

The Song Of Matthew
A Verse Rendering
Of
The Gospel According To St. Matthew

By

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About the Text

The text of this work is adapted from “The Song Of Matthew” first appearing in the book *Gospels In Verse, Volume II, A Text Resource for Musicians and Composers* (Xlibris Corporation, www.Xlibris.com). It has been changed as follows:

1. I have attempted to remove from the story all false and sinful condemnations of Jews which have historically contributed to the practice of eliminationist anti-semitism. The crucifixion of Jesus is shown as the assertion of Roman power, with the collusion of certain religious authorities, within the context of a cosmopolitan and polyglot community.
2. The conventional notion that Jesus was followed by a band of twelve men has been modified to include occasional references to women among his followers. Because Judas is often considered to be a personification of the supposed betrayal of Christ by Jews, some references to Judas have been deleted. The group referred to as “disciples” is construed to include both women and men.
3. Narrative which includes masculine pronouns and other gender-specific terms has often been modified to allow interpretation as descriptive of either sex.
4. References to God or Jesus which would favor one form of human government over another, e.g. ‘king’, have often been deleted.

In all other ways I have attempted to create a text for singing that is “congruent” with holy scripture, as advised in *The Book of Common Prayer* (pg. 14). I welcome any suggestions to change the text in accordance with the above guidelines if a reader discovers the need for such alterations.

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The Song Of Matthew

1.

Some ask where Jesus came from, and some others
Have small concern for families and origins.
To suit the pref'rences of either type,
I, Matthew, made a genealogy,
From Abraham to Joseph, spouse of Mary.
It shows us how the line would have descended,
Down through some two and forty generations,
Had Jesus been conceived the usual way.

However, his conception and gestation
May have occurred in quite another way.
Mary, betrothed to Joseph, not cohabiting,
Was claimed to have had congress with an angel.
If you accept this version, then my list
Is not for you, for Joseph does not signify.

Yet, those who search for facts within these mysteries
May trace a lineage by the genealogy.

Certainly, Joseph had refused this baby;
Righteous, unwilling to weather public censure,
He planned to leave them both and start anew;
But then one night, while Joseph slept, an angel
Came and commended the baby to his care.
The angel told him it would be a boy,
The peoples' savior.

They would call him Jesus.

**Because, while I am telling you this story
I often must lay claim to special messengers,
Angels in the night, speaking for God,
Or hermits from the desert, dreaming dreams,
Tradition adding weight to all their stories,
Here I will explain what prophecy is.**

**A man (by custom, nearly always a man)
Withdraws himself from any earthly pleasures,
And seeks thereby to know a purer truth
Without distraction from the body's senses.
There, in some lonely place of high awareness,
He speaks aloud, in words not fully his,
And either writes these words or calls upon
Someone who hears, to write and make a record.
The telling of his speech then travels forth
Across the world, and down through time, to us,
And we perceive this ancient utterance
As a bright declaration made by God
Using the lips and mouth and tongue and voice
Of the hermit, whom we call a prophet.**

**We say the words of prophets come from God,
Not from a priest or scribe or editor.
When we have seen such words writ down before us,
Sustained by study and belief for centuries,
We are prepared to find in things that happen
Proof, that in these words from long ago,**

God tried to tell us what would happen now.

**I, Matthew, sing, how Joseph's dream then came
To verify the ancient prophet's word,
By the obscure certainty of fulfillment,
That a lone virgin would make her a son,
And that this virgin's boy would be God with us.**

**When Joseph woke he found himself persuaded,
Took Mary as his wife, but knew her not,
Named the boy Jesus, as the angel said,
Lest Mary try to give another name;
And if you are inclined to have your list,
Look for another version of my story.**

2.

**Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Judea,
When Herod the Great was king of all that province.
On the night when Mary gave him birth,
Three astrologers came asking at Jerusalem:
"Where is the boy-child, King of all the Jews?
We saw a new star rising in the sky;
And come to pay him homage by the star."**

**When Herod heard, he feared he would be plagued
By supernatural forces, knives, assassins ...
After the many flagons of mulled wine
Heated at his table in lead cauldrons,
Had poisoned his fevered brain, begetting terrors,
Inspiring him to useless fits of violence.**

He called together all his councilors,
And asked, "Where will th'usurper child be born?"
And in their effort to assuage his madness,
They crooned dark prophecies with large conviction,
Claiming the place called Bethlehem, Judea,
*Would spawn for them a king by no means least,
A shepherd and a ruler of the sheep,*
Thus damning with faint praise twice in one verse.

Herod met in secret with th'astrologers,
And learned exactly when the star appeared,
Though this is something he should well have known
Because the star was brightest where he was,
And th'astrologers traveled from afar.

So Herod off to Bethl'em sent the strangers,
Asking them to find the baby there,
And then come back to tell him what they saw,
So he could go and pay his homage, too.
They traced the moving star until it stopped;
They went inside the house where Mary was;
They saw the baby, and were filled with joy.

They knelt and paid their homage, each, with treasure:
Gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,
As Sheba, daught'r of Wisdom, from far shores
Brought myrrh to Sol'mon and bowed down before him.

That night they all three dreamt the same strange dream

Where voices said, Do not return to Herod,
And so they took another road back home.

And Joseph dreamt yet another angel-dream
Where the same voices said, Take wife, take child,
Go into Egypt with them, for a time.
The family woke and vanished in the dark.
They went down into Egypt, and they lived there,
And waited there, until King Herod died.

But Herod, not yet dead, choked on his rage
When he saw th'astrologers had betrayed him.
His throat harbored a cold black fire of bile;
I decree I will not be deposed,
So be condemned all children under two;
So Herod spoke, and so did Bethl'hem suffer;
The Roman soldiers, clad in iron and leather,
Broke through the doors of all the little houses
And killed the infants with their spears and swords.

To us this measure may appear so cruel,
So far beyond the worst of any horror
That nothing can retain it in a memory,
As if my words were written down in water;
But where our reason fails to penetrate
We hear an echo in the ancient prophet:

*A time of wailing and loud lamentation:
As Rachel wept for her lost children, spurning
Consolation, for they were no more.*

Finally, Herod did die, and then the angel
Appeared again to Joseph down in Egypt,
And called him now to bring his family back.

Though Bethlehem, Judea would still suffer
Under Herod's son, called Herod Antipas,
Joseph and Mary, and the youth called Jesus,
Would come back to a village known as Naz'reth,
Way down along the sea of Galilee.

3.

A strange wild man was seen out in the desert,
Eating of bugs and honey, wearing hides.
Stranger still, were crowds of people wand'ring,
Come out from Jerusalem and all Judea,
Under the blazing sun, to hear him cry,
Repent, the kingdom of heav'n is at hand!
The silent shout of verses from Isaiah,

*A voice is crying in the wilderness,
Prepare the way, the Lord is coming soon!*

I wondered, why did all these people gather?
Did they not have other occupations?
This wild man, John the Baptist, was demanding
And not tactful as he pointed out their defects.
They stood there, meekly, all the livelong day,
Waiting to be dipped into the Jordan,
And then go back to all their humdrum lives.
I thought, how is it possible that they,
Bowed down before the weight of constant labor,

Hemmed in by their innumerable, capricious laws:
Religious laws, Roman laws, traditions, local customs,
Above all by the prying eyes of neighbors;
How could these people perpetrate real sins?
Sins worthy of the wrath, the dreadful threats
They sat upon the dirt to hear him thunder:

You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee?
Now try to bear fruit worthy of repentance!
Do not cry out, We are the seed of Abraham -
God begets Abr'am's children on these stones!
The ax is sharp and thirsting for your sap -
Take care that you be fruitful, and be saved,
For those that bear not fruit will feed the flames!
I baptize you with water for repentance,
But one who is more pow'rful will come after
To baptize you with fire and Holy Spirit!
His winnowing fork he'll carry in his hand,
He'll clear the threshing floor, and bag the grain,
And burn the chaff with his unquenchable fire!

This kind of talk the people meekly took -
And more appeared there, every day, to hear it!
One day, with all the others on the gravel,
There sat young Jesus, waiting to be washed,
And John said, "Jesus, you should baptize me!"
But Jesus answered, "Let this be so now,
That each of us might righteousness fulfill."
When Jesus brought his head up from the water,
The Light of God descended like a dove

And lit on him; a voice cried out from heav'n,
"THIS IS MY SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED."

4.

The Spir't of God, the one shaped like a dove,
Led Jesus up into the wilderness,
And left him there, to learn of ghostly things.
For forty days and nights he did not eat.
There, in his fast, a devil came to him.

Now devils are the causes we imagine
For all the things we do to hurt each other.
Some people give them horns and tails and hooves,
But those I've seen look just like you or me.
They try to bargain, off'ring you temptation
Until you pledge to let them take your soul.

First now this tempter offered Jesus pride,
Say'ng, If you are great, then tell these stones
To make themselves into warm loaves of bread.
Jesus answered this with words, for he
Did not take pride in magic, but in teaching.
He said,

*One does not live by bread alone,
But every word that issues from God's mouth.*

Then the great tempter flew them through the air

And found a shaky place for them to sit
Atop the temple, high above Jerusalem.
See'ng that Jesus would respect and understand
Someone adept in calling up allusions,
The devil said, God will command his angels
To catch you if you fall, and lift you up
(As did not I myself just lift you up)
And you will not be dashed against the stones.
Since you are great, and know this, why not jump?
And Jesus answered, so, the devil's voice:

Do not subject the Lord your God to test.

The devil flew them to the highest place
Out on a mountain with expansive views;
They compassed all the kingdoms of the world,
Where every king in every distant palace
Had made his bargain to oppress the poor.
The devil said, All these I now give you
If you fall down and worship here my pow'r.
But Jesus said,

*Be gone! For it is written,
Worship the Lord your God, and God alone.*

So off the devil flew, and other angels
Came, lifted Jesus up, and took him home.

Be mindful of the powers of this world:
For in the story of the three temptations
The devil says that all the earthly kingdoms
Are held in thrall, and yet Jesus refuses;

**So, even to this day, they are the devil's;
And if a king should ever claim to you
That he is sanctified by God to rule,
Stop and be mindful, pride precedes the fall.**

**When Jesus heard that John had been arrested,
Set to be judged by those who have no mercy,
He wanted to avoid incarceration,
And not because he feared the walls of prison,
But knowing that he had from heav'n's kingdom
A charter and a task. So, seeking freedom,
He made a new home in the town Capernaum,
And what Isaiah wrote was thus fulfilled:**

*Where the road runs there along the sea,
Across the Jordan, down by Galilee;
The people who before in darkness dwelt,
Have looked up and beheld a greater light;
They dwelt beneath the shade of their own death,
And now a light has dawned o'er the whole earth.*

**From that time henceforth, Jesus said, as John:
Repent, Repent, the kingdom is at hand!
But by what sign would people see this kingdom?
By his deeds; he gave them, more than flame,
More than blood and wound and retribution,
The image of a fount of living water,
A world made new, bathed in the light of souls.**

**Then one day, walking down along the shore,
Jesus found two companions, Simon and Andrew.**

**They made their living there as fishermen:
As out they threw their net, one at each end,
Then pulled it in again to see their catch.
Jesus declared, *If you two follow me,
I will show you how to fish for people.*
So there they left their net and followed him.
They soon found two more brothers, James and John,
Sitting there by the shore, mending their nets.
When Jesus called, they came and followed him.**

**These four, with Jesus, went through Galilee,
Teaching the people in their study rooms.
Know'ng now what we do of Jesus' history,
You may well ask what skill preceded them:
He had escaped threefold temptation;
Before that, he had known the preacher John;
Was schooled in small-town life, perhaps a trade,
(Tradition says that Joseph was a carpenter),
And agricultural economy;
Because he was a Jew, he studied scripture;
And he spoke well, b and he revered the word.**

**There was a world of meaning in his hands
That found and healed all sickness and affliction.
He was famous ev'n in far off Syria:
Crippled people came from near and far,
Victims of demons, lepers, epileptics;
And soon the noisy crowd of those afflicted
Sat silent in the street throughout the night
Outside his door. So, early in the morning,**

**When he came out, the crowd would be there, waiting
To feel the healing touch of God on earth.**

5.

