
of you

you are shining like the sun
if only you knew



open

what is the word
this body embodies?

when you see me
what is said
without being spoken?

you who knit me in secret
who knows
my inward being
who sighs and psalms
within my deep
before a thought
is on my tongue

what living word am I?

my hope is that
you might read me as

open
open to love, to existence
to sensing spirit
in the magnificent and the mundane

open to awe, to pain
to being wrong
over and over again
to being healed,
forgiven, celebrated
embraced, remembered

open to the deep
in the other, sea, sky
you, whoever comes my way
open to stay in unknowing,
in liminal space
open to grace

let 'open'
be what is spoken
along the lines
of my palm

harvest

this is harvest

ingathering
of fruitfulness

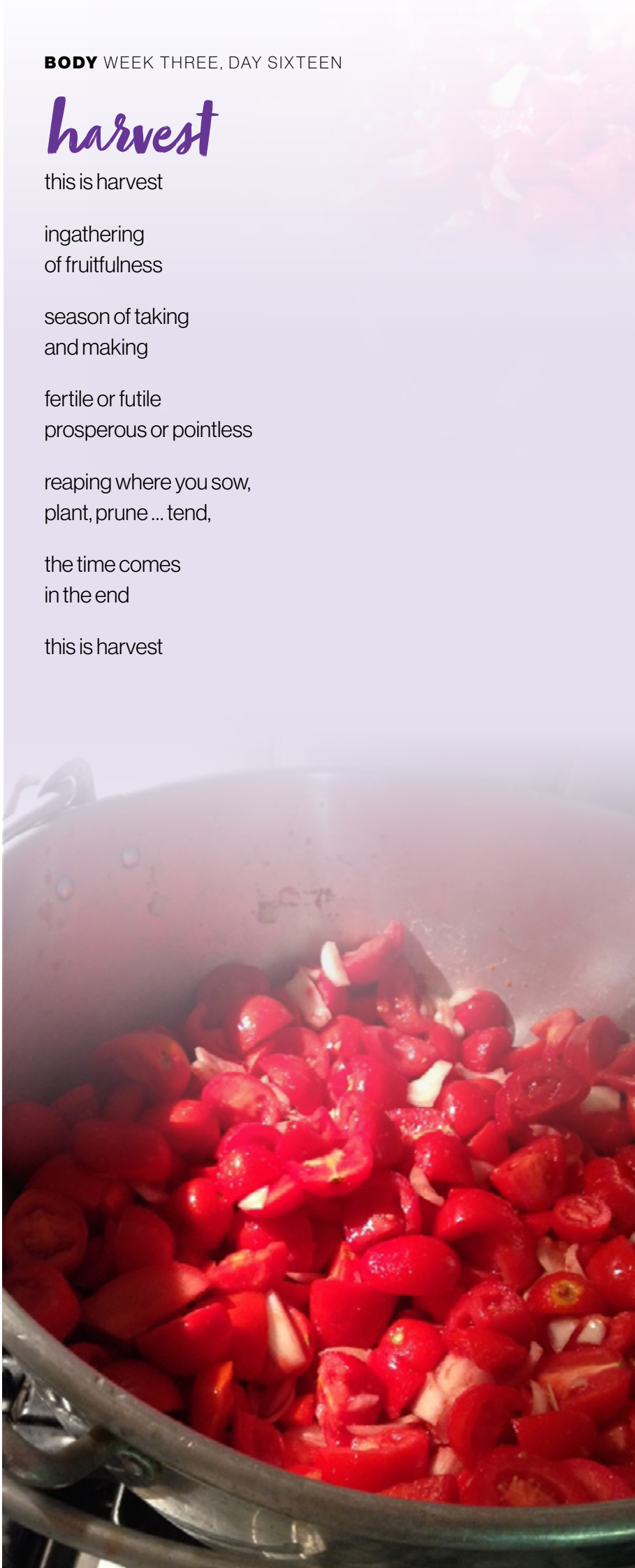
season of taking
and making

fertile or futile
prosperous or pointless

reaping where you sow,
plant, prune ... tend,

the time comes
in the end

this is harvest



Grace

It's the third Sunday in Lent.

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Luke 13:1-9

'Let it alone for one more year.' There's a space of grace.

The vineyard owner planted a fig tree to have figs, probably for the cheese plate to accompany the wines – quite acceptable! So, coming back for fruit for the third time and finding none, it was reasonable to give up and put an end to the constant disappointment and drain on resources.

Why was the gardener invested in protecting the fig tree and committing more of their own labour to encourage its fruitfulness?

Has there been a time when you have been blessed with a space of grace? When you thought the crunch had come and you had failed, and then someone close to you committed time and energy to help you to flourish? Have you been that gardener for someone else?

