

# Grace



**Words and images by Patrick Jurd**

## Introduction

One meaning of 'grace' is 'unearned gift'. It seems to me that 'unearned gift' is also an excellent description for life itself. What did I do to earn life? Nothing. If I have been given a gift, one option is to return it, **or** I can ignore it **or** I can make the most of it. In my own fumbling way, I'm trying to make the most of the grace, the gift of life.

One way that I've tried to make the most of my life, especially since the COVID pandemic, is to appreciate the grace that is available to each of us, every single day. My writing since my last work, **This New Day** (Coventry Press, 2020), has acknowledged the grace at work in the world. Our task is to open our eyes and revel in that grace, in all its forms. To try to stay sane through the COVID lockdowns, I began to focus on the everyday beauty around me. Thus **Grace** is filled with words and images from the last five years.

I have been influenced by the Franciscan John Duns Scotus and his theology of haecceitas or 'thinness' - that each living thing or material thing, every part of creation, has been designed to be what it is. In doing so, such as in being a leaf, it is what it was created to be. I have also been influenced by poets such as John Keats: 'beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know'. Also by Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God'. So too by my late friend, Brian Doyle, who lived much of his adult life living and working at the University of Portland in Oregon. His writing which entails rich story-telling, has a wonderfully incarnational spirit that always buoyed me.

Why do the work for **Grace**? The last few years of my life have been challenging, for a variety of reasons: COVID with its lockdowns and other dislocations, moving from work to retirement, deaths of family and friends. Trying to be alert to grace in my life has both buoyed me and freed me. Thinking on a societal level, it felt like the right time. We live in a world that can spend too much time focusing on the banal or the horrible. We can become distracted, jaded, cynical. Such banal or horrible matters exist, but it is vital to focus on the goodness, the Godness, that is constantly around us, placed there by the God who loved each of us into life. It is vital to focus on the good so that we can be sustained to endure the banal and horrible, and still be a source of light in the world.

I have divided **Grace** into two broad sections: **Here** and **There**. **Here** comprises words and images where I have glimpsed grace in Australia, mostly Parkdale and Mentone. **There** comprises words and images where I have glimpsed grace during my overseas travel.

As I share this collection, I would like to honour a few people. Death is the sucky part of life that we don't like to talk about. My brother Chris, a deeply good and complex man, died in June 2021, following a 10 year battle with cancer. My mother Rona died in April 2023. She was the first person to encourage me to see the beauty around me. While she was 97 when she died, you only get one mother. I also acknowledge the passing of my friend, Chris Morris, whose sudden death in April 2024 still brings me up short.

A constant in my life for more than 40 years has been my darling wife, AnneMaree. Words cannot adequately express my deep love and gratitude for her ongoing love and support. She is grace embodied for me, every single day.

It is my hope and my prayer that you open your heart to be touched by grace.

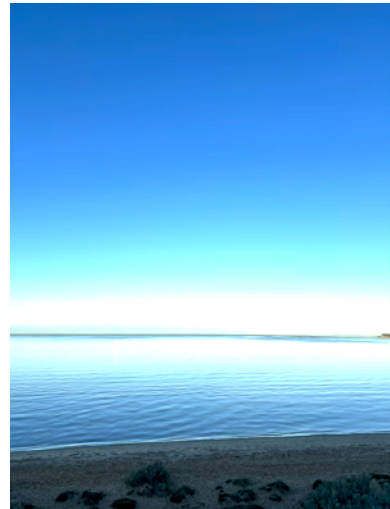
Patrick Jurd  
June 2025

# Here



## **A new year**

May the sunshine of this morning  
lighten your day and  
any dark spaces of your year.  
May the love in your life  
for yourself and others  
be the sun  
enabling you  
to see the shadows better.  
May your relationships help you  
to be more fully yourself  
so that your actions  
nurture your dreams  
into reality.



## **Held**

Late summer twilight,  
Balmy,  
Sun's glow fading.  
The cacophony of crickets,  
more than a sound  
has a physical effect.  
I am held  
in a moment  
of gratitude  
for life.

## **Always**

The sunset stopped me  
In my tracks.  
I had to pull over  
and take a snap.  
So everyday,  
yet this was so magical,  
demanding attention.  
With a whisper  
God yells  
'I'm here!'  
The irony of the timing  
as I witness this  
on my way to Mass  
Is not lost on me.  
God is always with us.  
Am I open to grace?  
Am I awake?





## **Anniversary**

It's hard to know  
where to start  
I feel so lucky being married  
for so many years  
to a woman I adore.

This woman is  
my best friend  
soul mate  
and lover.

This woman who  
tolerates all my flaws  
and still loves me.

It is her love  
that has freed me  
to be the best version  
of me – which is  
no mean feat.