**Better to be seen and heard, above
The soft, insistent tremor of their voices,
Jesus found a path upon the mountain.
He took his place against the cloudless sky,
And captured thus the crowd's benevolence:**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
They will hold the deed to heav'n's house;
Blessed are the ones who weep and mourn,
For they will find the comfort that they seek;
Blessed are the meek, for they inherit
What the proud possess'd when yet they lived;
Blessed are all those who feed on truth,
They satisfy their hunger and their thirst;
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they
Will see God clearly, when they pass away;
And blessed are the ones who strive for peace,
By this they shall be known as God's own children;
You are blest when you are most reviled,
Accused and persecuted in my place,
And great will your reward be up in heav'n,
As great as what the prophets knew before you.*

**Because I, Matthew, am a decent person,
I know that decent folk obey the law;
I therefore seek to reassure you, reader,**

**That Jesus was not lawless, but believed,
Instructing all who heard and saw his work,
Gentile and Jew: we should obey the law.**

**So now before I tell the many stories
About the deeds of Jesus and his foll'wers,
I give you his interpretations here
Of laws that govern people in community,
Or should so govern, if we follow him.**

**In this regard my record is more useful
Than many other books which do not mention
Communities and churches of his followers;
But rather, they presume, as Jesus told us,
That he would die, and come back from the dead,
And then would come the end of history.**

**If this is how things really came to pass,
(And who among us can assure they haven't?)
Then we would not have churches in his name.
I hope that if I mention this dilemma
I am not sowing tares of righteous anger
Among the grain stalks whitening in the field.**

*"You are the salt that seasons earthly things;
If salt has lost its taste, what can restore it?
Just as spoiled salt is trampled underfoot,
So would you find your being crushed and lost
If you tried to be what you are not.
You cannot be a thing without a spirit:*

*Just so, the world is dark without your light.
A city on a hill cannot be hid;
You cannot hide your lamp beneath a basket,
So put it on a stand where we can see it,
And let your light so shine before all others
That they may see your works, and give God glory."*

*"I have not come to rid the world of laws,
Or cast aspersions on the words of prophets.
I come not to abolish, but fulfill.
Before the heav'n and earth all pass away,
Not one word, nor letter, nor one stroke
Will wear or fade from off the written scroll;
Nor will one deed of any righteous soul
Escape God's eye, till scripture is fulfilled.
Therefore, who breaks the least of these commandments
And teaches others how to do the same,
Will be a stain upon the floor of Heav'n;
They who obey the law in everything
Will hold the highest place of those on high;
Yet, they who seek eternal life must be
More righteous than enforcers of the law."*

*"From ancient times we have professed a law:
You shall not murder, or you may be judged.
But here I say that wheth'r or not you kill,
You will be judged for nursing anger's thirst.
If you have marked a broth'r or sister's faults,
Studying insults, barbing them, as fools,
You too are liable for the fires of hell.*

*Now as you offer up your gift to God,
Recall the strains that discord may apply.
Leave there your gift, before the Lord, and go,
And reconcile yourself with those you loathe;
Then come and give without a troubled mind."*

*"If it were easy to refrain from straying,
We would not need commandments to forbid it.
Many are they who praise themselves within
For not yet quite completing their desires.
But now I say to you that every one
Who begs free lust to flourish, breaks the law.
It's better if you cut your member off
Than sin with it and be sent whole to hell."*

*"As it is flesh in marriage makes the bond,
So it is flesh betrayed that breaks it too;
And if the husband seeks another cause
For claiming his divorce is justified
Than the perversity of his own burge'ning pride,
He makes a sacrament of his convenience,
To force his own wife into adultery."*

*"Again, from ancient times we have been told
To carry out the vows we make to God.
But I say, Better make no oath at all,
Neither by the heav'n whereon God sits,
Nor by the earth, where God may deign to tread,
Nor by these earthly cities, spires and palaces.
And do not swear an oath upon your head:*

*You cannot make your own hair black or white.
I advise, say "Yes" or "No," and mean it;
And any more assurance is the devil's."*

*"'Tis said when we are injured we can take
Eyes for eyes and teeth for teeth in payment.
I say, do not avenge the one who strikes you;
But turn your cheek and let him strike again.
And if he takes the coat off of your back,
Then give your cloak as well to keep him warm.
And if by force he makes you go one mile,
By choice you should continue one mile more.
Be grateful for the ones who beg from you -
Give freely what you have to those who ask."*

*"Many are the righteous who believe
That we should love our friends and hate our foes,
And now the whole world follows this belief.
Except that now we make the world anew:
Now love your en'mies as you love your friends,
And pray for any one who persecutes you.
For you and I, and friends, and enemies,
We are all children of a loving God,
Who makes the sun to rise on everyone,
And sends rain on the righteous and the sinful.
If you love only those who love you back,
What credit is it for your loving nature?
Tax collectors love their friends this way.
And if you love and care for your own family,
Is this attachment, then, a greater virtue?"*

*Our blood will favor those of our own blood.
The perfect virtue of a perfect person
Loves all God's children just as God loves us."*

6.

*"I say beware of practicing your piety
In such a way that others give you credit;
For you may strive to flaunt your generosity,
But in your afterlife get no reward.
So do not sound the trumpet when you give,
As hypocrites before the congregation;
That brassy knell is all that they will hear
Now and hereafter. When you give your alms,
Let not the left hand wait upon the right;
So see that you your alms may do in secret,
And God, who sees in secret, will reward you."*

*"You should be wary of your piety
If you are drawn to practice before others
An incremental portrait of devotion.
The hypocrites so love to stand and pray
In courtyards and on corners of the street;
They raise their voices, banishing reflection,
Like boys on whom their mothers love to dote.
I say that in their lust to gratify
Their hunger to be recognized for praying,
They have received God's answer. When you pray,
Go into your room and shut the door,*

*Pray to your Father silently, in secret,
And when you pray do not heap empty phrases,
Climbing the pile of words to be near Heav'n,
For God knows what you need before you ask it.
So say, Our Father, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom comes, and may your will be done,
Here on the earth, as it may be in heav'n.
Give us this day our daily bread to eat,
Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors,
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
But rescue and deliver us from evil."*

*"When you fast, wear not a dismal face,
As if to show that pain inside your gut
Reserves a higher chair at God's long table.
When you fast, put oil on your head,
Wash your face and keep your visage calm.
Your Father knows in secret what you do,
And will reward you with a heav'nly food."*

*"Lay you not up on earth your worldly goods,
Where moth and rust consume and thieves will steal,
But store up for yourself a heav'nly treasure,
Where neither moth nor rust nor thief can go.
Where this your treasure is, your heart will follow."*

*"The eye's a lamp that shines into the body.
The healthy eye will bring the body light;
Yet darkness flows through eyes that have no health.
If light that lives inside of you is darkness,*

Think on how deep, how dark this darkness is!"

*"Nowhere is there a slave can serve two masters,
But must love one and so despise the other.
So must you choose between wealth and your God."*

*"I tell you, do not fret about your life,
Wherefrom will come your food and what you drink,
Or how your naked body finds its clothing.
Is not your life more than your food and drink?
Is not your body more than what it wears?
Consider the birds, flying across the sky:
They neither sow nor reap nor gather sheaves,
And yet your heav'nly Father finds their food.
So, are you not of greater worth than they?
And can your worry add a single hour
To stretch the span of life that God appoints?
Consider the lilies, flow'ring in the field:
They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you
That even Solomon in all his glory
Was not as glorious as the least of these.
If God so clothes the grasses of the field,
Which are alive today and dead tomorrow,
Will He not clothe you, you of little faith?
Therefore do not antagonize and struggle,
For God knows that you need all of these things.
Strive first for God, and for God's righteousness,
And what you need to wear and eat will find you.
And do not worry what will come tomorrow;
Tomorrow will bring worries of its own,*

And evils met today are quite sufficient."

7.

*"Judge not, that you may not be judged by others,
And by your standard measured with their eyes.
The trial you give them, later you will know,
And circumstance may find you a worse residue.
How can you, in the chamber of your mind
Truly assess another as yourself?
The speck that flaws your neighbor's enterprise
Looms larger than the log that flaws your own,
Yet you are driven to expunge that speck,
As if your broom could sweep the heav'n on high!
You hypocrite! First drag away your beam,
And then perhaps see clearly to that speck."*

*"We know what holy is, and what it's not.
Do not despoil your holy things with dogs,
Nor throw your sacred pearls before the swine;
For dogs will turn and maul you for your gift,
And swine the precious trample under foot."*

*"Only for what you ask will you be giv'n;
What you search for, that is what you find;
If you knock, the door will open to you:
Persistence in all cases is your friend.
If your child asks you for a loaf of bread,
Would you instead for your child find a stone?
If your child asks you for a fish to eat,
Would you instead for your child find a snake?"*

*Even evildoers, (which you are),
Know well enough to give a child good things,
And how much more will God above in heav'n
Give all good things to those who ask for them."*

*"Strive in all things, not to do to others
Anything you would not have done to you.
So say all the laws and all the prophets."*

*"Many the souls who take the higher way
Leading to destruction and damnation.
The gate to hell is wide, the road is easy.
A narrow gate to paradise leads in;
The road is hard, and there are few who walk it;
Adversity the beacon on their path."*

*"Beware false prophets lurking by in ambush,
Rav'nous wolves bedeck't with wool of sheep.
Always, you will know them by their fruits:
For grapes are never gathered from a hawthorn,
Nor from a thistle can you pluck a fig.
Of trees, 'tis said that some are sweet, some bitter,
But no tree bears its fruit both good and bad."*

*"Not everyone who cries aloud, 'Lord, Lord,'
Will enter heav'n's door when the judgment comes.
So many on that day will lay their claim!
From long rehearsal they themselves lamented,
'Did we not prophesy and cast out demons?
Did we not deeds of power in your name?'*

*Alas, I do not know them in their pride
They have themselves rejected all the same."*

*"So, if you hear these words and do likewise,
You will build up your house upon a rock.
The rain may fall, the flood may roar and pound,
The wind may blow and beat against your door,
But this, the house you built, will never fall
Because it has been founded on a rock.
If you hear me, but match not word with deed,
You build your house upon a spit of sand:
When the storm comes, your house will never stand."*

**So did Jesus from the mount conclude,
Fulfilling the commandments and the law,
Not written in a scroll, or cut in stone,
But spoken out before the common folk,
In words that every one could understand:
Every word, that they might hear and do,
According to the dictate of their hearts.
He cared for them as the shepherd of their souls,
Not as the scribes, the keepers of the scrolls.**

**It may not make a difference whose law
Prevails among the Jews: the Pentateuch,
Or this new covenant that Jesus gave us.
The Romans are our masters now, and they
Have laws enough to tell us what to do,
And not to do, and power to enforce them.**

But I believe our Roman conquerors,
Drawn to a destiny we cannot know,
Will sick'n and die betimes as their corruption
Burns and eats them slowly from within.

Their ways are not the same as Jewish folk:
They use their human chattel as an instrument
In manners that we Jews would never do.
I am told, in Herculaneum,
Among the villas of the very wealthy,
Are cisterns holding water from the mountains,
Where Romans take their aged slaves and servants
Before they die, to chain them in the water,
There to languish, food for captive lampreys,
Because the flavor of these worms, so fed,
Cooked and served whole at choice disports and banquets,
Is thought to transcend every delicacy.

They use their human chattel as an instrument,
As after battle they will march the soldiers
Of the defeated armies, each beneath the bar,
A spear held fixed and low over the path,
Where, if they do not bow, they are all killed.

O God of Israel, if you have a name,
May you O God not exercise your will
To let your chosen people do such things
To any human being, liv'ng or dead.
And when we pass beyond the rule of Romans,
Then let us love the law that's best for us

And let it lead us so to do God's will.

Down at the very bottom of their being,
These Romans worship death; and all aspire
To power over life, by force or guile.
Down the long succession of command,
From emperor to lowly legionary,
Each one preserves the right to kill the next,
Which masquerades as justice when applied.

And that decree, sent out by Caes'r Augustus,
That all the world should pay a Roman tax,
Subverts the souls God gave us into numbers,
Mere marks and specks flung 'cross a Roman grid;
So, for their purpose, we are only increments
Of pow'r expressed, and future revenue,
Not souls unique and born to live forever.
And all our worldly mortal government,
Priests or scribe or Pharisee, forsook
Whatever moral stature they yet had,
When they permitted Roman governors
To duplicate their tithe and so oppress us.

But Jesus does not beckon with a sword,
Exhorting us to thirst for blood from enemies,
And revel in his pow'r to take a life.
His hands reach out to heal us, every one.
He glorifies our lives by giving life,
And fears no death, and does not look for glory,
But manifests the living will of God

By his redeeming each of us our sins,
And proving for us immortality,
Not merely as a province of our fantasies,
Or as a salve for aging emperors,
But as the birthright of a child of God.

No more are we or Romans meant to die
Crushed by the cold machinery of heav'n
Here in a world where dictates of the Gods
Are fixed, and there will never be redemption.

8.

A great crowd followed Jesus down the hill.
Suddenly, a leper blocked the path;
He knelt and said, Lord, heal me if you choose.
Jesus touched him, saying, *I do choose;*
And then the leper's ravaged skin was clean.
Jesus told the leper, *Keep this secret,*
Do not tell the people how I healed you;
Go, and show yourself to all th' authorities,
Offer them the gift Moses commanded,
But do not claim, in my behalf, new pow'rs.

Now as I start to tell how Jesus healed them,
Looking at what he did, and what they did,
There is a limit to my comprehension.
In this case, I now find my thoughts arrested
By his instruction that the deed be secret.

Healing a repulsive skin disease

Amid a watching crowd of postulants,
Then saying to the healed man, Do not tell:
What is the purpose of this exhortation?

Jesus asked the people from the mountain
To let their lights shine brightly in this world
And not to hide their lamps beneath their baskets.
Lord, help us to complete our understanding:
We have arrived through prayer and meditation
At such a quiet, inner place, and see
The very sacred and the very sinful
Now shine like faces of a common coin,
Yet dimly, through a screen of secrecy,
And many are the souls who hoard them both.

When Jesus came back to Capernaum
A Roman soldier met him in the street,
Say'ng, Lord, come now, my servant is at home,
Paralyzed, and in terrible distress.
Jesus said, *Then I will come and cure him.*

The soldier, a centurion, answered him,
O Lord, my home is not a worthy place
To house you. May you only speak your word,
And I am sure my servant will be healed.
Like you, I am accustomed to authority,
The soldiers under me will come and go,
And the slaves will obey me. Speak your word.

When Jesus heard this speech he was amazed.