Digging around disturbs the soil, disrupts the surface, and a heaping of manure may not be what you might wish for. Have there been difficult times that have broken you open with grace that has been rich and rewarding?

What is happening for you in this Lenten space of grace, this wilderness journey led by the Spirit?

Where do you find nourishment and nurture? Fruit only appears in the right season, but watching, pruning, watering and feeding the tree is a constant commitment.

What fruitfulness do you long for?

What fruitfulness are you being called into and what does grace have to do with that?

Maybe you could plant something in your garden, or in a pot, to remind you of this time.

As we journey on, we inhabit those spaces of grace.

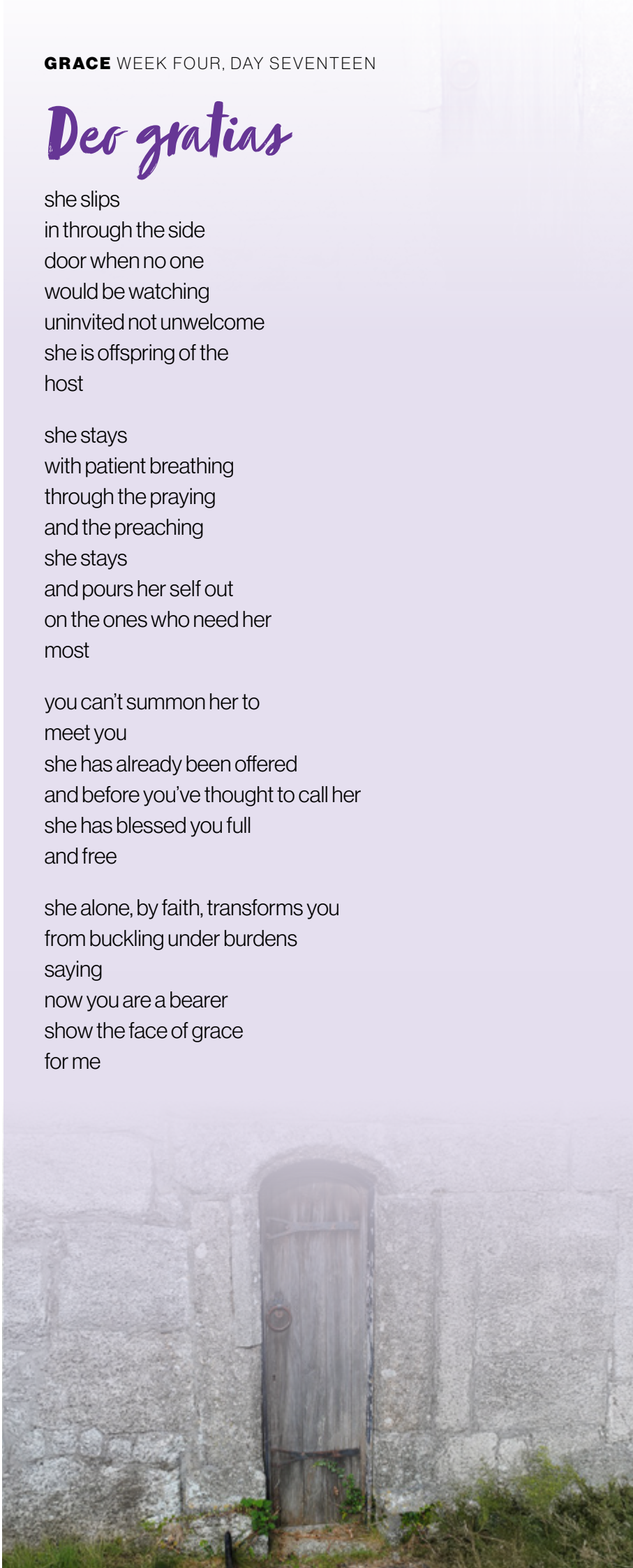
Deo gratias

she slips
in through the side
door when no one
would be watching
uninvited not unwelcome
she is offspring of the
host

she stays
with patient breathing
through the praying
and the preaching
she stays
and pours her self out
on the ones who need her
most

you can't summon her to
meet you
she has already been offered
and before you've thought to call her
she has blessed you full
and free

she alone, by faith, transforms you
from buckling under burdens
saying
now you are a bearer
show the face of grace
for me