My theological training  
taught me  
that we are each  
made in the image  
of God who is love.  
We are made whole  
when we give ourselves  
freely in love.

And I get to live  
that graced reality.

## **Awash**

I look up at night  
And the inky dark  
is awash with  
stars.

No wonder humans  
have been fixated on them  
for millenia.

Our brains  
look for patterns  
but with less light pollution  
there are just  
so many!

Their majesty  
leaves me speechless  
and comforted  
and at peace.

I remember  
that the Greek root of  
'grace' means  
'unearned gift'.  
And I give thanks.

## **Drizzle**

Drizzle can seem annoying.  
Not dry  
and not really rain.  
Yet there is a  
gentleness  
about the way  
it hits the roof  
or the ground.  
Drips gather slowly  
on trees and roofs.  
Grass and plants  
seem greener.  
Dark clouds overhead,  
stillness,  
peace.  
Enough to hear the  
'wump' of the magpie's wings  
overhead.  
Simplicity  
Wholeness  
God's hand at work.

## **Life**

There is something  
about the light  
and the rain falling  
that makes this moment  
precious  
numinous.  
In a different moment  
I'm watching a pre-teen  
refuse her mother's attempts  
to take a photo of her.  
It seemed, sadly, to make her feel  
uncomfortable.  
In another moment  
I am consoling a student  
whose grandmother  
is about to pass away  
after the girl  
'saw her for the last time'.  
Life  
like a swollen river  
has eddies  
and special flows.  
What to make of it?  
Be present,  
pay attention,  
open your heart.  
The rest follows.



## Celebrate life!

It's so easy  
to sleepwalk  
through life.  
Barely awake  
barely aware  
of the miracles  
around us  
every moment  
of every day.  
Before my mother's  
decline  
She revelled  
in so much that  
life has to offer:  
'sucking the marrow'.  
While I'm sad  
At her passing,  
right now  
I am so grateful  
to be alive  
in **my** life,  
especially for those  
who love and nurture me -  
something that has  
wondrously come  
to the fore  
in recent days  
as we acknowledged  
mum's passing.  
More than that -  
a death  
should propel us  
into life.  
I have  
this time  
**now**  
and I need  
to make the most of it.  
I need to be awake  
and aware  
of those everyday  
miracles  
and celebrate life  
in me  
and around me.

## Chris

Sunshine streams down  
Generous and unexpected  
On this winter's day.  
Grace, too,  
As I wrestle  
With my brother's passing.  
This person  
Who has been  
A constant in my life.  
Constant too  
has been his pain  
Due to cancer.  
Sad at his passing,  
But I'm also relieved.

A man of contradictions.  
Who isn't?  
Most of my adult life  
I saw the positive  
As he cared for others  
Whether as a grandfather  
Doling out 'doughnuts and pink milk'  
As a solicitor for those in need  
Or a football club stalwart.  
His razor sharp intelligence  
Led to insightful  
And occasionally acerbic comments  
As well as many smiles from me  
As he named a truth.

Living in Melbourne for 40 years  
Has meant most of our relationship  
Has been by phone.  
Near the end I sent him a message  
That included:  
'I am not with you but I am with you.'  
In my memories and my heart,  
I pray that the converse  
Is also true.



## Enveloped

Still, early morning  
brilliant blue sky  
mirrored in  
mill-pond calm water  
gently lapping waves  
at water's edge.  
I am enveloped  
in a living prayer  
of grandeur  
and gratitude.  
For a brief time  
I immerse myself  
in this numinous moment  
and revel in it.

## Dolphins

Sun glistens off the water.  
Shimmering.  
Symbol  
of all that is precious  
in this scene.

Dolphins race the ferry,  
so clearly  
having the **best** time,  
seemingly egged on  
by the 'oohs and ahhs'  
of the humans  
whom they have  
spellbound.  
This stretched on  
for minutes  
until we reached the port.  
in their thisness  
they part the veil  
for us to glimpse,  
reminding us  
to be our true selves  
and embrace life's joy.

## Eyes, heart and mind

Seagull soars through the air  
incongruously  
amidst city buildings.  
The geometry is wrong:  
natural grace  
amidst human control.  
The seagull captivates me  
because of its 'outofplaceness',  
reminding me of a greater order.

Another glimpse into that order:  
watching the wind  
whipping the tree  
making it look mobile,  
almost pulsating.  
'It's only air',  
yet so vital in the grand scheme.