**He turned and said to those who followed him,
No one in Israel has shown me such faith!
The gentiles come from everywhere on earth,
To share in heav'n's kingdom with our fathers,
While all the heirs who should have joined the banquet
Will be thrown off, into the outer darkness,
To weep and wail and gnash and grind their teeth.
Then, turning to the Roman, Jesus said,
Let it be done according to your faith,
And the man's slave was healed within the hour.**

**Then Jesus came to Peter's mother-in-law,
Who lay in bed with fever, and he touched her,
And the fever left her, and she served him;
They brought him many people wracked with demons.
He cast out spir'its and comforted the sick,
And so fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy,
*He took away our ills and our diseases.***

**So, with his healing hands, Jesus established
A different way of understanding health,
Because he made afflictions and diseases
Gone, as if in fact they'd never been;
Ended, once and for all, as in a vision
Of a sick world made healthy by God's will;
Healing, not as a private benefit,
Or payment for observance of the law,
But healing free to every human soul:
Slaves, gentiles, lepers, tax collectors,
Approaching him with faith, asking for help.**

And had the healed ones told abroad their miracles,
Would they not then be keeping death alive,
Even the memory of their own diseases,
Which were no more, if God's will would be done?

The next day, they were standing by the water,
And Jesus, wanting to escape the crowd,
Said, *'Cross the water we should sail away.*
I saw this as a kind of understanding
That with his pow'r to summon human life,
Came pow'r to master human death also.

So, when they came and reassured him, Teacher,
I will follow wheresoe'er you go;
Jesus told them, *Foxes dig their holes,*
Even the bird of the air has built a nest;
The Son of Man may nowhere lay his head.
From this remark I hear, I understand,
"I will not rest, not even when I die."

When one of his disciples said to him,
Before I follow you across the water,
Please, let me first go back and bury my father,
And Jesus told
him, *No, now follow me,*
Let the dead go and bury their own dead,
By this I think he meant that all of us,
In deeds of faith, must choose and show
If we are of the living, or the dying.

When all of them had gathered in the boat,
And they were sailing out across the sea,
A windstorm came and lifted up the waves,
So that the water splashed about their feet.
And Jesus was asleep up in the stern,
But they awoke him, saying, We will drown!
He rebuked the winds, the rising waves,
Until around them everything was calm.
They were amazed, and said, What man is this
That even winds and seas obey his words?

And when the boat touched on the distant shore,
Out on the sand, they found a field of tombs.
Two wild and pitiful men lived in the black
Shadows of the stark white sepulchres;
They were alone, and all the people shunned them.
And suddenly, these men shouted, Who are you?

And demons wailed out of the wild men's throats,
Son of God, what will you do with us?
You want to torture us before our time?
Now a large herd of swine was feeding there.
The demons said, Now cast us from this flesh,
But send us into yonder herd of swine.

So Jesus sent the demons from the men
Into the swine, and suddenly the herd
Rushed down the bank and jumped into the sea,
Where they all perished. And the swineherds ran

Into the town nearby, telling their tale.

Then the whole town came to see this Jesus,
And, when they saw him, begged that he would leave,
Fearing that he was prince of all the devils.

And so I think it is always, with miracles:
The common folk will hear, and leave their houses,
Drawn by the chance of seeing a new thing,
But in their hearts, before the eyes of neighbors,
Fearing the strange, the captivating other,
They bend and search to find a likely stone,
An arc of stones, first one, then three, then many,
A hail of death, raining, down from the sky.

9.

Jesus and his company of fisherfolk
Chose not to die among the Gerasenes,
But crossed the sea again, back to Capernaum.

Their time had come to challenge and refute
The self-appointed guardians of virtue
Whom God had chosen to transact his will,
Austere enforcers of the Roman code,
Who saw in Jesus' fundamental difference
A force disintegrating and rebellious,
Offensive to the one who has no name,
And so presumptive of the heav'nly will.

Some people brought a man upon a bed.
The man was paralyzed and lay quite still.

Jesus, seeing their faith in all his gifts,
Said, *Find your strength, your sins are all forgiven.*
But there were those nearby, who heard him say this,
And said among themselves, *This man blasphemes.*

Jesus read their inner thought, and asked,
Why do you think this evil in your hearts?
Which do you think is easier to say?
"Your sin's forgiv'n" or "Stand up and walk"?
So that you all may know I have this pow'r,
I will now take the harder path with him.
So say'ng, Jesus turned and healed the man,
Say'ng, *Stand up, take up your bed and walk.*
The man stood up and went back to his home.
All the people saw this, and were awed,
Glorifying Jesus' healing powers.

From my own booth, I, Matthew, the tax collector
Came out, and followed Jesus to his home.
And as we sat at dinner in the ev'ning
Many tax collectors came and ate there:
Outcasts, and people of bad reputation.
Th'authorities condemned us, and they asked:
"Why does Jesus befriend all these bad people?"

But Jesus answered, *People who are well*
Do not need to visit a physician.
As those who suffer illness come to doctors,
These people look for mercy on their sins;
And as physicians strive to heal the sick,

I come to help the sinner, not the righteous.

**John the Baptist's foll'wers came to Jesus
And put to him a question about fasting:
Why do the righteous fast both day and night,
While you and your disciples do not fast?**

*Jesus said, As wedding guests should feast,
Not mourn, while they the bridegroom entertain,
So should these people have their joy with me,
Before the day comes when I will be taken,
And then may they all fast and mourn at will.*

*No one takes a patch of unshrunk cloth
And uses it to fix a worn out cloak.
For the shrinking cloth will pull away
Leaving a bigger tear than what there was.
New wine is not put into old wineskins
For they burst, and then the wine is spilt.
Rather put new wine into new wineskins.*

*I am something new under the sun.
To suit the need they have for knowing me
We should all make the law's observance new,
And so preserve the law, and all my teaching.*

**As Jesus said these things to John's disciples,
A man with influence and learning came;
He knelt, and said, My daughter has just died,
But if you come and touch her, she will live.**

Not minding that the scribes had claimed before
That he blasphemed when he forgave a sin,
But seeking to help this man in his distress,
Jesus stood up, and went to see this girl,
To work through her his pow'r o'er life and death.

On his way, a woman crept behind him;
The woman had been bleeding for twelve years.
She told herself, If only I can touch
The frayed edge of his cloak, I will be healed.
Jesus turned, and seeing her, he said,
Take heart, your faith has made you well again.
And instantly the woman was made well.

When Jesus came to where the sick girl was,
He heard the flutes and instruments make mourning.
People were gath'ring there to keen and wail,
And he cried out above the crowd's commotion,
Go away, this girl is only sleeping!
They laughed at him, but then they went away.

Inside the house, Jesus clasped the girl's hand:
Her eyelids fluttered open, and she woke.

He left her house, and walked along the street;
Two blind men heard him, and they cried aloud,
Have mercy on us, Son of David, please!
They followed Jesus, noisily, to his house;
They came inside, and Jesus said to them:

Do you believe that I can make you see?

Yes, Lord, they said. And so he touched their eyes,
And said, *By faith now let this deed be done,*
And then their eyes were opened, and they saw.
And Jesus sternly told them, *Tell no one.*
But they left him and praised him in the street.

Lord help me to complete my understanding:
If I had spent my life with darkened eyes,
And by the touch of Jesus was made new,
Except through means of some transcendent grace,
How could I even know what a thing was
If I but saw it, and I did not know
How all my other sense would apprehend it?
So as the light of day chastised their souls,
Reflected glory so consumed their being,
They could not hear or understand his words;
So neither of them heard his prohibition,
But told the truth as well as they could know it.

Then some people brought to him a mute,
Whom they believed was silenced by a demon,
For when Jesus had cast the demon out,
The mute spoke clearly. People were amazed,
Saying, Israel never saw the like.

I think that what these people said was true,
And since in both their origin and consequence
His healings had no precedent for them,
Th' authorities claimed Jesus was a demon;

**They said he had such power over demons
That the lord of darkness must be in him.**

**E'en if these small overlords believed this
Honestly, and not from jealous spite,
That Jesus was the evil one incarnate,
It swelled their own importance as his foes;
As likewise they would lose their influence
If they acknowledged him the Son of Man.
Sour men, why was it such an easy task
To see the prince of darkness as a man
Walking amongst them, healing with his hands,
And not believe he was their God made flesh?**

**Then Jesus went to all the nearby cities;
He taught the people in their study rooms,
Proclaimed to them the good news of the kingdom,
And cured them of diseases and afflictions.
And when he saw the crowds, he had compassion,
Walking through their midst with arms outstretched,
For they were like lost sheep without a shepherd,
Blinded by their own weakness, and defenseless.**

**To nurture them, he said to his disciples,
*Though they are numbered like the stalks of grain,
Few labor for a harvest of such plenty,
Therefore let us ask our heav'nly Husband
Send us laborers to reap this bounty.***

10.

**Jesus then summoned to him his disciples.
He taught them how to banish unclean spirits,
To cast out devil, sickness, and affliction,
And then he gave his power to these twelve:
Simon Peter and his brother Andrew,
James and John the sons of Zebedee,
Philip, Thomas and Bartholomew,
Simon the Cananaean, also Matthew,
James, Thaddaeus, and last, Judas Iscariot.**

**These he sent out with his own instruction:
*Go you nowhere out among the Gentiles,
Nor enter any town of the Samaritans,
But find the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
Proclaim that heav'n's kingdom now comes near!
All you will cure the sick and cleanse the leper,
And cast out demons, and revive the dead.
As I have giv'n these gifts without your payment,
So shall you freely give your gifts to them;
Take not their gold, nor silv'r or copper coin.
Carry no bag, nor clothes, sandals or staff;
For your labors, ask for your daily bread;
Whatever town or village you may enter,
Find out who is worthy, and stay there.***

***Greet the people wheresoe'er you enter,
And let your peace descend upon their heads,
And if they prove not worthy, turn away,
Shake off their dust as you tread out their door
And on the day of judgment they will know***

Worse than what fell on Sodom and Gomorrah.

*For I am sending you out now, like sheep,
Into the midst of cruel hungry wolves.
Be wise as serpents, innocent as doves;
Beware of them, for they will tie and chain you
To judge and flog you in their marketplaces,
Drag you before their governors and kings,
And make example for both Jew and Gentile.*

*But when they hand you over, do not search
For what to say, or how to preach your word;
God is with you and God forms your speech;
It is not you who speaks in time of trial,
The Spirit of your Father speaks through you.
A brother gives his brother to the sword,
Father and mothers will betray their children,
And children have their parents put to death.*

Everyone will hate you for my name.

*Endure until the end - you will be saved
To flee one persecution for another -
Yet, truly, you will not see every town
Before the Son of Man comes to redeem you.
Disciples are not ranked above their teachers,
Nor does the master serve the household slave;
Enough that they resemble one another,
Teacher and disciple, slave and master.
Now see, Beelzebul they call the master,*

Much more they will malign those of his household.

*Have no fear of those who seek to hurt you,
For that which is concealed will soon be open.
What I say in the dark, you tell in light,
What I whisper, you shout from the housetops;
They kill the flesh but cannot kill the soul,
So do not fear them. Rather fear the one
Inside you, who can kill both soul and body.
Two sparrows may be sold for just a penny,
And yet not one of them will fall to earth
Without your Father marking where they fell.
So every hair on every head is counted:
So do not be afraid, you have more value
Than hairs or sparrows to your loving Father.*

*Watch there to see who testifies for me:
For those who openly acknowledge me
I also will acknowledge up in heav'n;
But if they stubbornly deny my name,
I also will deny with like persistence.
And do not think that I bring peace on earth,
For I come not in peace, but with a sword.
I will set a man against his father,
I will set a daughter against her mother,
A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
I will make enemies of households;
And if you love your family more than me,
Then you are not worthy of my service;
If you love your children more than me,*

*Then you are not worthy of my service;
Whoever does not meet the needs of others,
Whatever needs, is not worthy of me;
For those who think they recognize their life,
And seek to find it, they will surely lose it;
While those who know not what their life will be,
But lose themselves for my sake, they will find it.*

*Whoever welcomes you, this one knows me,
Knowing me as the one who sent me here.
They welcome prophets in the name of prophets,
And so receive a prophet's just reward.
Regardless of the depth of their belief,
If they can welcome you as righteous people,
They will receive the fruits of righteousness.
And if their hospitality is small,
Cold water for a child in your name,
Then, none of them will lose their just reward.*

11.

**Jesus himself went out among the people,
Teaching and proclaiming the good news.
John, in his prison, heard of Jesus' teaching,
And sent his messengers to speak to him.
Are you the one who is to come, they asked,
Or are we still in search of our salvation?**

**Jesus asked, *What do you hear and see?*
*The blind receive their sight, lame people walk,
Lepers are cleansed, the deaf their ears unstop,***

*Even the dead are raised again to life,
And good news fills the ears of all the poor.
So now to John I say, Blest be the one
Who hears this and takes no offense at me.*

Jesus spoke of John then, to the crowd:
*Why did you go forth into that wilderness?
To hear the sound of reeds against the wind?
What did you search, out walking in the desert?
A prince or kinglet, preening in soft robes?
They wear soft robes up in their royal palaces,
But not, I think, out on the desert sand.*

*I think that you were looking for a prophet.
Yes, and more. You sought to find some truth,
And did, for John brought you near to fulfillment
The one of whom 'tis written,*

See my messenger,

*Who will prepare the way before I come.
Among those born of woman, I tell you,
None has been greater than John Baptist is,
And since he came, there has been war in heav'n.*

*The violent seek to take God's house by force;
Prophets and the law prevailed till John came,
And now if you are willing to accept him,
He is Elijah, the one who is to come.
Let anyone with ears to hear this, listen.*

To what can I compare this generation?