GRACE WEEK FOUR, DAY EIGHTEEN

restless grace

defiantly laughing at the gravelled
ground between
then and whatever might
become of now
grace shoulders our fences and fears
and heaves them into a corner
crying;
'you wont need those anymore'

unbounded now she breaks
into our measured world and erupts our
expectations
with pulses, not of power but of presence

grace grows daisies
between the broken wheels of whatever
fallen industry lies in shards around us
erupting with the possibility
of our becoming
something else
altogether,
altogether something else

and the moon and stars stay in their orbit
the tides keep steady pace
delight and pain rise and fall and rise
and all the while she plays
restless
in our minutes and our days



loved

how did you know
to call right then

right then when
all I could do was watch myself
framed in windows
with spectacular, irrelevant valley
views
walking around the house
lost in becoming
altogether invisible
to body and to blood

how did you know
to call
and tell me you could see me

seen, known, loved,

no one else witnessed mists of calm
falling like the veiled curtain of night

no one else tasted cascades of relief
mingled with laughter
at how much all this

hurts – loss, longing,
love in all her worn, torn and newborn
forms

sweet sister
teach me that grace
that hears the silence,
makes the call and
bears
the maker's trace

love

loved

not yet

God give to me
a place of grace
to still these restless wings
to halt this constant crusade
to park this disarray,
stay
afloat, attached,
moored in some safe harbor
shielded, sheltered,
secure

while great, grey waters,
narratives of birth, death
and all our slight and mighty
beginnings and endings
course beneath
undisturbed,
unencumbered,
unexamined

while clouds clot creamy in
the autumn sky
and sail on without message,
menace or
misunderstanding

and breezes blow rumours
of seasons yet to come;
whispers of rain,
reason, fear and folly
but not yet,
not now,
not today

God give to me
a space
of grace



GRACE WEEK FOUR, DAY TWENTY-ONE

choise

here's the choice

grace
or death

I choose to live



GRACE WEEK FOUR, DAY TWENTY-TWO

lift the cup

and, this is not
your own doing

you have not earned this right
this flight of blissful blessing
this day of filtered autumn light
this night of testing,
playing, laying, dancing
moon shadows against the wall
there is nothing you could have done
to make it happen
or to take it all away

this is gift
held out in trembling hands
bathed in salty tears from there to here
and back again
wrapped in broken words,
already heard but rarely understood
lifted up
lift it up
lift the cup

drink to the sky

to the morning,
breaking over one more misty valley
calling another Sabbath
into being
becoming the rest of your life

to the daylight
where nothing hides
for long, for good,
for life and health and daily food

to the dark
twinkling with unimaginable mysteries
and unknowable depths
of doubt

and, this is not your own doing
this is grace
reach out, watch this space



Time

It's the fourth Sunday in Lent.

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b – 32

It happens.

There can come a time when you want to gather whatever you've got or got coming to you and move on, to somewhere far away. That's the time for wandering into the world and getting lost to find yourself. Sounds like Lenten wilderness.

There can come a time when those around you don't behave in quite the way you might have expected. Knowingly or not, they steal from the future and leave you bereft.

There can come a time when you wait with empty open arms full of love.

There can be the homecoming time, ecstatic, surprising and seemingly unjust, depending on your position.

There is a time when the lost are found, when the dead come to life and the party starts.

What time is it for you right now?

What has this Lenten time taken from you, or given to you?

What does it feel like to be welcomed home?

Maybe you could write your own parable from your own experience about what it's like to wander untethered through this wild world or about finding love that waits to welcome.

Come, journey on, and see where we are led in this time.