Open my eyes  
Open my heart  
Open my mind  
and truly see  
God's handiwork  
everywhere

## **Focus on love**

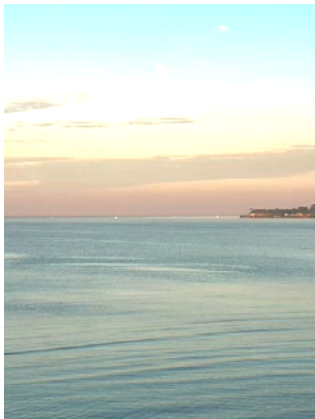
God spreads her love around  
as the sun kisses the day  
with autumnal warmth.  
Apt since this Friday  
is called Good;  
not because of the suffering  
nor the death  
since we still have plenty  
of both.  
Instead we ought to  
focus on the love  
of God for the world  
and each of its inhabitants.  
This act of love  
and integrity.  
This act of love  
that spoke the truth  
to power.  
This act of love  
that did not resist violence.  
This act of love  
whose seeds give birth  
to light,  
liberation,  
wholeness.

## **Glow**

I can feel  
their goodness  
I am overcome  
being a witness  
to care for others  
to those who build connection  
those who encourage  
those who support.  
These words  
seem an empty vessel  
to carry the full import  
not just of my emotion  
but of my senses.  
This goodness captures me  
buoys me  
despite more COVID news  
This human goodness  
**glows**  
shining its light  
for those with eyes to see,  
lighting a path to follow.

## **Gone?**

Death is sudden,  
final,  
yet my apprehension  
or understanding  
of my mother's passing  
seems to unfold  
over time.  
It has the look of a blow  
but maybe  
her death  
is unfolding  
as mysteries do.  
My finite mind  
can only grasp  
so much.  
I have held sorrow and loss  
at bay  
'She was in pain'  
'It was time'  
True  
but not complete statements.  
As another formal step  
is done  
I have returned to loss  
yet I also realise  
it is a step forward.  
Where to?  
A life where my mother  
is a memory (or a thousand!)  
I cherish and embrace all that was good  
in her  
and let go or forgive  
her shortcomings,  
as I hope others will forgive mine  
in my turn.  
  
Death unfolds...like a flower?



## **It broke through**

Air still  
slightly chill.  
Sun streaming.  
Blend of blues  
in sky and sea.  
Water shallow  
and crystal clear.  
Tiny waves  
caress the shore.  
Who in their right mind  
Needs more?  
Grace swirling round  
pierced a wall  
I didn't know was there.  
I'm so happy  
tears fall.  
Joy lifts the veil.

## Grateful

Waking up early  
Isn't always easy.  
This morning  
I am transfixed  
By the tiniest  
Yellow sliver of a moon.  
It is so ephemeral  
That it will be invisible  
In a few short minutes  
After the sun rises.  
Is it that it is  
So low in the sky?  
Its distinctive and unusual colour?  
Or the fact that it is both ordinary  
And extraordinary  
All at once?  
But it snaps me awake  
Eyes wide.  
As my brain struggles  
To name it,  
I feel  
Grateful  
For this grace  
As I start my day.

## Home

Home is a concept  
As much as a place.  
Where do I belong?  
Where can I be my true self?  
Nothing and no one  
Is holding us back  
From feeling  
'at home'  
- other than ourselves.

A long time residence  
Develops a familiarity.  
Work done  
To maintain or improve,  
People and gatherings,  
Events  
Large or small,  
Joyous or sombre,  
Children conceived  
And raised,  
Games and laughter,  
Sunrises and sunsets  
Trees, flowers, birds  
Lemons  
Lawn  
And, if you're lucky  
And work hard at it  
Love  
And buckets of it!



## **Held, strengthened and loved**

The society  
in which I live  
has propagated a myth,  
a myth so powerful  
that fortunes, industries,  
even countries  
have risen and fallen  
based upon its premise  
of solitary freedom.  
'I am free to do as I choose'  
The counterbalance  
of responsibilities  
were ignored, abhorred or forgotten  
in the headlong plunge.  
Along comes a pandemic  
that proves  
that my actions always  
affect others.  
Yet, despite two years  
of lockdowns,  
disruptions and disconnection,  
the myth  
has deep roots,  
so facts that 'I do not believe'  
continue to be ignored.  
Humanity has been given  
a golden opportunity  
to grasp the power  
of our connection  
in community  
where we are each held,  
strengthened and loved  
to be all that we can be.  
Then we can prove  
the dictum:  
'we are each angels  
with one wing  
and it is only when  
we embrace each other  
that we can fly'.  
What of the myth?  
Do not think it will just disappear.  
We each have a responsibility  
to denounce it,  
to live its converse,  
showing the myth to be  
the destructive lie  
that it is.