*They are like children sitting in the marketplace,
Calling to the crowd and one another:*

*“We played the flute, and yet you did not dance;
We cried and wailed, and yet you did not mourn.”*

*For when John came he did himself deny
He neither ate nor drank, but sparingly,
And so they said, He is possess'd by devils!
And when the Son of Man came after him,
Eating and drinking as he pleased, with sinners,
They said, Now see, a glutton and a drunkard!
Nothing that we do can please them now,
And wisdom's vindicated by her deeds.*

**And then, as Jesus thought about the cities
Where he had healed and raised folk from the dead,
He reproached all the people living there
Because they saw but they repented not.**

*“Woe unto you, O Chorazin, Bethsaida,
For if the deeds of mercy done for you
Instead had been vouchsafed on Tyre and Sidon,
All of them would wear sackcloth and ashes,
And so when judgment comes, then you will pay.
Will Capernaum be lifted up to heav'n?
Never, she will slide into the pit!
I say now, if my deeds of pow'r were done
In Sodom, it would last until today!
Even so, you cities, in that judgment
Sodom would fare better than yourselves.*

Then Jesus said a prayer of thanks to God:

*I thank you, Father, Lord of heav'n and earth,
For you have hidden all these holy things
From the wise and the intelligent
And have instead revealed them to the children.
Father, such has been your gracious will,
All things have now been handed down to me,
No one knows the Son except the Father,
And no one knows the Father but the Son,
And those to whom the Son reveals the Father.*

*I say come unto me all you that toil,
Come now you weary, you with heavy burdens,
Come unto me and I will give you rest,
Take my new task upon you, learn from me,
For I am gentle and my heart is humble,
And you will find some comfort for your souls,
My task is easy, and your burden light.*

12.

**Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath.
His disciples followed. They were hungry,
And there they plucked and ate the heads of grain.
And when th'authorities beheld them eating,
They said, This is not lawful on the sabbath.**

**Then Jesus said, You know what David did
When he and his companions needed food?
They ate the bread of presence in the temple,
Which was against the law, except for th'authorities.**

*You know that in the temple these authorities
May break the law and still are not found guilty.*

*And if you say, This field is not our temple,
I tell you, as I stand amid the grain,
That I am something greater than the temple;
That if your pow'rs obeyed what my law tells us,
That we should offer mercy and not sacrifice,
Then you would not so quick condemn the guiltless.
The Son of Man is lord of all the sabbath
And those who follow him uphold the law.*

**Then Jesus went and joined the gathering.
There was a man who had a withered hand.
Th'authorities approached him and accused him,
"Can you now cure this man, here, on the sabbath?"**

*Jesus answered, Suppose you had a sheep,
Only one sheep, that fell into a pit
During the sabbath: would you lift it out?
So how much more of value in your law
Is any human being, than a sheep?*

**He said then to the man, Stretch out your hand!
He stretched it out, and Jesus healed him then:
One hand was just as healthy as the other hand.
Silenced, the scribes and overlords went out,
And they conspired to hurt the Son of Man.**

Everywhere he went the crowds were waiting,

**And every one who came there to be healed,
All of them, were cured and went their way,
And still he ordered them to keep it secret.**

The verses of Isaiah were fulfilled:

*Here is my servant, one that I have chosen,
My Belov'd, with whom I am well pleased;
I will put my spirit in his mouth
And he will offer justice to the Gentiles;
He raises not his voice nor cries aloud,
And will not make a tumult in the streets.
My servant will not break a bruised reed,
Nor quench a smoldering wick, until he brings
The victory of justice to God's children,
And in his name the Gentiles will see hope.*

**Then they brought Jesus a demoniac,
One whom the devil had made blind and mute.
At Jesus' touch, the man could speak and see.
The people in the crowd were all amazed,
Asking, Can Jesus be the Son of David?
But the authorities claimed yet again
That Jesus was in legion with Beelzebul.**

*Jesus said, A kingdom against itself,
A city or a house against itself,
So divided, each of these will fall.
If Satan casts out Satan, so is he
Against himself, and so his kingdom falls.
And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul*

*Then who do your own exorcists employ?
The Spirit of God within me drives them out,
And the kingdom of God now comes to you.*

*If I would plunder someone's property
First I would take care to bind the master.
If you are not for me, you are against me,
Yet, if against me, I can still forgive you
Every sin and blasphemy save one:
Whoever speaks against the Son of Man
Will be forgiv'n this if they so confess;
But those who speak against the Holy Spirit
Will never find forgiveness in this age,
Nor in all ages till the end of time.*

*Good trees may yield good fruit, and bad trees bad,
But can a viper offer me a blessing?
The mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart,
This fullness good or evil will reveal,
So see your utterance before you,
And judge yourself what careless words you utter.
For when you come at last to hear your judgment
For careless or for mindful words you said,
You will be judged as worthy, or condemned.*

**Watchful, th'authorities then sought a sign,
To prove that Jesus was the Son of God.**

*O evil and adulterous age! he said,
You have no sign except the prophet Jonah,*

*The one who was three days and nights held fast
There in the belly of the giant fish;
For so the Son of Man will be enclosed
For three days in the belly of the earth,
There in that place that stands outside of time.
The people of the city Nineveh
Will rise up and protest this generation,
Just as they wore their ash when Jonah came,
But you do not repent the Son of Man,
Though you have treated him far worse than what
They did to him for all his disobedience.
The Queen of Sheba also will condemn you
Because she came here from the end of earth
To listen to the wisdom of King Solomon,
And greater things than Solomon are here!*

*You have all seen me drive forth unclean spirits:
Now when such spirits leave a person's heart,
They wander out across the desert waste,
Searching for their rest. When they find none,
Then the unclean spirits shout abroad:
"We return to our house, whence we came."
The house they find is empty, swept, in order,
So off the unclean spirits go, and rally
Seven other spirits yet more evil;
Together they move back into the house
(Which is the person's thirst for some salvation);
And so that person's heart becomes at last
Yet more corrupted than it was at first;
And so with ev'ry evil generation.*

There, while he spoke, his mother and brother came.

They stood apart, and sent a message in,

That they were waiting there to speak to him.

Jesus did not go out, but asked the messenger,

Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?

And pointing to his followers he said,

Here are my mother and my brothers also,

For they who do my Heav'nly Father's will

Are all I need of family, here on earth.

13.

Jesus sat beside the sea, in the sunshine;

Such a great crowd had gathered on the shore,

He waded out and jumped aboard a boat

To tell this parable across the water,

While the crowd stayed and listened on the beach.

A sower went to plant, and seeds were scattered:

Some fell on the path, where birds would eat them;

Some fell by the rocks, and found scant soil;

They sprang up quickly, for they were not buried,

But the sun came and burned the sprouts away;

Some fell amid the thorns and vines, and choked;

Yet some fell on good soil, and grew apace,

And brought a harvest of a hundred fold.

Let anyone with ears attend my story.

His disciples stopped him here and asked:

Why do you speak the truth, but in these parables?

*Jesus said to them, You know my secrets,
But in this crowd such knowledge is not found.
For you, the ones who have, yet more will be,
But they who know but little, will know less,
And what they know will be forgot in time.*

I speak in parables to fulfill Isaiah:

*They will listen, never understanding;
They will look, and never yet perceive;
A people hard and fast against persuasion,
Their ears are blocked, and they have shut their eyes.
Their eyes are not for searching out the truth;
Their ears are not for listening; yet should they
Turn with understanding in their hearts,
They would see and hear, and I would heal them.*

*Blessed are your eyes, they search and see;
Blessed your ears, for listening and hearing.
The multitude of prophets and the righteous
Have longed to see and hear what you now know.*

*Who hears my word and does not understand it,
The devil comes and steals away the seed,
Snatches away the seed sown in his heart:
This is where the seeds fell on the path.*

*Who hears my word and burns at first with joy
May see the flame of their excitement vanish
When their belief engenders opposition:
This is where the seeds fell on the rocks.*

*Who hears my word but then lets earthly cares,
The lure of wealth, or yoke of family duty,
Choke and starve the word so it yields nothing:
This is where the seeds fell 'mongst the thorns.*

*Who hears my word and understands it well,
And gives it room to flourish in the heart
And then bears fruit and yields a bounteous harvest:
This is where the seed falls on good soil.*

*A farmer sowed his seeds out in a field
When everybody slept, his enemy came,
Sowing weeds among the wheat, and fleeing
Into the night, unseen by anyone.
The plants came up with weeds and wheat together.
The farmer's slaves said, Master did you sow
Good seed and bad together in this field?
An enemy has done this, says the farmer.
Shall we master, then, remove the weeds?
In doing this you would uproot the wheat.
Let the weeds and wheat grow up together,
And at harvest time, instruct the reapers,
Collect the weeds, and bind and burn them first,
Then gather all the wheat into the barn.
So shall their souls be brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*I am the one who sows the seeds of wheat.
The good seeds are the children of humility,
Each choking weed a child of human pride;*

*The enemy who sows them is the devil.
The harvest is the end of all the ages,
And they who reap and burn are heav'n's angels.
These angels cut and bind from all the earth
All cause of sin, and fruit of sin, and sin,
And throw this arrogant harvest on the fire,
Where vaunts and vices crackle in the coals,
While all the righteous souls will shine like suns
And beacons in the kingdom of the Father.
Let anyone with ears now hear me speak!*

*If someone sowed a little mustard seed,
And tended it till it became a tree,
So big the birds would nest among its branches,
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*And if a woman took a little yeast
And mixed it in with water, oil and flour
Three measures full, and all of it was leavened,
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*And if a man found a treasure in a field,
And in his joy sold everything he had,
And then he went and bought himself the field,
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*And if a merchant sought the finest pearl,
Found and acquired it, recking not the price,
Selling all he owned could he but have it,
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*And if a net caught every kind of fish,
The fishermen would sort the fish they caught,
Putting the good fish here, the bad ones there,
So will it be when comes the end of ages,
And angels sort the prideful from the righteous;
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

*All of these parables fulfill the prophet:
My mouth speaks, and my voice proclaims the truth
Hid from the foundation of the world.
So also are we brought to heav'n's kingdom.*

**Jesus said, *Have you understood all this?*
And when they answered "Yes," he said to them,
*So, if a wealthy man brought forth his treasure,
And showed you what is new and what is old,
Then would he be like those who are most holy,
Trained in truth to enter heav'n's kingdom.***

**Then Jesus came back home to Nazareth,
The little town where he was born and raised,
Known as the son of Joseph and of Mary.
And there he told the people what he thought.
They were all astounded, and they said,
Where did this Jesus grow so wise and powerful?**

**Isn't he the same, the workman's son?
His mother is the one that we called Mary,
His brothers James and Joseph, Simon, Judas.**

Don't his sisters live right here in town?
Where did this man get all these ideas?
And very soon they took offense at him,
And he said, *Here the prophet has no honor.*
And in that town his deeds of power withheld,
Because they would persist in unbelief.

14.

The son of the Herod who had seen the star,
Herod Antipas, soon got word of Jesus,
And he in fear confessed to all his servants,
That John the Baptist was raised from the dead,
And worked his pow'rs again in Jesus' body.
The Tetrarch's slaves, like many humble people
Followed and believed in Jesus' teaching.

The folk called Herod Tetrarch, for the Romans
Divided the province Judea into four
Giving him a quarter to rule over,
There where his father had ruled over all.
They had called his father King of the Jews,
But this was a mere fiction of the Romans,
Who found this scion of an Idumean line
The likeliest of puppets for enforcing
Roman interests in this troublous province.

Herod Antipas took his brother's wife,
Herodias, and married her himself.

In the desert John had told the people,
Herod breaks the law to take this woman!
Herod had wanted to put John to death,
But feared the crowd, because John was a prophet.
So Herod had arrested John and bound him,
Concealed in prison, so he could not speak.

But when Herod's birthday came, Herodias
Had her own daughter dance before the feast.
The motion of her arms and legs, her languor,
So inflamed the fading lust of Herod
He promised to her whatsoever she asked.
Herodias then prompted her to say:
"Cut off John's head and put it on a platter."
Herod was grieved, yet must he keep his oath,
To cultivate respect among his people,
And so commanded that the deed be done.

John's head was sever'd in the cell below,
Brought on a platter, and giv'n to the girl,
Who made a present of it to her mother.
John's disciples came and took the body,
Buried it, and then brought word to Jesus.

When Jesus heard about the death of John,
He went off in a boat just by himself.
He thought about the crowd that went with John
Out to the desert, enraptured by his voice,
Carried away to senselessness by fervor
Like Romans at a Bacchanalia,

Chasing a hairy god, seeking deliverance;
Not drawn by heated flesh and drunkenness,
But by the power, by the stark austerity;
See'ng visions of revenge instead of coitus.
Even as Jordan's waters had clasped them in,
And they emerged, all flushed with readiness
For world and god and everything renewed,
They hungered for a dry crust of fulfillment
And thirsted on spare sand for something more.

Then came Jesus, so placid, deep in thought,
Healing the sick, and asking for their faith.

They saw his boat go by, and quickly followed it,
Threading between the pebbles, pools and scarps.
He looked up, saw them run, and came ashore;
Having compassion on them in their sickness,
Their yearning for an advocate, their poverty;
And he healed them.

In the evening, his disciples
Came and said to him, This lonely place
Has no food. The hour is getting late.
Send the crowd now off into the villages,
So they can buy some bread and feed themselves.
But Jesus said, *They need not go away.*
You can give them what they need to eat.

But they replied, We don't have any food,
Five loaves, two fish: and this is all there is.