this time

this time
marches no straight line

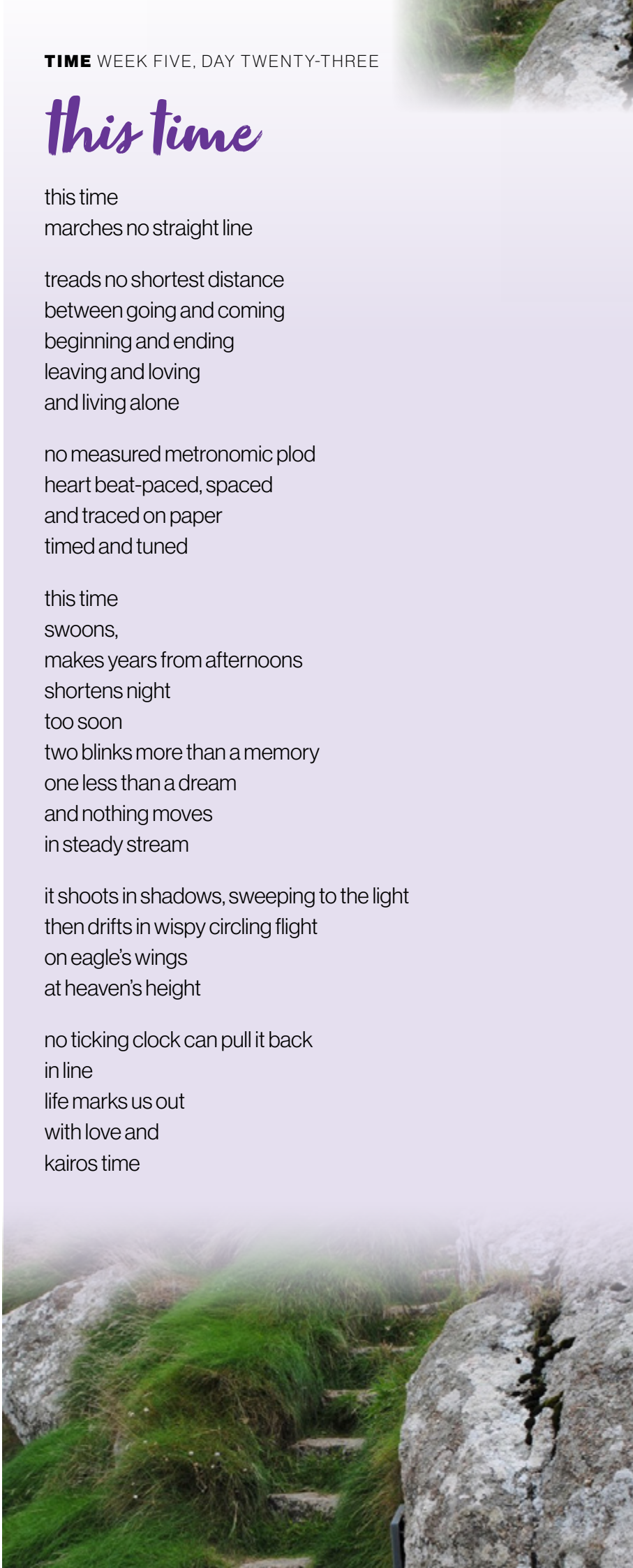
treads no shortest distance
between going and coming
beginning and ending
leaving and loving
and living alone

no measured metronomic plod
heart beat-paced, spaced
and traced on paper
timed and tuned

this time
swoons,
makes years from afternoons
shortens night
too soon
two blinks more than a memory
one less than a dream
and nothing moves
in steady stream

it shoots in shadows, sweeping to the light
then drifts in wispy circling flight
on eagle's wings
at heaven's height

no ticking clock can pull it back
in line
life marks us out
with love and
kairos time



threshold

(for Adrienne)

I met you today
gentle, worn woman,
on the threshold
in that space between
breath and death

Four of us; you,
your two daughters
and I, the priest,
all edged by angels

we circled
your ebbing body

and you, in the doorway
unsure of stepping
into the mystery of
the house of love
hesitant to leave the party here
for whatever waits behind the veil

their silent tears
familiar touch on fragile skin
and memory's ancient words
invoking passage and peace
must have ushered you
through, I left you
with the sign of the cross
over the eye of your soul

and you left them
minutes later

for you, Adrienne, the angels sing
more joyously tonight
for you, the heavens dance a starry
welcome jig
for you, time takes a gentler shape
and wraps the warm receiving blanket
of eternity
around your shoulders
shouting 'welcome, beloved child'

for you, Adrienne
all for you

TIME WEEK FIVE, DAY TWENTY-FIVE

invitation

hours before now I sat above the vineyard
and watched day fall into night
but I don't want to write about the colours
purple, blue, grey, gentle on the palette
or the silence
punctuated by magpies, a cow,
and distant barking dogs
or the kangaroo that appeared
took a long backward look
and left, leaping through leaf
too soon to turn

where are the words for this thin place?

I want to write for you
the knowing of presence,
powerful, universal, pervasive
I want you to sense the grace
that seeks you through the gathering
dusk, rests gently on your head,
seeps into your deepest heart,
not for any reason or worth
or anything you have done to deserve it
or not, today or any day
but just because you are you
and you are loved

but each attempt, each best attempt
to catch some of this mystery
betrays the story
cheapens the treasure
you cannot tell a scrawny tale
about this, or any thin place
you cannot tell

so come
here's a cup of life poured out
red and robust
here's broken bread
shared with a companion
here's a resting place
infused with unnamed blessing

come

TIME WEEK FIVE, DAY TWENTY-SIX

chronos

time turns pages
without consent
or concern
for what is written
or omitted

clocks tick
mapping chronos
gone gone gone
past past past
gone fast
gone past
tick tock tick clock

it's easy to be melancholy

hours ago the sun ended night
with golden light, a promise
plus a red sky warning
and now night has come again,
an end, again