## Inward and outward

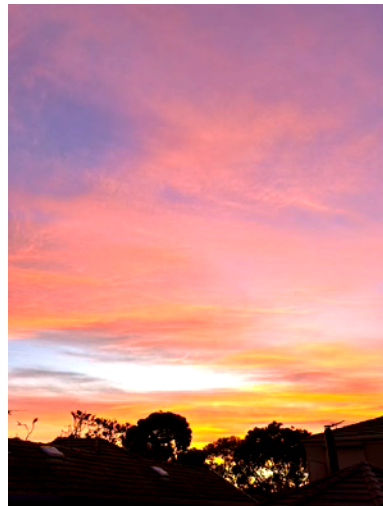
Bees take their fill  
of morning nectar  
HEIC the grevillea.  
Noisy myna  
does the same.  
likewise the wattle bird.  
Magpie warbles  
its strangely comforting sound.  
Blue sky crowns the scene.  
Hint of a breeze  
rustles the leaves  
of the plants and trees  
near my front porch.  
Butterfly meanders past.  
Other signs of life  
include humans  
running, cycling or driving.  
I am held  
lovingly  
by the peace  
of this scene.  
Our dogs explore the yard  
and 'protect' the perimeter.  
More beauty  
more colour  
from the bottlebrush,  
flowering gum,  
sasanqua,  
frangipani,  
roses  
and the plethora of weeds  
in the lawn.  
And I continue to be held  
by the peace.  
Then I read the words of Etty Hillesum,  
a young Jewish woman killed at Auschwitz:  
'each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in  
others. And remember that every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more  
inhospitable.'  
And for a moment I glimpse  
the vastness of God's love  
that draws me  
both inward and outward.

## Ode to Ave

A community of service  
Focused on developing  
The next generation  
Leads the good out of each  
Pointing them towards  
Fullness of life  
Done with  
Wit  
And humour  
Guided by  
Our gentle friend  
Who leads us into  
The truth  
About life, others, ourselves  
And God.  
The same God  
Whose powerful message  
'I love you  
As you are'  
Can be too much to believe  
For young and old.  
We are showered  
With the grace  
Of this unearned gift  
And it is where we  
Find ourselves,  
Build relationships,  
Find fullness of life  
And rediscover fire.  
This we glimpse at Ave.

## Opened

As I open the front door  
I'm greeted by  
A swathe of colour  
In the sky.  
The morning artisan  
At work again.  
The further from my home  
The more colour I can see.  
The contrast in light and colour  
Gives texture to the cloud  
As aerial canvas.  
But no words nor photos  
Capture how it feels.  
I say thanks  
And this gift  
Opens me to accept the day.

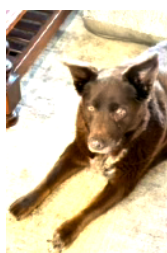


## Party hat

Driving to work  
in the morning half-light  
I spot a group of runners  
an everyday sight.  
Looking more closely  
I spot party hats  
on each in the group.  
I chuckle;  
that's not everyday  
yet it speaks  
of a richness  
of care and connection.  
'We're together'.  
A powerful and sustaining bond,  
as well as good fun!  
For whom would  
you wear a party hat?

## Privileged

As I scrabble  
on the floor  
trying to stretch tight muscles,  
my dogs see this  
as their cue to interact.  
They come to me  
smiling, wagging their tails,  
which, along with guttural noises  
show their pleasure  
at this possibility.  
As I pat them,  
I am repeatedly licked on the arm  
as they wiggle around  
so that I get the 'right' spot.  
Such a simple activity  
greeted by such joy  
is humbling.  
I am not a dog owner.  
I am a steward,  
A caretaker  
and so much richer for it.



## Silent reminder

Moon  
constant  
and changing,  
silent witness  
to everything on Earth.  
When my internal disquiet  
drives me to  
'Do something!'  
The moon is a reminder  
that change can come  
even when all  
seems still

## Rethinking ordinary

Taking our dogs  
for a walk  
on the beach  
my breath is taken away  
by another glorious sunrise.  
So much so  
it jolts me into  
rethinking the idea of  
ordinary.

Ordinary has overtones  
of plain, everyday or boring.  
This scene  
of pastel pinks and blues  
framed by delicate clouds  
and crowned by the moon  
is neither plain nor boring.

There is a sunrise  
every day  
but this scene  
is not ordinary.  
This scene  
teeming with delight is  
gobsmacking  
grace-filled  
and reminds me  
again  
to not sleep walk  
through the joys  
right in front of me.  
Rather, to open my eyes  
see  
and savour  
God's bounty  
in all its forms.