And Jesus told them, *Bring the food to me.*

**Then he sat the crowd down on the grass,
He took the loaves and fish and looked toward heav'n,
He blest and broke the loaves and fish in pieces;
And his disciples passed them to the crowd,
And everybody ate till they were filled.
When the disciples took up what was left,
They gathered up twelve baskets full of pieces.
Five loaves, two fish had fed five thousand men
And several thousand wives and children too.**

**Jesus put his disciples on the boat,
Telling them to sail across the lake.
Then, after he had sent the crowd away,
He went out on the mountainside to pray.
There in the dark he lay, face down, alone.**

**Out on the sea the boat was swamped in waves,
Far from the land, the wind rose up against it.
Before dawn, in the twilight, Jesus came
Walking toward them 'cross the heaving sea.
When they saw him walking on the water,
They cried in terror that he must be a ghost.
The voice of Jesus called out over the din,
Saying, *Take heart now! Do not be afraid!***

**Peter answered, Lord, if this is your voice,
Tell me to come with you out on the water.
Jesus said, *Come.* So Peter left the boat,**

And stepped across the waves to Jesus' side.
But then, when Peter felt again the wind,
He cow'ed and shrank. Down in his legs did go,
And lifting up his hands he cried, Lord save me!
And Jesus caught him by the hand and said,
O you of little faith! Why do you doubt?

And then they got together on the deck,
And the wind ceased, and everything was calm,
And all of his disciples worshiped him,
Saying, Jesus, you are the Son of God.

At dawn they came to Gennesaret's strand
Where the people already knew of Jesus,
And they sent the word of his arrival there
To all the nearby houses and the villages.
And the people brought him all the sick,
That they might touch his garment, hem or fringe,
And all who came and touched him, they were healed.

15.

The sanctuary police then sent Jesus
A delegation from Jerusalem,
Asking, Why do your disciples break
The laws, and the traditions of our elders?
For they do not wash hands before they eat.

And Jesus answered, *Why do you yourselves
Break your own law to favor your tradition?
For God says you should honor father and mother,*

*Yet your tradition says you may withhold
Support from father and mother, so to give
More to enrich the temple's treasury,
Telling them God has the greater need.
So to bloat your vain and sumptuous ritual,
You snatch bread from the mouths of aged souls
And take your pride of place among the faithful.
You hypocrites! Isaiah said to watch for you,
They who do me honor with their lips,
But set their hearts on things so far from me;
In vain they proffer praises with their vanities;
As if their pride and precepts were my doctrines.*

**He called the crowd in closer, speaking low:
Listen and understand me when I say
What goes into your mouth cannot defile you;
What comes out of your mouth defiles your spirit.**

**The magistrates took great offense at words
Which contradicted all their dietary laws;
And the people wanted to defend Jesus,
But Jesus begged them to avoid the judges,
Letting them pass in safety to their homes.**

**He told the crowd, You know my heav'nly Father
Has planted seeds in many of your souls,
And will uproot the ones he has not planted.
Therefore, leave these sharp sentinels alone;
For when they cite their laws and hover o'er me,
They are like blind men, guided by the blind.**

*Regardless which of them might lead the way,
All of them will end down in the pit.*

Peter said, Explain this parable.

Jesus answered, *Don't you understand?*

What goes inside your mouth will pass your gut,

And out of you it goes into the sewer.

But what comes from your mouth, comes from the heart,

The heart, the origin of all defilement.

From the heart comes every artful plan,

Adultery and theft and fornication,

From the heart comes murder, lie and slander;

These are what defile a person's soul;

To eat with unwashed hands does not defile.

Then Jesus went away, to Tyre and Sidon,

And there a foreign woman shouted, Lord,

Have mercy on me and my little daughter,

For here she is tormented by a demon.

Jesus did not answer, and seeing this,

His disciples said, Send her away,

All day she follows us, shouting your name.

So Jesus answered her, *I'm sent to heal*

Only the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But the woman came and knelt before him,

Saying, Lord, help me. And again he answered,

It is not fair or just to starve the children

By casting their food out, so to feed the dogs.

And she said, Yet, Lord, even hungry dogs
Eat the crumbs from off their master's table.

Jesus answered, *Woman, great is your faith!*
Your daughter now is healed as you have asked!

How clear is Jesus in his understanding
Of limits to the God he felt within him;
And in the woman's call for charity,
Her selflessness in caring for her daughter,
Her limitless expanse of open love!
There is no better way of showing him
The human and divine are intermingled;
How flesh, which first had stifled Jesus' spirit,
Took up the energy of love to heal.

Jesus looked out along the sea, and found
A place to sit, high on the mountain side.
The crowds brought forth the lame, the maimed, the blind,
The mute, and those possess't, and many more,
They put them at his feet, and he laid hands on them,
And all were cured, so the crowd was amazed,
And they all felt the world was made anew.

Then Jesus called up his disciples to him,
Saying, *I have compassion for this crowd,*
Three days and nights they have been here with me;
And now I cannot send them back home, hungry.
And the disciples said, This is the desert!
Where can we find the food for such a crowd?

Jesus asked them, *How many loaves are there?*
They said, *Seven, and a few small fish.*

He made the people all sit on the ground,
And, taking the food, he offered thanks to heav'n,
Broke the loaves and fish, and offered them,
And all of them ate, and they all were filled,
And they took up the broken pieces later,
Seven baskets full of bread and fish.
Four thousand men were fed out in the desert,
The women and children there were even more.
Jesus sent the crowd away, and left,
Heading for the country Magadan.

16.

Then came again the sanctuary police,
Telling Jesus to show a sign from heav'n.

He said, *When it is evening, don't you say:*
"We will have fair weather. The sky is red."
And when you see the sky is red at sunrise,
Don't you say, "The red sky threatens storms."
You make interpretations of the skies,
But cannot read the signs of your own times.
An corrupt and adulterous generation
Asks for signs to prove the Son of Man,
But no sign will be given save the fish
Where Jonah for three nights and days was held.

Then his disciples came to hector him

Complaining they did not have any bread.

*Jesus said, Watch out, beware the yeast
The dietary police would offer you.
They were puzzled, saying to one another,
“Is it because we have forgot our bread?”
But Jesus said, O you of little faith,
Why do you care if you forgot your bread?
Don't you remember, five loaves fed five thousand?
And then sev'n loaves fed four thousand more?
Why do you still fail to see the truth?
I did not speak of leaven, or of bread,
But of their teachings and hypocrisies.*

**Then they came to Caesarea Philippi,
And Jesus asked them, What do people say?
Who is the Son of Man? They answered him,
Some say you're John the Baptist, others Elijah,
Or Jeremiah, or another prophet.**

But you, who do you say I am?

**Peter said, You are our true salvation,
And you are the Son of the Living God.**

*And Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah!
You did not learn of this from flesh and blood!
But now my Father in heav'n has revealed it,
And you, Petrus, you will be the rock
Whereon the Son of Man will build his church,*

*The gates of hell will not prevail against it.
I give you now the keys of heav'n's kingdom.
Whatever you bind on earth, 'tis bound in heav'n;
Whatever you free on earth, 'tis loosed in heav'n;
And now I order all of you forbidden
From speaking words of this to any others.*

**From that time on, Jesus would foretell
That soon he must go to Jerusalem,
To suffer at the hands of fawning pow'rs,
Those captive supplicants of shield and sword,
The surrogates of Rome; with nail and spear
Be killed, and on the third day, raised again.**

**Now Peter, hearing this, took him aside,
Saying to Jesus, Lord, forbid these things;
But Jesus turned and said to Peter, No,
Get behind me, Satan, speak not so,
For now you are a stumbling block to me,
You speak of human things and not divine.**

**Then Jesus said to all of his disciples,
If any of you choose to be with me,
Deny yourself, prepare to die, and follow.
For those who want to save their life will lose it,
And those who lose it for my sake will find it.
What would it profit you to gain the world,
If in so doing you would lose your soul?
And what return would you expect to get,
If you gave up your self, for any sake?**

*I tell you now, the Son of Man will come
With angels, in the glory of his Father.
He will make recompense for what's been done,
As truly as I tell you, here and now,
That some are standing, who will not taste death
Before they see the Son of Man arrive.*

17.

Six days later, Peter, James and John
Walked out on the mountainside with Jesus.
There they saw Jesus new, he was transfigured,
And his face was shining like the sun,
And the robe he wore shone like the moon.

Suddenly they saw Moses and Elijah;
Prophets were speaking to the Son of Man.
Then Peter said to Jesus, It is good,
We are here with you, and I can make
Dwellings for you and Moses and Elijah.

And then a bright shape covered the whole sky,
And a great voice surrounded them, and said,
THIS IS MY SON, THIS IS MY BELOVED,
I AM WELL PLEASED, LISTEN TO MY SON.

They fell down on their faces, filled with fear,
But Jesus touched them, saying, *Rise, fear not.*
They looked and now saw Jesus, all alone,
His face and robe as they had been before;
And then they came back down the mountainside.

Jesus said, *Tell no one of this vision,*
Until I have been raised up from the dead.
They asked, **why did Elijah come to visit us?**
Jesus said, **speaking of John the Baptist,**
Elijah comes and first restores all things.
But if Elijah had already come,
Th'authorities would never recognize him,
And they would do with him just as they pleased.
And so the Son of Man will also suffer
When their soldiers will take him away.

As these four then returned to Galilee,
There came a man who knelt in front of Jesus,
And he said, Lord, have mercy on my son,
For see, he suffers terrible great seizures,
And when they come he falls into the fire,
Or in the water; where he is, he falls,
And your disciples' healing power failed him.
Jesus said, *O you faithless and perverse,*
How much longer must I hear your plea?
Bring the poor child here to me for healing.
And Jesus took the demon out of him.

When his followers came to him and asked
Why could we not cast the demon out?
Jesus said, *Because you have no faith.*
If your faith were small as a mustard seed,
Yet it was genuine and planted there secure,
You could say to the mountain standing here,
Move from here to there, and it would move,

And there is nothing that you could not do.

Before they left there, Jesus said, again,
The Son of Man is going to be betrayed,
Human hands will take and flay and kill him,
And on the third day he will rise again.
And the disciples wept to hear these things.

When they arrived back at Capernaum,
The tax collectors came and spoke to Peter,
Say'ng, Does Jesus pay the temple tax?
He does, said Peter. But when Jesus came,
He asked of Peter, knowing what he'd said,
From whom do kings of earth take toil or tribute?
Do they ask for such payment from their children?
Then Peter said, No, Lord, they take from others.

Jesus said, *The children then are free.*
We have no need to pay a temple tax;
However, lest we give offense to them,
Go now, down to the shore, and cast a hook;
Haul in the first fish that the hook brings up;
Open its mouth, and you will find a coin;
Then, give this coin to them for you and me.

18.

Some disciples came to him and asked
Who is the greatest one in Heav'n's Kingdom?
Jesus called a child to stand among them,
Saying, *You must all become like children,*

*Or you will not enter the heav'n's kingdom.
This child's humility will rule o'er heav'n;
For, those who now are last, will there be first.
And the one who welcomes in my name
One so innocent, also welcomes me.*

*And likewise, if you place a stumbling block
Before the feet of any little ones,
Then it would be better if you wore
A great millstone, fastened around your neck,
And then you jumped and drowned in the great sea.*

*Woe to the world with all its stumbling blocks!
And though we all know we may trip sometime,
Woe to them who put these blocks before us.
If it is your foot that makes you stumble,
Then cut it off. Better to have one foot
Than walk with two into eternal fire.
And if it is your eye that makes you stumble,
Then tear it out. Better to have one eye
Than see with two the flames of your damnation.*

*Do not despise the smallest of these children,
For each child has an angel up in heav'n
Who sees the face of God at ev'ry instant.
And if a shepherd has a hundred sheep,
And one of them is lost, doesn't the shepherd
Leave the ninety-nine to find the one?
And when he finds it, truly, I tell you,
He rejoices more at finding just that one*

*Than for the ninety-nine who did not stray;
For God's will is that every one be found.*

*From this may we be taught to speak with them
With whom we share our love in a community.
When brother or sister work their sin against you;
Tell your grievance to them privately.
If they listen, you regain their trust.
If they don't, then go and speak again,
Taking one or two along to witness,
So that what you say may be confirmed;
And if they still refuse to hear your words,
Tell your grievance to the whole assembly,
And if they still refuse to hear the church,
Let them be to you as Gentiles are,
Or as a tax collector (Asking yourselves
In prayer, whether God so means for you
To love this person more or love him less?)*

*For what you bind on earth is bound in heav'n,
What you loose on earth is loosed in heav'n,
And if you find agreement here on earth,
For anything you ask, it will be done,
By my Father who is up in heav'n.
Where two or three are gathered in my name,
They will all know that I am there among them.*

*Peter, fond of counting, asked of Jesus,
Dear Lord, if my brother sins against me,
How many sins should I then forgive him?*

**Should I forgive him up to seven times?
And Jesus said to him, *Not seven, Peter;
Not seventy-seven times; nor even seventy
Times seven times, would be enough.***

*Let me tell a story about forgiveness:
A king had reached his day of reckoning
With all the slaves who served him in his palace.
The first slave owed the king ten thousand talents,
But he could not pay, so the king said,
Let this slave be sold to make the payment,
Together with his wife and all their children,
And all of their possessions and their cattle.
But then the slave fell on his knees before him,
Saying, Have patience, I will pay it all!
Then pity moved the king to stop the sale,
And he forgave the slave all of his debt.*

*But that same slave went out and came upon
Another slave who owed him still some money.
Seizing him by the throat, he screamed, Now pay!
The other slave fell down and begged the first,
Pleading, Have patience, I will pay it all,
But pity did not move the angry slave,
Who had the other slave thrown into prison.*

*When all the other slaves saw what had happened,
They told the king about the first slave's hardness,
And so the king said to this slave again,
You wicked slave, I pitied and forgave you,*

*Because you begged and pleaded for my mercy;
So, could you not show mercy to this other,
As I showed mercy when you came to me?
And then the king, in anger, had him banished,
Until he found a way to pay his debt;
So will my heav'nly Father banish you,
If you cannot find a way to answer him,
And do not so forgive your brother's debt,,
From your heart, when he begs your forgiveness.*

19.