and yes, there was
a small storm

and yes, words, like light
lifted and fell
some were spoken
some too deep to tell

and yes, we grew, into something else,
other than what we were this time yesterday
and who can say
what we may be becoming tomorrow

each tick, each tock, mark a movement
take a shape of grace and gathered,
form this blessed, boundless life

it's easier to be grateful



peregrinatio

and chances are you will not be back here
again, too soon, or ever
or maybe you will, sometime this afternoon
or one day in the near or far away
and does it matter

there is no need for marking every step
each bend takes on her own curves
and while you walk them, once
or more, they fit you,
you learn to lean into the corners
like the steady shoulder of a lover

drawn into the next step,
all will be well

the next step, all will be well

the next part of the path
and all manner of things will be well

yes, there are resting places,
springs and other blessed things
parched shade-less plains, burning bushes
mountaintop transfigurations
clefts in the rock
to hide when the going gets too bright
and beautiful, you can
just let it pass by, this time,
this time, let time pass by,

but soon, or sooner, or later
you will come out, come down,
come on and follow
your path
because you are called into
this life
and you can't resist, or close your ears,
or fail to take the hand held out

and who knows
where your path goes
where the wind blows
where you are

one wild day

unless
you risk it all
in one wild day
of telling your heart
you will never know who holds
you near and dear
and they will never get to
show you

unless
you move
carelessly sometimes
without too much of a plan
you will never feel the sharp sting
of being lost and alive
and you will never need to be found
and welcomed home

unless
you die
deep in the earth
of common ground
and let yourself go
you will never live
you will always
be alone

Approach

It's the fifth Sunday in Lent

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read: John 12: 1-8

Can you see it?

Mary, with her valuable, fragrant, poignant offering, approaching Jesus. Bending to anoint his feet as he reclines. Touching him with tenderness and wiping away the oil with her flowing hair.

Lazarus, filled with the fragrance of leaning into life, close to Jesus.

Martha, moving to the table with steaming plates of food, her body busy with the blessing of hospitality.

Judas, reaching towards Jesus and Mary, determined to put a stop to things, to save some of the wasted wealth, for whatever reason.

Jesus in the centre, receiving the offerings and blessing the anointing.

Imagine you are there, amongst them. What is your posture as you approach Jesus? What do you bring in your heart and hands? Where do you find yourself in this tableau?

Jesus says, '...but you do not always have me.' Part of loving is preparing to let go of the ones we love. What has been your experience of approaching the loss of a loved one? What have you brought to them, to others?

Maybe you could share some stories with those you trust.

Maybe you could anoint each other with fragrant oil.

Come on, keep going, as we journey with the Spirit.

approach

silence and encounter
meet you on the road
and you can't always choose
who your companion will be

befriend them,
both bring blessing

solitude's single question
arising when the striving mind
is stilled, free from winding a way
through the crowd of noisy distraction
to the final point of impact
with what you need to ask

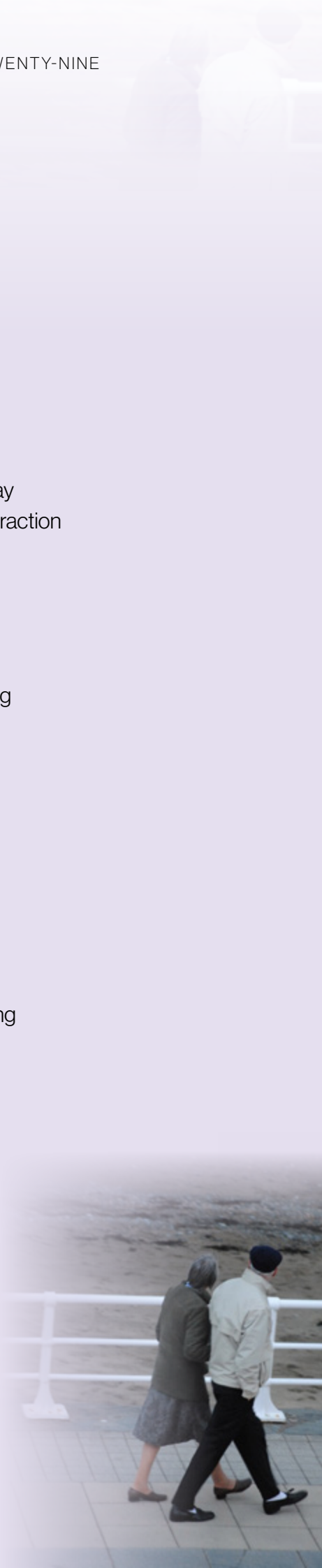
ask what you need
into the great love
that birthed you in the beginning
alone, solitary, disconnected
for the first time
breathing on your own
on your own
breathing