## Sustainer

Shining stump of a rainbow  
which dives into the bay,  
shrouded in clouds  
from white to  
shades of grey.  
It presides over a scene  
notable for its icy, lashing wind  
and waves  
topped in white,  
crashing against the shore  
spreading seaweed and human detritus.  
Bleak?  
Some may say.  
I think it's best described as  
Grace  
Glorious wonder  
Sustainer



## Sacraments

*For Michelle Newland*

A young woman  
dies in her mother's arms.  
Past devastation  
and panic,  
Hope flickers.  
No life signs  
for 10 minutes.  
A glimmer remains,  
a bare spark  
which over 20 years  
is fanned into flame  
By love.  
We gather in a church  
named 'Resurrection'  
to celebrate  
a different kind  
of resurrection  
fashioned by  
Faith, hope and love.  
Each person who speaks  
is a living sacrament  
Or awed in their presence.  
'The greatest of these is love'  
from St Paul  
is never more true  
over this time  
that is a loving embrace  
for all privileged  
to be present.  
As the priest prays  
'May the body of Christ  
bring us to eternal life'  
he names  
the wondrous reality  
of our salvation  
so powerfully  
on display.

## Salvation is now

When someone dies  
salvation can become  
a topic of reflection.  
Instead, I think that  
salvation is **now**.  
For me to be saved  
I need to be saved  
from myself:  
My selfishness  
my controlling  
my obsessions  
my lack of compassion  
my lack of love.  
When I am saved  
from myself  
I can more fully  
enter into relationships

with others  
and God.  
That is the work of a **life**.  
This brings the reign of God  
in this life  
and the next.

### **Shine**

On our morning walk  
sea and sky combine  
in their ineffable manner  
to produce  
serenity  
or power.  
Water, still.  
Golden glow  
light shimmers off the sea,  
A study in blues.  
The shine is hint  
to the divine,  
always present,  
sometimes glimpsed.  
The shine can also be seen  
In the rainbow  
with the backdrop  
of clouds, heavy and brooding.  
The shine,  
clue  
to the spiritual food  
present.  
May the shine never wear off.



### **Still burning**

A little volunteering in aged care  
is humbling,  
challenging  
and an enormous privilege.

Marking the start of Lent with them,  
I remind myself and those gathered  
that God loves us  
as we are.  
God has already forgiven us  
but we need to forgive ourselves  
and others  
so that we can move on,  
be our best selves.  
'I needed to hear that'  
said a beatific 99 year old.

As I distribute ashes  
to another elderly woman  
she says 'thank you'  
and flashes me a glowing, slightly cheeky grin.  
I say  
'No, thank *you*'.

Still burning, bright.

## **The beat**

Driven by the wind,  
waves pound the shore  
like clockwork.  
Seabirds  
wheel, swoop, and glide.  
Rocky outcrop  
site of water fountains  
surging into the air.  
The sun and clouds  
collaborate to create  
a glow  
that highlights  
the glory on display.

This wonder, this grace  
isn't for me,  
it is for itself.  
The grace of life

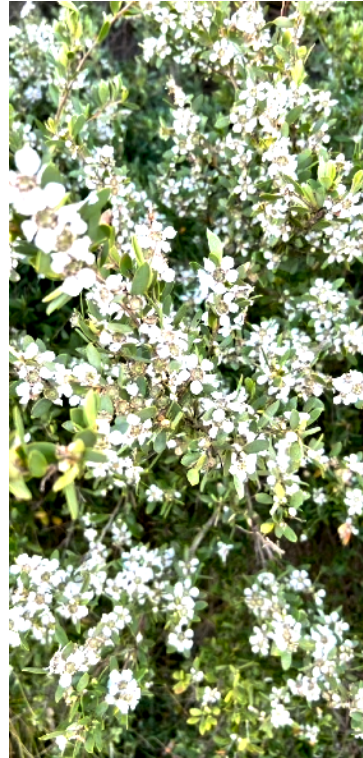
What is my response?  
Appreciation and wonder?  
Apathy?  
Or some kind of valuation?

## **The power of music**

Went to a gig  
With my son.  
Great show  
And the performer helped  
The crowd really get into it.  
More than once  
He said:  
'Thank you for the chance  
To sing for you tonight'.  
That blessing of music  
Cut both ways.  
Communion  
A term of significant theological heft  
Takes many forms.  
A beautiful version  
Was on display  
As the crowd  
Clapped and danced along  
But singing  
In unison,  
Crowd and performer,  
Is precious.  
More precious still  
Sharing this  
With my son.

## **Thisness**

Birds quickly dart  
this way and that,  
Ten or more  
interplay:  
Dodging,  
twirling,  
swooping  
centimetres  
from the ground,  
from the trees,  
from each other,  
joyously alive.  
Majestic trees  
grow up and out.  
Light bark,  
green foliage  
interlink  
to form  
a shady canopy  
from the sun  
and the brilliant blue  
of the sky.  
Don't forget the blue  
of the sea  
on this magnificent  
spring day.  
All just a sliver  
of thisness  
on display:  
Everywhere,  
all of the time.  
Each organism,  
each facet,  
living or not,  
doing what it  
Is supposed to do  
in God's creation.