Jesus departed Galilee and went
Across the Jordan, down into Judea.
He was traveling towards Jerusalem.
Large crowds had gathered wheresoe'er he went,
So he preached and taught and cured the sick.

Th'authorities came, and set for him a test:
They asked him if he thought that it was lawful
That men divorce their wives for any cause.
He answered, *You have read, in the beginning
He made them male and female and then said
The man should leave his father and his mother,
And join his wife. These two become one flesh.
So then they are no longer two, but one:
What god has joined, let no one tear asunder.*

But here the law's interpreters asked him,
Why then did Moses tell us husbands how
To make certificates and divorce our wives?

Jesus said, *Because you are hard-hearted,*
Moses allowed you to divorce your wives.
But you know, before Moses, it was not so.
Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity,
And marries another, he commits adultery.

His male disciples said, *If this is true,*
It's better if a man would never marry.
But Jesus said, *Not everyone can do this,*
But only those who can avoid adultery.
You can learn by thinking of the eunuchs:
There are eunuchs who were born this way,
And eunuchs made this way by others' hands,
And eunuchs who have chastened so themselves
That they may better enter heav'n's kingdom;
I say to you, accept this if you can.

Then some people brought their little children
So he might lay his hands on them and pray,
And his disciples ordered them away,
But Jesus said, *Let little children come to me,*
Heav'n's kingdom is theirs, most of all,
And he laid his hands on them and prayed.

Then a young man from a wealthy house
Came to him and said, O teacher, tell me
What good deeds will let me live forever?
(The young man thought his wealth could be transformed
By deeds, into a spiritual treasure,
And so proclaim his family's good fortune.)

*I can't tell you what is good, said Jesus,
Only God in heav'n knows what's good;
But if you wish to find eternal life,
Keep the commandments, and you probably will.*

Which commandments? asked the wealthy youth.

*Do not murder, nor cheat on your wife,
Do not steal, do not bear false witness,
Honor your father and your mother also,
In all things, love your neighbor as yourself.*

**I have kept all these, the young man said,
So will I enter now, eternal life?**

*Now, said Jesus, if you seek perfection,
Go and auction all of your possessions,
Then give all of your money to the poor,
And you will have great treasure up in heav'n,
So come, and follow me, and we will go there.*

**When the young man heard these words, he left
Downhearted, for he owned so many things,
And he could not imagine owning nothing;
And Jesus said to his disciples, See,
The rich will suffer passing heav'n's gate.
See how a camel laden with its packs
Is caught and stuck within the needle's eye;
So do these mortal goods obstruct the passage**

*Of all the wealthy into heav'n's kingdom.
Who then can be saved, Lord? they all cried.
Jesus said, For mortals, it's impossible,
But ask of God, and everything is possible.*

*And Peter said, O Lord, we have left everything,
We followed you. So, what then will we have?
Jesus said, When all things are renewed,
And I am sitting on the throne of glory,
Each of you saints will sit upon a throne,
Judging over all the tribes of Israel,
And everyone who left the world behind,
Houses, families, children, fields and cattle,
All of these forsook, for my name's sake,
Will be returned a hundredfold and more,
And all of these inherit life eternal,
And the first on earth will then be last,
And the last on earth will then be first.*

20.

*To help them all envision what would be,
Along the dusty road, outside Jerusalem,
He gave a parable to his disciples:
Who will come in with me to heav'n's kingdom?*

*Once there was a man who owned a vineyard.
Early in the morning he went out
To hire the workers who would pick his grapes,
And they agreed upon the daily wage.*

*Later in the morning, he went out,
And saw more workers standing in the marketplace,
And said, You go, and if you start right now
I will pay you all the daily wage.*

*And the man went out again at noon,
And in the afternoon went out twice more;
Every time he found more standing there,
Idle, because they had not yet been hired.*

*When evening came, the man said to his manager,
Give the laborers their daily wage,
Start with the last and then go to the first,
Every one of them is paid the same.*

*But when the laborers who started first
Received their pay, they grumbled and complained,
Because they thought they would receive more money,
And said, these workers only worked one hour
And yet you paid them just the same as us.*

*The man said, Friend, I have not cheated you.
We agreed on what the wage should be.
Take what you have coming, and then go.
I choose to give these others the same wage;
Do you envy them my open purse?
Just so, the last on earth will then be first,
And those who now are first will then be last.*

As Jesus kept the road into Jerusalem,

**One day he took the twelve off by themselves,
And said to them, *Now you hear what will happen:*
The Son of Man will be betrayed and taken
The Roman judge will sentence him to death.
Then they will hand him over to their soldiers,
Broken and mocked, flogged and crucified.
*In three days he will rise up from the dead.***

**Then came to him the moth'r of James and John,
Who with her sons knelt by him, asking favor.
She said, O Lord, declare that when these two
Come into this your kingdom, they will sit,
One at your left hand, and one at your right.**

**Jesus said, *You know not what you ask.*
Can you drink the cup that I will drink?
And they both said to him, Yes Lord, we can,
And he said, *Yes, you will drink from my cup,*
But sitting at my right hand or my left,
This is not a favor I can grant,
*But is prepared for those my Father chooses.***

**When the others heard this, they were angry,
But Jesus said, *You know the Gentiles' kings*
Are lords and tyrants over all their subjects,
But it will not be so amongst you twelve.
The man who would be king must be a servant.
As I came not to vanquish, but to serve,
*So let my life be ransom for these many.***

As they were leaving Jericho one day,
There were two blind men there beside the road;
And when they heard his people passing by,
They shouted, Lord, have mercy on us here!
Jesus stopped and stood and spoke to them,
What would you have me do, to help you here?
And they said, Lord, please, let our eyes be opened.
Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes:
At once they saw, and so they followed him.

21.

When they had reached the outskirts of Jerusalem,
Jesus sent two followers ahead,
Telling them to go into a village,
Looking for a donkey and her colt,
*Take them away and bring them here, to me,
If anyone tries to stop you, answer them,
The Lord needs these, and they will let you go.*

So the disciples did as he instructed,
They brought him up the donkey and the colt,
They threw their cloaks across the donkey's back
And sat him so the people could all see him.
A crowd of people came and lined the street,
Spreading their cloaks across the fractured stone,
Cutting leaves and branches from the trees,
Waving them in the air, shouting and singing,
Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David,
Blest be the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest heav'n!

The word of his arrival spread like fire,
Till the whole city buzzed with expectation,
Threats of intervention, glimpses of turmoil,
Strangers in crowds announcing to each other:
The prophet Jesus comes from Galilee!

Jesus led the crowd into the temple
Driving before them all the moneychangers.
He overturned their tables and their seats,
Until the galleries were bare of commerce,
And as the merchants fled across the plaza
He called after, crying, *It is written,*

*My house shall be called a house of prayer,
But you are making it a den of thieves.*

Then he and his disciples made a place
Inside the temple, where the blind and lame
Came in crowds there, to be touched and healed.
The cries of children calling out, Hosanna,
Hosanna to the Son of David, rang
And echoed up among the mighty pillars,
Where clouds of incense carried shafts of light;
And as th'obsequious magistrates heard these cries,
Clustered in corners, whispering, enraged,
Filled with a rising sense of dislocation,
They asked, Do you hear what these people say?
Jesus said, *Yes, and may it be fulfilled,*

*Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants,
I have prepared these praises for myself.*

So saying, Jesus left Jerusalem
And spent the night nearby at Bethany.
And as he was returning in the morning,
He stopped to eat some figs from off a tree.
But there were no figs on it, only leaves,
And Jesus cursed the tree, and said to it
May no fruit ever come from you again!
And the fig tree withered at his voice.

So his followers were all amazed,
To see the fig tree wither when he spoke,
But Jesus answered them, *If you have faith,*
Not only will you wither trees like this,
But even if you tell the mountains, Fly
And throw yourselves down yonder in the sea!
All these things will your Father do for you,
If you but ask in prayer, with faith, from him.

And once again they went into the temple
And found a place to gather folk and heal.
The sanctuary police approached and spoke to him:
Who gave you the authority to do this?

Jesus answered their request by saying:
John the Baptist was himself baptized:
By what authority did water wash his sin?
Did the cleansing come from heav'n down,
Or from the human hands that washed him clean?

And they went off and argued with themselves:

If it's from heav'n, then he'll likely say
Why then did you not believe his teaching?
And if we say his gift was merely human,
Then the crowd will surely turn against us
For all of them believe John was a prophet.
And so they answered Jesus, We don't know.
And so he said to them, *I will not say*
By what authority I heal and preach to them.

Jesus told his challengers a parable:

A man had two sons, and he told the first,
Go and labor in the fields today.
The first son answered, No, but later did;
The father told the second son, Go also,
He said, Sir, I go, but then went not.
Which son carried out his father's will?

The argumentative ones all said, The first.

I say, no matter how you keep the law,
And measure your observance by your goods,
The tax collectors and the prostitutes
Will enter heav'n's kingdom long before you.
For John came down the path of righteousness,
And you did not believe him when he cried,
I am a voice out in the wilderness,
But all those people whom you scorn and shun,
They believed him, and they begged for mercy,
And even after you had seen all this,
You did not change your minds and find belief.

*So listen to another parable,
Which may yet help you with your unbelief:
There was a man who planted him a vineyard,
He built a fence, a winepress, and a watchtow'r.
He leased it to some tenants and went off.*

*At harvest he sent slaves to take some produce:
But the tenants would not pay their rent,
They beat and stoned and killed the master's slaves,
So he sent more slaves in, more than before,
And the tenants beat and killed them too;
And finally he sent his son to them,
Thinking to inspire obedience,
But when the tenants saw the son, they said
Let us kill him, and get his inheritance;
They seized the son and threw him out and killed him.*

*Now when the owner of the vineyard comes,
What will he do with them, his murd'rous tenants?*

**His listeners answered, He will kill those wretches,
And lease his vineyard then to other tenants
Who will pay their share at harvest time.**

*And Jesus said, The scripture is fulfilled,
The one stone that the builders first rejected,
Has now become the building's cornerstone;
This stone will break all them who fall upon it,
And it will crush the one on whom it falls;*

*And so, God's kingdom now is taken from you
Just as the vineyard's taken from those murderers,
And giv'n to those who will produce good fruits
And share them with the master of the vineyard.*

**And as th'authorities came to understand
That Jesus spoke of them, their anger grew,
And they foresaw the day they would arrest him,
And then imprison him for blasphemy.
But, fearing the crowd, who loved him, they did not.**

22.

**Jesus thinking he had this audience captive
Sought to exploit the ready opportunity,
By teaching them another violent parable,
Reaching beyond these Roman instruments
Who did not understand his teaching yet.**

*Once there was a king who had a son
For whom he had prepared a wedding banquet.
He sent out slaves to call on all the guests
But those he had invited would not come.
So he sent other slaves, who advertised:
The dinner is prepared, the oxen slaughtered,
Fat calves and all delights await you there,
Come now help us celebrate the wedding!
But all these subjects whom he had invited
Made light of their refusal and went off,
One to his farm, another to his business;
People seized the slaves, and beat, and killed them.*

*The king, enraged, now sent them out his army,
Destroyed the murderers and burned their city;
Then he said to all his surviving slaves,
The wedding feast is still prepared, and waiting.
Those whom I asked at first have proved unworthy.
Go therefore now, into the city's streets;
Ask everyone you find there to the banquet.*

*And so the slaves went out into the streets.
They gathered all they found there, good and bad,
And soon the wedding hall was filled with guests.
And when the king came in, he saw a man
Unlike the others, with no wedding robe.
When the king asked the man about his robe,
The man was speechless. So the king declared,
Bind this man, hand and foot, and throw him out,
Let him cry in the dark and gnash his teeth.
For many are called, yet but few are chosen.*

**Then th'authorities sought to find a way
To lead Jesus into seditious speech:
So, cloaking their request in deference,
They said, Because you are sincere in teaching
The way of God according to the truth,
And do not seek to counsel partiality
For power, wealth, position, or any cause,
Tell us if you think that it is lawful
To pay tax to the Roman emperor.**

But Jesus could discern their secret malice,
And said, *Since you are making me a test,*
Show me the coin you use to pay the tax.
They brought him a denarius and he said,
Whose head is on this coin, and whose the title?
They said, *It is the emperor's face, and title.*
So Jesus said, *Give therefore to the emperor*
What is his, and to God what is God's.
The magistrates conceded, and they left him.

Then th'authorities came again to test him.
They posed a problem: *Moses gives a law*
That if a man dies childless, then his brother
Shall wed his widow and raise up the children.
So, if there happened to be such a man
Who had six brothers, and they all died childless,
Each leaves the selfsame widow, who herself
Then dies. Now when they meet in heav'n,
Whose wife of the sev'n shall she then be?

You're wrong both in the letter and the spirit,
For when these peoples' souls are resurrected,
They neither marry, nor are giv'n in marriage;
Then they are all like angels up in heav'n.
And you can't deny the resurrection,
For long ago did not God say to you,
I am the God of Abraham and Isaac,
And the God of Jacob, yet these three,
Are still alive in more than memory,
For he is God of the living, not the dead.