and then

encounter's deep holding
present partner, companion,
resplendent, dressed in knowing
before you find words
in step, pacing,
facing forward
looking onward to finding
so much more than
either had before

silence and encounter
meet you on the road
and you can't always choose
who your companion will be

befriend them



don't turn back

If I could meet,
(at some strange cross-road
curving time and distorting seasons)
if I could meet her at five or six years old,
here's what I would tell myself
about the road of life:

there is no map, especially when you think
there is and you have it in your hand
that's when you will get lost

you wont always be lost
even though sometimes it feels like
a forever kind of dark

you need to be lost in order to know
what it is to be profoundly found
and you will be found, you will be found

there is no road stretching out
neatly before you
there are many, and you can choose
and you can change, and you can choose again
as long as you are prepared to fail and fall and fail again
and fall again, but always keep on breathing

you will have traveling companions,
but it is your road
and they have theirs and you can't control
when paths diverge or join,
love companions, embrace solitude,
both are blessed partners on the way

there will be a time, or maybe more
when you stand on the edge of the abyss
it is then that you are closest to your treasure
and most in danger of turning back
don't turn back

leap into the deep unknown, because I know
and you do too, buried in your bones
that there has always been one
whose arms outstretched will welcome you,
and bring you home



Here Be Dragons

when you come to the end
of your known world
there is a sign,
writ large by ancient cartographers
fully aware of what they didn't know,
and it simply says;
Here Be Dragons

if you take another step

the sky may fill with fire
the sea become reptilian
rippled and roaring,
your homeland may shrink back
out of sight, in fear and forgetting
and your heart be pierced

so when you do come to the end
of your known world
and truth impels you
calls you, drives you to move

choose your grief

to turn and return
or face the dragons

I've met them

they welcomed me as friend
and are my close companions
in this perilous terrain,
unmistakable angels
in this wilderness of awe

betwixt

you finally arrived at this
this liminal space
betwixt the edge of the known
and all that is beyond

you have not stopped moving
although the pace has slowed
putting dust and distance
between you and what was done
and said, not done and not said
moments missed, or mismanaged
you have not stopped moving

and here's your first and best decision; rest
even if there's only a rock for your head
lay down, lay it all down,
if you don't rest, you won't dream

if you don't dream, you'll miss them
ascending and descending
bridging this thin place
weaving worlds together
bringing promise that no matter what
no matter what happens

you will not be abandoned,
you, bearer of the promise
that will not be shattered
damaged, traded or revoked

so take this dark lacuna, this night of nothing
and everything, ladders and longing,
this rupture and coupling of heaven and earth
and wrestle well until day breaks

wrestle your destiny, wrestle your blessing
wrestle with all your wit and wisdom and wonder
and come to morning spent, come to the gate of morning
dancing on wonky legs, that will take you
limping with sheer joy into this new day

then mark this space
for God was here
even though you did not know

wrestling blessing

so, what will you wrestle
from this night of restless pacing,
chasing fleeting blessing
from a rude, reluctant angel

what will you wrestle
from the arms of dark despairing
racing onto morning
with a warning
wrapped in dew

and how does this struggle leave you
when the day is dawning
in the sweet caress of morning
are you sure that you
are you?

here's a blessing for the daylight
when you've battled with the blackness
here's a liturgy of welcome
for the daybreak of your heart
you can use it as you're limping
from the campground of your conflict
you can use it as you're leaving,
benediction, as you part;

bless this sacred ground

marked with memory and wounding
may you who travel after
receive rest, unearth your name,
may your dreams be worth the struggle
may your longing find a shelter
may your heart be full of laughter
may you never walk the same



edges drawing in

this wilderness time is closing
I can feel the edges
drawing in, approaching,
gathering arms opened wide, stretched out,
welcome wandering one, welcome,
welcome home

this wilderness time
is closing slowly,
daily creeping to an end,

holy week

wait, wait, (please wait)
can't you wait until I am ready?
until we are ready?

there must be more
more dreams for Jacob,
more blessings to wrestle,
more angels bringing healing,
flying low over a rocky sea
there must be more

because I'm not sure I'm ready, we're ready
to walk this week, to walk this way
to follow where you are going
where are you going?

this wilderness time is closing slowly
daily creeping to an end

please provide whatever it is
that we most need to bring back
that we most need to bear, to carry
to be, to become, to embrace, to embody...

and stay with us
through this most holy week
of desolation and delight, stay with us
until you need to leave
so we can get back home

this wilderness time is closing, slowly.



Beloved

It's Palm Sunday, we're moving into Holy Week,

Take some time to be still and notice the life around you.