## **What truly matters**

We thrive  
We flourish  
We nurture  
and are nurtured  
in a milieu of love.  
Like the air we breathe  
love can be taken for granted  
or  
savoured  
revelled in  
appreciated  
as the only gift  
the only grace in life  
truly worth mentioning.  
In love, we live  
and move  
and have our being;  
We are freed  
from our anxiety  
or self-doubt  
to be our true selves  
in glorious daggyness;  
where nothing else matters  
just  
love  
and the way  
it liberates our soul.  
Every drop of love  
should be savoured  
no matter whence it came:  
from an animal  
from a child  
from an adult  
from a friend  
from your beloved  
or the glorious beginning  
of another day  
beckoning us on.

## **A psalm of gratitude**

Loving God there is so much in the world  
For which to give you thanks.

I am so grateful for life  
The wonder of waking each day  
And interacting with other people and the world.  
This life journey I have been on  
Has taught me much - and there is much still to learn.  
Not the least of those being my efforts to be my best self, daily.

I am deeply grateful for the joy and delight of living and loving  
My darling wife and our precious sons.  
I am grateful for the gift of travel  
That has opened me up  
To new ways of being  
as well as natural beauty that has so many different faces.

The grace of my years of ministry  
Encouraging young people to be their best.  
The privilege of working alongside  
So many gifted educators  
Across 41 years.  
Working to make hearts and minds  
More receptive to your presence in their lives.  
The privilege of supporting and journeying with  
young and older through vulnerable moments.

I try to keep my mind and heart open to beauty around me.  
There is so much of which to speak...  
So, in no particular order:

I delight in humanity  
Especially art, music, writing & poetry,  
Drama and spirituality  
Which are humanity's attempts to explore itself and  
Point towards what is true and good.  
I delight in young children  
Who are windows into humanity at its best.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

I marvel at  
The sky with its infinite variations and combinations  
Of blue and grey.  
Whether bright or sombre  
The seemingly infinite variety of clouds  
Along with the reds, pastels and golds  
Of morning and evening  
Portray your majesty and glory.  
Such majesty is heightened  
By the sea which has its own colours and moods.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

I wonder at all of the animals  
Those that are cute  
And others that leave me wondering.  
The variety of insects and spiders  
And other smaller creatures  
That play vital roles in food chains

Whether I know it or not.  
There are also all of the unseen creatures  
Whether they are underground,  
In deep oceans  
Or they are microorganisms.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

Humanity has a headlong desire  
To grow and improve.  
In our hubris, we thought the Earth was just for us.  
We are only just learning about the subtle complexity  
Of the water cycle, carbon cycle, nitrogen cycle  
And the other subtle ways  
That you have helped the Earth sustain itself over millennia.  
Those natural cycles care for us too - without our realising.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

While humans love the sun,  
We need the wind and rain and storms.  
As do the trees, plants and flowers  
In all their shapes, sizes and colours  
That daily perform the miracle of making their own food.  
In their turn they give us the oxygen we need.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

I marvel at the tectonic forces  
At work across and underneath our world.  
Such forces create land and destroy it,  
Giving rise to volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis.  
Such forces change the Earth as we know it  
And have done so for millions of years.  
Then there are the fossils that display  
The jaw-dropping panoply of life over millennia.  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

When I look out and up  
I see the Moon and stars  
Other planets in our solar system  
There is the Milky Way, other galaxies  
Which give rise to unimaginable forces  
In a space so vast it makes one's head spin  
As well as sub-atomic particles.

Humans have learned so much.  
Has our wisdom grown too?

Amidst every thing, you are present  
Thus everything is a sacrament.

For all of this and so much more  
Thank you God whose love suffuses and animates all that is!

# There



## A different sacrament

I returned to  
a spiritual home  
deeply moved...again  
by its memorials  
and stained glass.  
My joy in this place  
took a new level  
upon hearing a concert there.  
Not traditional rituals  
but if a church exists  
to worship God  
this was  
a different sacrament.  
The beauty and grandeur  
of Vivaldi, Bach and Beethoven  
and their celebration of humanity  
played with passion,  
especially the organ  
that turned an emotional experience  
into a visceral one.  
The whole body vibrating:  
God's presence  
With us  
Now.



## Alive!

Walking where there was snow  
A few short weeks ago  
seems to emphasise  
the wonder  
and glory  
of the life on display,  
both in its familiarity  
and its foreign character.

Then it occurs to me  
that I may be meeting  
this tableau  
with an increased sense  
of relaxation  
that is enabling  
a fuller awareness  
of my surroundings.  
Feeling more truly  
myself  
than I have  
in some time.