**When Jesus had so silenced all the keepers
Of the law, they chose from out their number
A lawyer, who set forth this final test:
Which commandment, teacher, is the greatest?**

*Love the lord your God with all your heart,
With all your soul, and with all your mind.
This is the first, and the greatest commandment.
And the second is like it: Love your neighbor
As you love yourself, and on these two
Depend all other laws and speech of prophets.*

**At the end of the day, Jesus asked,
Friends, tell me, whose son is lord and savior?
And they answered him, The son of David.
Tell me how it comes to pass that David
By the Spirit calls his own son Lord?
For did not David sing,**

The Lord he said

*To my Lord, Sit with me, at my right hand,
Until I put your enemies under your feet?
Thus if David calls his own son Lord,
How can the same one still be David's son?*

**And finally they had reached an end of answers,
And of questions also, for his adversaries
Did not dare to ask him any questions.**

23.

**Then leaving behind all quotes and exegeses,
Jesus addressed the crowd and his disciples,
And castigated all who held authority,
As one who had no fear of their reprisal.**

*They sit on Moses' seat, dispensing laws,
And all of you should follow what they say;
But do not follow what these people do,
For they will never practice as they teach.
They bundle heavy burdens, hard to bear,
And lay them on the shoulders of the poor,
But one and all are loath to lift a finger
To help all these, weak and downtrodden, stand.*

*Their deeds they calibrate for public viewing,
With broad phylacteries, and fringes long;
They love the place of honor at a banquet,
And strive for choice seats when they come to pray;
They proffer favors to th' indulgent toads
Who greet them, supplicating, in the market,
Who warm the chambers of their prideful hearts
By letting drop the honorific "Rabbi."*

*Shame on you for calling them your Rabbis,
For God's the teacher, and we're all his students,
And we should name no fathers here on earth,
For we all have one Father, up in heav'n.
Nor can you people call yourselves instructors,
For you have one instructor - your salvation.*

And I will now instruct you: listen closely.

The great among you, soon, will be your servants.

And they who pride themselves will then be humbled;

And they who are the lowest be exalted.

Woe to you, you overlords and hypocrites!

You lock the people out of heav'n's kingdom!

You will never enter there yourselves,

And yet when others enter you would stop them!

Woe to you, brokers of Roman power!

You cross the sea and land to make a convert,

Then you would train this neophyte to be

Twice as much a child of hell as you!

Woe to you, blind guides, deceivers, fools,

You tell them that an oath upon the sanctuary

Is an oath upon an empty box,

But swearing by the gold amassed within it

Binds the faithful to keep fast their vow.

Blind fools! Do you not see which is the greater?

The gold, or that which makes it sacred gold?

The lust to gather, or the drive to spend?

You say, who swears an oath upon this altar

Is bound by nothing more than block and mortar,

But which prevails, the object of a duty?

Or is it the sanctifying spirit?

*If you make your oath upon an altar,
You swear by every gift that is upon it,
And by the sanctuary, and the faithful,
By heav'n, and the throne of God, and God.*

*Woe to you, you coddlers of the speck!
For as you tithe your mint and dill and cumin,
You neglect the spirit of the law
Which is to help us build a world of justice*

*Tempered by mercy and imbued with faith.
From the ocean of the world's injustice
You strain out gnats while camels pass the sieve,
And simulate your sanctity with pride.*

*Woe to you, excluders of the helpless!
You wash the surface of the cup and plate,
Then eat from them with greed and self-indulgence,
For you mistake appearances for virtues;*

*Clean the inside of your spirit's vessel,
Assure its content free from all corruption,
Your sustenance will come then honestly,
And you preserve a clean and wholesome spirit.*

*Woe to you all, you effigies of greed!
You are like standing, gleaming tombs of white,
So beautiful with whitewash on your surface,
But inside you are rank with bones and filth!*

*Woe, woe, sanctifiers of dead marble!
You would build up great tombs for all the prophets,
And decorate the graves of all the righteous,
And claim if you had lived in days of yore*

*Not to have shed a drop of prophets' blood.
But you yourselves descended from their murderers
And now complete the measure of your ancestors!
How can you snakes escape the mouth of hell?*

*Therefore I send you prophets, sages, scribes,
And some of these you kill and crucify,
Others you have flogged in halls of worship,
And chased like packs of dogs from town to town,*

*So down upon you rains the righteous blood,
From righteous Abel murdered by his brother
To righteous Zechariah, whom you murdered
Between the sanctuary and the altar.*

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I mourn thee,
Killing your prophets, stoning God's holy messengers!
How often have I sought to shelter them,
Gathering your children there together,
As a hen protects her brood under her wings,
O city! You would never let this be.*

*See now. Your house is left you, desolate,
And you will never see me any more,
Until aloud you call up to the sky,*

Blest is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

24.

Then Jesus left the temple, and his followers
Marveled at how grand and tall it was,
And he said to them, *Do you see these buildings?*
Soon, not a stone will rest upon a stone,
All of this edifice will be thrown down.

He went with them out on the Mount of Olives,
And several came and spoke in private to him:
What will be the sign that you are coming?
When will it be the ending of the age?
And Jesus said, *Beware the talk of signs,*
For many people claim to be your teacher,
And even more by them be led astray.
You will see wars, and then hear talk of wars,
But do not fear, the end will not be yet.
Nations will rise up against each other,
Famine and earthquake sweep across the land,
But all of this is only the beginning,
The birth pang of an infant world renewed.

They will hand you over to be tortured,
Everywhere you go, people will hate you,
As one by one the faithful fall away,
From fear of death, or pain of persecution,
From hatred and betrayal in their midst.
False prophets will lead some of you astray,
And as the vigor and the pulse of faith

Recede, the love of many will grow cold.

*If you endure, then you will all be saved,
And good news be proclaimed to all the world,
Before the end. The desolating sacrilege
Will then be standing in the holy place*

*(As the prophet Daniel has foretold,
Let the reader hear and understand,)*

*And all Judea flees into the mountains.
And the one who watches from the housetop,
Must not stop to rescue his possessions,
Or the one that labors in the field,
Must not fetch his coat before he leaves.
Woe to the women who are great with child,
Or those who nurse, mother and infant, then,
And pray for all who suffer in that time
That they not flee in winter, or on Sabbath,
For see! Such pain and carnage has not been
From the beginning of the world, till now,
And its like will never be again.
And if Our Father had not stopped the time,
Not one of you would be saved in those days,
But, for the sake of them that have been chosen,
Our father will make cease the storms of death.*

*Then, in that silence, if they say to you,
Look! Here is the savior! Lo, he comes!
Do not believe it, for they will be false,*

*Simulated signs to lead astray,
Within and without, you will all wander off;
Take note, for I have told you this beforehand.
He is neither waiting in the wilderness,
Nor in the inner sanctum of the palace,
For as the lightning comes from out the east,
And flashes 'cross the sky into the west,
So will be coming of the Son.
Where the corpse is, there the vultures gather.*

*And when the rain of suffering subsides,
 The sun will darken, and the moon turn gray,
 The stars will fall from heav'n to the earth,
 The powers of the heav'ns will be shaken.
Then will the Son of Man send forth his sign,
Across the heav'n, and all the earth will mourn.
He himself will come in clouds of glory,
Sending forth his angels with a trumpet;
And they will bring the souls of his elect
Here, from the ends of heav'n and of earth.*

*If you watch, you know when this will be,
For from the fig tree you can learn a lesson:
When the branch is tender, and the leaves,
Unfurl, and spread to catch the light of day,
You will know that summer's warmth is near;
So also when you see the ending signs,
You will know the Son of Man is coming,
Is near, is standing at the very gates.*

*Truly I tell you, that this generation
Will not pass away before he comes,
Heav'n and earth will pass and be forgotten,
But these my words will linger till he comes.*

*And no one knows the day or hour he comes,
Neither angels, nor the Son of Man,
Only the Father in heav'n knows the time;
For it is as it was in Noah's time,
When all the people ate and drank and married,
Until the day that Noah closed his ark.
So little did they know until that flood,
Came, and it washed every thing away,
So will it be when comes the Son of Man:
Two farmers will then stand beside a furrow,
One is taken, and the other, left;
Two women, grinding meal together:
One is taken, and the other, left;
Keep awake, soul, for you do not know
At what hour or day your Lord is coming.*

*If the watchful owner of the house
Had known beforehand when the thief was coming,
He would have stayed awake and barred the door.
And so must you be ready for that moment,
And so your soul eternal will secure.*

*As a master might appoint a slave
To make sure that his household is protected,
By giving all the other slaves their payment,*

*Let us be certain that we watch the gates:
Wise and blest is he who stays at work,
And when the master comes is still awake.*

*But if the watchman is a wicked slave,
He tells himself, My master is delayed.
Then he beats the slaves with sticks and chains,
Eats and drinks himself into a stupor,
And on the day when he might least expect it,
The master comes and puts him out the door,
To join the weeping, banished from his home.*

25.

*Heav'n's kingdom brings to mind a wedding:
Ten bridesmaids took their lamps, and they went forth
To meet the bridegroom, but he was delayed.
Five of them were foolish, five were wise.
The foolish took their lamps, but no more oil,
The wise took lamps and flasks of oil beside.
As they all waited past th' appointed hour,
The maids began to nod their heads and sleep.*

*Then at midnight there rose up a shout:
Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come to meet him!
Then all the virgins woke and trimmed their lamps.
The foolish begged the wise, Please give us oil,
For we have none, our lamps begin to flicker;
And then the wise said, No, there's not enough,
Go and buy more oil to light your lamps.
Yet, as the foolish bridesmaids went to buy it,*

*There came the bridegroom, opening the banquet,
And those with burning lamps came following after;
But when the foolish bridesmaids had returned,
The door was shut, and they all cried, Lord, open!
Alas! The bridegroom said, I do not know you.
So keep awake, therefore, and be prepared.*

*Once a man was going on a journey.
Before he left, he called his slaves before him.
He gave each slave a diff'rent patronage,
According to the skills he may have shown.
To one he gave five talents, another, two,
Another, one; and then he went away.*

*The slave who had at first received five talents
Went and traded, and made five more talents.
Likewise the one who had received two talents,
Traded these, and he made two more talents.
But the slave who had received one talent,
He dug himself a hole and hid the money.*

*After a time the man came home again.
He asked these three to show him what they'd done.
The first slave told him, See, I made five more.
And so his master said to him, Well done;
As you have earned my trust in this small thing,
Now many things I put in your charge:
That you may now enjoy your master's favor.
And then the second slave said, Master, see,
From your two talents I have made two more.*

*And so his master said to him, Well done,
As you have earned my trust in this small thing,
Now many things will I put in your charge;
That you may now enjoy your master's favor.*

*Then spoke the slave who had received one talent:
O Master, I have known you to be harsh,
Reaping where you did not sow the grain,
And gath'ring where you did not scatter seed;
So in my fear I went and hid your talent.
Now here it is. You have just what is yours.*

*His master said, You wicked, lazy slave!
Can there be justice in your accusation,
That I would reap and gather what's not mine?
You should at least invest this with the bankers,
So I may teach my coin to earn some interest.
I take this talent from you, and I give it
To him who made the five turn into ten.
For to the ones who have, more will be given;
And from you empty-handed will be taken
Even the little that you thought you had.
I throw you, worthless slave, into the darkness,
Where you may ever weep and grind your teeth.*

*For, when the Son of Man comes in his glory,
He will sit upon the throne on high,
And all the nations will be set before Him,
And He will sort the souls from one another,
Sort, as a shepherd sorts his sheep and goats.*

*And He will say to those upon his right hand,
Come, for you are by my Father blest,
Come you now and enter in the kingdom,
Prepared from the foundation of the world,
For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty, and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger, and you welcomed me,
I was naked, and you gave me clothing,
I was sick, and you took care of me,
I was in prison, and you visited me.
And then the righteous souls will answer him,
When was it, Lord, that we found you were hungry?
When did we see you thirsty, and give you drink?
When were you a stranger, and we welcomed you?
When were you naked, and we gave you clothes?
When were you sick, or in prison, and we visited?
And then the Son of Man will answer them:
Just as you did for any, the least of these,
These who are members of my family,
So did you do for me, and so now come,
And enter into heav'n's kingdom with me.*

*And He will say to those upon his left hand,
You that are accursed, depart from me.
Go now alone into eternal darkness,
To dwell there with the devil and his angels:
For I was hungry and you fed me not,
I was thirsty, and you gave no drink,
I was a stranger, and you drove me off,
I was naked, and you clothed me not,*

*I was sick, and you would let me die,
I was in prison, and you let me rot.
And they would answer also, When, O Lord,
Did we see you were hungry, thirsty, naked,
A stranger or a prisoner or an invalid,
And when did we not answer to your needs?
And just as surely he will answer them:
As you have failed the least of these my children,
So have you failed me in my hour of need,
And so you enter the eternal banishment,
As they, the righteous, find eternal life.*

26.

**Jesus said, In two days comes Passover;
Then I will be betrayed and crucified.
And as he spoke, the Roman puppet chiefs
Met with their own enforcers of the law,
And they conspired to capture him and kill him,
In such way as they might avoid a riot.**

**Jesus had been at Bethany awhile,
Staying with Simon the Leper in his house.
As he sat and took his ease at table,
A woman with an alabaster jar
Came in and poured some oil on his head.
When his disciples saw the costly ointment,
They saw it as a sentimental waste,
And told her that she should have sold the oil
And given money from it to the poor.**

But Jesus said to them, *Why do you trouble?*

She has performed a kindness here for me.

You will always have poor people with you,

But you will not forever have me here.

She prepares my body now for burial,

For she can see more clearly than you can.

Wherever this good news is told the world,

They will remember how she cared for me .

Now one of his disciples was a traitor.

He came in secret to th'authorities,

Seeking to be paid for the betrayal.