Take some time to be still and notice the life within you.

What are some words or images that come to you in this time?

You might want to share these thoughts, write or draw them, or hold them within you.

Read Luke 19:28-40

Can you imagine seeing Jesus, riding on a colt, trotting along the road paved with garments? Multitudes are gathering, praising, heralding the one who is coming in glory to bring peace.

Where are you watching from? You, who have followed the path of this itinerant prophet, teacher and healer. You are one among many, but something swells within you. A recognition of the one who has seen you and blessed you, whom you have grown to love. Here is your beloved, lifted out of the ordinary, crowned by the crowd.

There is fear here too. It resides in the shadows, finds voice in the echoes that bounce off city walls. Tell them to stop. But this is unstoppable, it doesn't rely on the voices of the people, they will abate. It is resonating from deep within the solid, silent stone. This sound is a cry of recognition and adoration from beyond the known and will not stop.

Here we are, about to embark on Holy Week, we have come this far on the journey and have gathered at the gates.

We know what happens next.

Here, at the portals, in this liminal stopping point between now and what's to come, be assured. You are loved. Just as you hold the gaze of the beloved, so you are seen and known and loved. It's reciprocal, but not transactional. There is nothing that could happen this week, nothing that you can do or say, or fail to do or say, that will stop the love that comes towards you and wraps around you.

Of all the things you packed for the beginning of this journey, what has been the most precious, and what might have been better left behind? What have you gathered up along the way? What have you shed? Who has been alongside you? Where have you been led by the Spirit?

Maybe you could pour it all out in love and prayer, behind closed doors, or with those you trust. Here we go, the final part, thank you for journeying with me.

always, we begin again

and in the beginning, there is always an ending
a separation, a breaking, a rending, an upending
order from chaos
light from dark
then from now

rupturing the fabric of the known
disturbing our complacency
holding a mirror to our diverted eyes
look, just look, look now
and once you do
you know, and once you know,
release, and off we go,

always, we begin again

this persistent pursuit
essentially baptismal, under and arising
death to life,
and back down to all the little deaths
then up to life again
eternally accompanied by that voice;
you are my beloved,

and each time
there is some kind of ensuing eviction into
wilderness,
adrift, misplaced, lost, liminal
wilderness
inhabited by wild beasts and distractions
wilderness
where angels bear graces beyond your craziest vision

and after all that,
here comes the beginning
knocking at your heart
with a new tune
and you will learn
to sing along
because this is now your song.



divine depot

you are a scrap merchant,
fastidious collector,
salvaging, recovering, rescuing, reclaiming
and saving
all the broken and glorious bits of the past,
minutes of magnificence, days of longing,
nights of weeping, weeks of wandering wonder
and years and anguish and elation

you hoard them all
herding them gently
into one splendid capacious collection
where nothing is omitted or forgotten
where nothing is everything
and everything is something,
or other

and you store them
in one grand and glorious divine depot
called 'us'

so that sometimes, when we need to lean
into an uncertain future,
unsteady with fear, trembling with unknowing
weak with worry or just plain tired and torn
you pull out a shard of the past from the treasure store
and lay it tenderly in our remembering
and wait

while recognition raises our eyes,
straightens our shoulders and steadies our hearts
and your presence infuses our present
with living memory
delicate, pressed, preserved and yet
so fully alive
that we can't resist being called into
outrageous hope

unbounded spirit of love
bless you
for putting us back together
again, and again and again



body of love

reading the body
is not something
we talk about much
in church

but in the list
of all things
bright and beautiful
our bodies
must be somewhere
near the top

because for one thing
you chose to come
and wear our skin
to love us
from the inside out
to teach us the language
of embodied living
and to take that fragile frame
through death, to hell and back
so we might know
love
in our bodies

so that we might be
your body of love
in this time and this place

we shouldn't talk about
reading our bodies
in church

we should just do it
always
because we are glorious



grace took her place

I didn't want to go tonight
bright moon, almost full
too much
to enter this table of broken body
spilled blood,
this garden of betrayal;
these days of the abyss

I didn't want to go tonight
it marks the beginning
of the ending of the beginning
and I'm not ready
not ever ready for this

but there she was uninvited, unplanned
simply, palpably present
grace took her place
at the table tonight

in the face of a child reading sacred story
slowly, carefully, round mouth
tasting the awkward word
in the body of an older woman not expecting to be fed
delighting in the soup, dahl and rice, 'this is nice'

in the candles for apostles, (light one for the betrayer in all of us)
and more for the women who were always there
in the conversations over candles, ordinary talk across the table
lives entwining, if only for this meal