Swathed by sun and blue sky  
this leaves me  
deeply grateful  
for this double gift.

## Connections



Travel is a great gift:  
Visiting wondrous places  
honouring triumphs and tragedies  
indulging in local cuisine.  
Aside from witnessing  
and celebrating diversity,  
those with whom  
we share our travels  
enrich and amplify the experiences  
and are a unique grace and blessing.  
My best friend and soulmate  
brings her compassion and humour,  
demonstrating what real connections  
look and feel like.

These light up every day together,  
a blessing for which I'm deeply grateful.  
Connections going back nearly 40 years  
brought us to Krakow  
with Gui and Daniel.

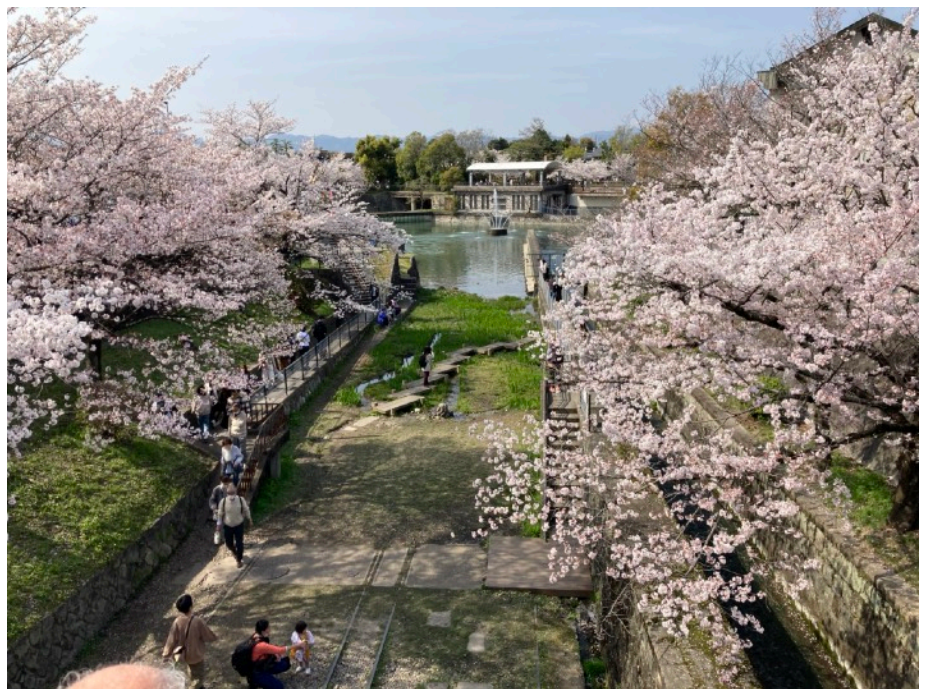
Aside from great company,  
we shared excellent accommodation and food.  
Also the powerful experience  
that is Auschwitz  
and the concert in Berlin,  
all of which were blessings  
that deepened and strengthened our bond.  
Friendship and family were celebrated  
with Richard and Werner.

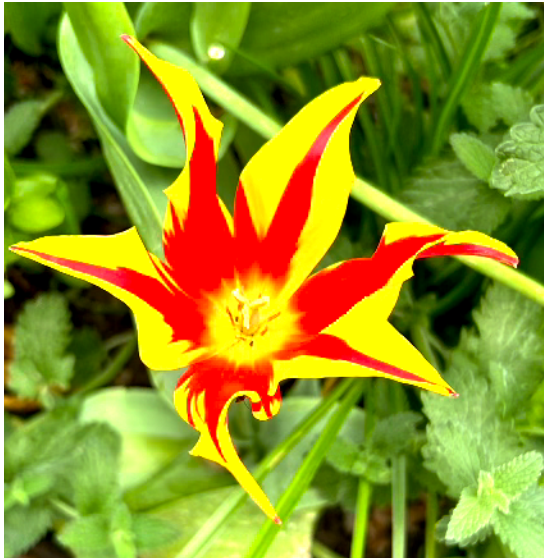
Our conversations,  
the hospitality we enjoyed,  
the generosity shown,  
along with spending time with Erika and Theresa  
again filled our cups with blessings.  
Our cruise experience  
on Viking 'Egdir'  
was made by relationships.

The staff were wonderful  
and looked after us beautifully  
such as Bogy and Karl from Slovenia  
Nemanja from Serbia  
Alvin and Efrem from the Philippines  
and Patrick from Portugal  
along with all of the others  
whose names I forget!

An unexpected blessing of this time  
was our connection with the Gartners:  
Dave, Sharon, Stan and Kay.  
sharing lively conversations  
filled with laughter and faith  
amplified an already-rich time on cruise.

Made in the image of our triune God  
who is love,  
who *is* relationship,  
we're most whole, most alive  
when connected with others.  
Making special moments  
even more so.





Cretaceous - Tertiary boundary

End of dinosaurs

## Fraumunster

Coming to a church  
built in the mid 9th century  
Required of me a radical shift in perspective.  
The highs and lows  
of such a span  
are glimpsed  
in the crypt museum  
with its documents of regal inauguration;  
later the Reformation handover  
as well as the disfigured face of a statue,  
victim of 'iconoclastic fury'.  
For all that  
'a place is holy because  
of those who've prayed there'  
seems very apt.  
This sense of  
grace abounding  
is reflected in  
the windows by Marc Chagall  
that are poetic and mesmerising  
casting a numinous light  
in this place of worship.  
First experienced six years ago  
I was again touched  
by its simple grandeur  
that also honours heritage.



My mother influenced  
my sense of the sacred.  
Living in a different city  
throughout my adult life  
I tried to share  
spiritual experiences such as this with her.  
So it was salutary  
when my love asked me  
If I wanted to but any other gifts  
that I replied through tears  
and quietly  
'Mum'.  
Backwards and forwards  
we are connected  
in spirit  
in time.  
This was the final of many  
such blessings on this trip.

## Heritage

Grace today  
as an older Japanese man  
spoke with passion  
about the details  
of a heritage home.  
Grace, too, that  
we had his undivided attention  
for such a long time.  
Whether it was the garden

and its composition  
or the different vista  
from each room  
everything was deliberate.  
As our time concluded  
I felt blessed and enriched.

### **It has already happened**

My mind cannot fathom  
the depravity  
of all that occurred in  
Auschwitz-Birkenau.  
The casual brutality.  
The lies.  
So I can understand the urge  
to deny it happened.  
It is so hard  
to accept  
the breadth and depth  
of the chilling glacier of facts.  
We can only then agree  
with Auschwitz survivor  
Primo Levi:  
'It happened  
Therefore it can happen again'  
What can we learn?  
If we are to prevent  
this from happening again  
there is no 'us and them',  
only us.  
We are human together  
and we are all  
less  
if we do not all  
accept and live  
this truth.  
Thus we are forced into  
vigilance  
to call out  
the uncomfortable realities  
around us  
that can grow  
in the dark  
if they are not examined  
in the light.  
I must quickly let go  
of annoyance  
and not react to  
perceived slights.  
Fidelity to living  
these powerful lessons  
in humanity  
every day  
is insistent.  
That I am a person of peace  
of acceptance  
of love  
every moment

so I can focus  
on living  
in the light.  
The atrocities were  
against life.  
I can respond by living,  
by embracing life  
in every facet  
and cheering on  
those around me  
whose love, compassion  
and humanity  
make the world  
more like what it should be.

### **Jungfrauoch**

It is a blessing  
to have an affinity  
for beauty in nature.  
This began with my wonder  
at rocks and fossils,  
deepened by  
my geological studies.  
To see Jungfrauoch  
in person  
brought all of that together  
powerfully.  
I was moved to tears  
several times  
at the grandeur  
of the snow and ice  
we can see  
and the glacial processes  
we cannot.  
To see and experience  
snow and glaciers  
in such glory  
from the viewing deck  
then the snowfields  
was wondrous  
despite my body  
battling the altitude.  
As we rested, drinking coffee  
next to the cafeteria window  
the scene stretched out before us.  
As time passed, we watched snowflakes  
float past  
as the clouds  
lowered completely  
providing a fitting closure  
to our time on the mountaintop.  
Underpinning the entire experience,  
deep gratitude.



## Kyoto

Places and times  
can be special  
for different reasons.  
Describing why isn't easy.  
It's about *feeling*.  
Being in Kyoto  
during cherry blossom  
is one such experience.  
Crowds throng  
to 'be there'.  
There is so much  
cherry blossom  
it's like being in  
a cloud,  
a warm hug  
of pinky, white petals.  
It's as if you are  
*floating* in cherry blossom.  
We walked **a lot**  
but the precious memory  
of bathing in the blossom  
will remain  
and bring  
a contented smile.



## Rivers

The river roils  
and swirls  
as we head upstream,  
then down.  
Beaches and banks,  
retaining walls,  
trees and shrubs,  
leaden skies,  
brilliant sunshine  
roll past our window  
as we cruise the Rhine  
then the Main  
and finally the Danube  
from Amsterdam to Budapest.

The river:  
foggy,  
mesmerising,  
the 'strudel' as it passes  
under a bridge  
such as at Regensburg.  
Dark and viscous.  
A bright expanse  
laid out before us.  
Water highway  
for commerce.  
Bringer of dreams  
and nightmares.  
Ageless  
and never the same.