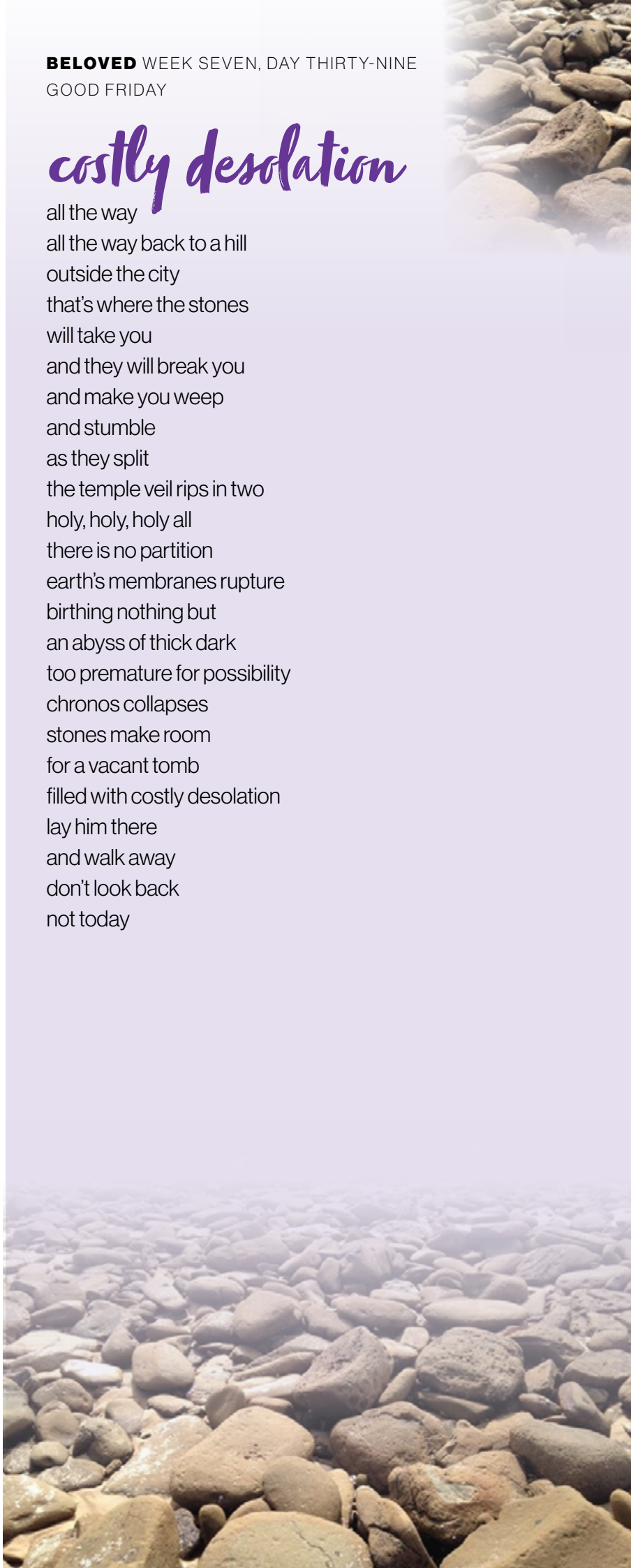
in the fire burning, encircled by our bodies in the chilly dusk
and the remnants of palm branches tossed in by distracted children
sizzling with mixed shouts of 'save us' from a confused crowd

I didn't want to go tonight
but grace opened the door to a space
that felt like coming home
and this clasp of the dark
might just be a house of welcome
soft, tender consolation
infused with love, not fear

BELOVED WEEK SEVEN, DAY THIRTY-NINE
GOOD FRIDAY

costly desolation

all the way
all the way back to a hill
outside the city
that's where the stones
will take you
and they will break you
and make you weep
and stumble
as they split
the temple veil rips in two
holy, holy, holy all
there is no partition
earth's membranes rupture
birthing nothing but
an abyss of thick dark
too premature for possibility
chronos collapses
stones make room
for a vacant tomb
filled with costly desolation
lay him there
and walk away
don't look back
not today



BELOVED WEEK SEVEN, DAY FORTY
HOLY SUNDAY

Lent

this was not what I expected, not at all
I've fallen off the map,
broken bits of dreams and schemes
stitched together with patient love
in the corner of my heart
blanket this tired and tested traveller

forty days and forty ways of coming undone
of finding blessing in the messing up
and fessing up, and glimpsing grace
with such a strange and stunning face
often alone, but ever
forever, coming home

and there has been a guide, or two
and always there was you
soul companion, breaking bread
making headway, even in the salty rain
and coming back again, again, again

in the morning I'll awaken,
beloved, not forsaken