They paid him thirty silver pieces for it,

And he conspired with them to fix the time.

When came the first day of unleavened bread,

They all wanted to prepare the feast.

They said, Where should we make our preparations?

He said to them, *Go forth into the city,*

There you will meet a man, and say to him,

The teacher says to you, My time is near,

And we will keep Passover at your house.

And all of these things happened as he said.

And in the evening, Jesus came and joined them.

And as they ate, he said, *Someone betrays me,*

And they all voiced their anguish, saying to him,

Surely, Lord, I never will betray you!

*And he said, Watch and see the one who dips
His hand into the bowl along with mine:
This disciple is the one betrays me,
And though we both fulfill the will of God,
Woe to this one by whom I am betrayed.
Better for him that he had not been born!
And so the one who had betrayed him said,
Surely you do not say I am the one?
But Jesus answered him, You have just said so.*

*And while they ate, Jesus he took bread,
After he had blest it, then he broke it,
And he gave the bread to his disciples,
Saying, Take and eat, this is my body;
Then he took the cup and he gave thanks,
And passed the cup from hand to hand around,
Saying to them, Drink this, all of you,
For this is my blood of the new cov'nant,
Which is poured out for many, for their sins,
I will never drink of this fruit again
Until the day comes when I drink it new
Together with you in my Father's kingdom.*

*Then together they all sang a hymn,
And left to go out on the Mount of Olives.
There, Jesus told them, You will all abandon me,
For this night you will do as it is written:
I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep
From the shepherd's flock will all be scattered.
But after I am raised up from the dead,*

I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Peter would ingratiate himself,
And said to him, I will never desert you,
But Jesus, knowing better, said, *Nay Peter*
Before the cock crows you'll deny me thrice.
But Peter swore again, Though I must die,
I will not deny you are my Lord,
And so said all of his disciples then.

Jesus went out to Gethsemane
A quiet garden on the Mount of Olives,
And said, *Sit here while I go in and pray.*
Peter, James and John he took with him,
And he was worn and anxious in his prayer,
Saying, *I grieve now, even unto death,*
Stay here and watch while I go further in.
And deeper in the dark and shady garden
He threw himself upon the ground and cried,
My Father, if you can, let this cup pass,
Yet not my will, but thine the will be done.

Then he came back and found them fast asleep,
And waking them, he said to Peter, *So*
You could not stay awake one hour with me?
Now stay awake and pray that you be saved
From the time of trial and temptation.
The spirit's willing, but the flesh is weak.
And back he went alone into the shadow,
Praying, *My Father, if this cannot pass*

Unless I drink it, then your will be done.

**Then again he came and found them sleeping.
Leaving them, he went and prayed some more.
Saying the same words he had said before.**

**Then he came and woke them one last time,
Saying, *Are you still sleeping while I pray?*
Get up, the hour is here, the Son of Man
Is now betrayed into the hands of sinners:
*Behold you, my betrayer is at hand.***

**Then came betrayal with his hostile crowd,
Roman soldiers armed with swords and clubs.
And he had giv'n his company a sign,
That Jesus was the one whom he would kiss.
And he kissed Jesus, saying, Greetings, Rabbi.
Jesus said, *Friend, do what you must do.***

**The soldiers and the crowd laid hands on Jesus,
And one attacked a slave, and cut his ear;
But Jesus stopped him, say'ng, *Put your sword back,*
If you live by the sword, so you will die.
If I but call upon my heav'nly Father,
Could he not send twelve ranks of angels here?
But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled,
*Which say that it must happen in this way?***

**Then Jesus turned and spoke to the whole crowd:
*Have you come here with swords and clubs to get me***

*The same as if I were a thief or bandit?
Day after day I sat in the temple teaching,
There you listened and did not arrest me.
But how you were, and how you are, is done,
So that the words of prophets are fulfilled.*

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

The crowd took Jesus to the sanctuary police,
Where functionaries waited to convict him,
And Peter followed after at a distance
Ling'ring in the courtyard of the palace.
He sat and waited there among the guards
Because he sought to know how it would end.
The soldiers canvassed, looking for false witnesses,
To justify their claim of execution;
But nobody could testify against him.

Many false witnesses did in fact come forward
But their stories did not find agreement.
Finally two of them agreed:

He claimed

*He would tear the temple to the ground
And build it up again in three days time.*

The lawyers stood and questioned Jesus then:
Have you no answer to this charge against you?

But Jesus kept his silence, so they asked him,
Under an oath before the living God,
Are you the Son of God? Are you the savior?

*Jesus said, You say so, but I tell you,
From now on you will see the Son of Man
Seated at the right hand of the Power,
Coming toward you on the clouds of heav'n.*

Then the soldiers flew into a rage,
Tearing the clothes off Jesus, and they said,
He's a conspirator! Now we need no witnesses.
You have heard his claim! What is your verdict?
And the Romans said that he should die.
They spat upon his face, and struck, and slapped him,
And seeing that the spittle blinded him,
Taunted him, saying, Prophecy, soothsayer!
Which of us is going to strike you next?

Outside in the courtyard, Peter waited,
And a servant girl came up to him,
Saying, You were also with this Jesus.
But Peter quickly said this was not so,
And later when he went out on the porch,
Another servant girl knew who he was,
And said, This man did follow Jesus here.
But Peter swore an oath, I do not know him!
And then again bystanders came around him,
Saying, 'Tis certain you are one of them,
You talk just like a Nazarene, don't you?

Then Peter cursed, and swore another oath,
Upon my soul, I do not know this man!
And at that moment heard the rooster crow,

And he remembered Jesus prophecy,
Before the cock crows, you'll deny me thrice,
And Peter left there, weeping bitterly.

27.

As the dawn came up over Jerusalem,
Inside the palace, th'authorities and the judges
Conferred amongst themselves and made a plan
On starting the machinery of death.
They had him bound and led away by soldiers
To serve the pleasure of the Roman, Pilate.

When the traitor saw Jesus condemned,
Repenting his betrayal, he brought back
The thirty pieces of silver he was paid.
He said then to the judges and the Romans,
I have sinned, betraying innocent blood.
They asked him, So then, what is that to us?
You'll find a way to expiate your sin.
He threw the silver on the temple floor,
And ran away, and hid, and hanged himself.

Th' authorities gathered up the coins of silver,
Saying, We cannot place these in the treasury,
Because this money has been paid for blood.
So with the money they procured the potter's field,
(Needing a place to bury unclean foreigners),
Which to this day is called the Field of Blood.

So had the prophet Jeremiah written,

*They took the thirty tainted coins of silver,
The price set by the people for the precious,
And paid them to possess the potter's field,
As the Lord had commanded them to do.*

Now Jesus stood with the procurator,
And Pilate said, Are you King of the Jews?

Was there a mock'ry in his asking this?
For Jesus was no Herod Antipas,
Nor yet could Pilate really think that ever
Jews would have had authentic kings again.

But Jesus simply answered him, *You say so,*
And he to the authorities said nothing;
And Pilate said, I do not understand:
These people make so many claims against you,
And yet you do not offer them reply.
But Jesus still declined to say a word,
And Pilate looked on him with great amazement,
For such a mind as his, though not religious,
Gave credit to the supernatural,
And may have seen the semblance of a God:
As Liber, dazed and fair, would stand among
The Roman sailors, they who knew him not;
Who broke their promise to press on to Naxos,
And were turned into monsters of the sea.

Now at this feast, the high procurator,
By custom, would release a man condemned,

Whom the crowd would claim deserved this mercy;
And the Romans held a famous villain,
Jesus Barrabas, a notorious killer.
So Pilate went before the crowd and asked them:
Whom do you want us to send out to you?
Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus your redeemer?

So, Pilate contrived a false deliberation,
To mask, and also reinforce, his power.
And, as he sat upon the seat of judgment,
His wife inside the house sent word out to him:
Do not you execute that innocent man,
For I today am pained and suffering greatly
And dreamed a dream wherein I saw his face.
But, never less inclined to hear those fancies,
With which she might beguile, and then torment him,
Pilate turned, and once more asked the crowd,
Which of these two would you have me release?
And with one voice the crowd cried out, Barabbas!
Pilate said, But what then should I do
With this man Jesus who is called a savior?
And with one voice the crowd said, Crucify him!

And although Pilate took great pleasure in the thought
Of seeing a Jew conspirator striped with blood,
Still he sought to mask his own intention,
And asked the crowd, What evil has he done?
And with one voice, they shouted, Crucify him!
So, taking yet more pleasure in their anger,
Pilate pretended that nothing could be done.

Tumultuous riots teeming in the streets;
Only assent could glut their lust for blood;
And he, frail stick, must bend before this storm;
Then proudly, before the screaming multitude,
He dipped his hands in water and he washed them,
Said, Of this blood my hands are perfect, clean,
And all you here may see to this, yourselves.

So Pilate sent Barabbas to his freedom,
And Jesus to be flogged and crucified.

Pilate's guards took Jesus in the palace,
And the cohort gathered close around him,
Stripped him of his clothes and decked him out
Wearing a crown of thorns, a robe of purple,
And a tufted reed in his right hand;
Then they knelt before him and they mocked him,
And shouted, Hail all Hail, King of the Jews;
They spat on him and snatched away the reed,
They struck him on the head, and mocked him more;
Tore off the purple cloth, wet with new gore,
Gave him again his own robe, stiff with blood,
And led him out to face the roaring throng.

As they went out, they met a man named Simon
Who'd come up to the city from Cyrene,
And they compelled this man to drag his cross.
Through the winding street marched this procession,
To Golgotha, (which means, Place of the Skull).

There they offered Jesus wine to drink,
But it was mixed with gall, which, when he tasted,
He refused. Then Romans crucified him.
They tore his garment off and passed it round,
Casting lots to choose which one would keep it.
Then they settled in to watch him die.
Over his head they put the charge against him,
Which read: See Jesus, King of all the Jews.

They also crucified two bandits there:
One hung at Jesus' right, one at his left.

The people passing by derided him;
They shook their heads and taunted him and said:
See, you who would destroy our mighty temple!
Now build it up again in three days time!
If as you say you are Son of God,
Save yourself! Come down now off the cross!
All the religious police also accused him:
He may save others, but can't save himself!
He may be king, but hangs there on the tree!
He's lifted high, but now he can't come down!
If he descends we will believe in him.
He trusts in God, let God deliver him;
If he's the Son of God, where is his Father?

At either hand the bandits taunted also.

At midday, darkness overcame the sky,
Lingering until midafternoon,

Till Jesus raised a loud and dreadful voice,
Eli Eli lema sabachthani?
My God, O why have you forsaken me?
And some of them nearby, who heard this, said,
This dying man is calling for Elijah,
They dipped and soaked a sponge in vinegar,
Put it on a stick and held it up,
And others, watching, counseled them to wait,
For they would see Elijah come to save him,
But Jesus cried again and breathed his last.

And at that very moment, in the temple,
The curtain tore in two from top to bottom;
The earth shook, and the rocks beneath were split;
Tombs were opened; many saints were raised.
(After his resurrection they came out,
They entered the holy city, and we saw them.)
And at that very moment, a centurion
Standing with the guard and keeping watch,
Swayed in the earthquake and was terrified,
And when his feet were planted firm again
Said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

There were three women, watching from a distance:
The mother of the sons of Zebedee,
Mary the mother of James, and Mary Magd'lene.

In the evening came a wealthy man,
Joseph of Arimathea was his name;
He went to Pilate asking for the body.

Pilate bid the soldiers take it down.

**They took it down and gave it then to Joseph,
And Joseph wrapped it in a linen cloth,
And laid it in his own new-hewn rock tomb.**

**He rolled a great stone up against the door,
And the two Marys, sitting opposite,
Watched as he pushed the stone up into place
And waited till the end of the Passover.**

**In the morning, the religious authorities
Brought a new petition up to Pilate:
Sir, recall that this impostor said
That after three days, he would rise again.
We ask therefore that you command your troops
To make this tomb secure for these three days.
For otherwise his foll'wers may go in,
Steal his body, and proclaim abroad
That he is ris'n and gone up from the dead,
Enlarging their deception, and fomenting
Rebellion to legitimate authority.**

**Pilate said to them, You have a guard;
Go ahead and make the tomb secure;
And so the lab'ers set the stone in place,
Using mortar to secure the cracks,
And then left several soldiers there to watch.**

28.

**After the Sabbath, on a Sunday morning
As the sun was rising in the east,**

The Marys went to see the tomb again.
Suddenly they felt a great earthquake!

An angel of the Lord came down from heav'n,
Rolled back the stone, and lingered there upon it.
His visage was like lightning, and his robe
Shone on them white as snow, bright like a blaze.
For fear of him, the guards who watched the tomb
Fell to the ground, as still as someone dead.

Do not fear me, the angel told the women,
You search for Jesus, who was crucified:
He is not here, for see, he has been raised.
Come here and see the empty place inside!
Go quickly, and tell all of his disciples:
Truly, he has ris'n up from the dead!
He goes ahead of you to Galilee!
Follow there, and you will see him soon.

They ran away with fear and joy commingled.
And, as they went to tell all his disciples,
Jesus appeared before them on their way.
He greeted them, and then they came to him,
Fell to the ground, and held him by his feet,
And worshiped him, until he said to them,
*Do not be afraid, but go and tell
My brothers and my sisters, all, to go
To Galilee, where we will be together.*
Meanwhile, several members of the guard,
Revived from their paralysis of fear,

**Told th' authorities of the empty tomb.
These functionaries then devised a plan
To justify the body's disappearance.
They set aside a quantity of money
To pay the soldiers for this testimony:
That Jesus' friends, coming by dark of night,
Stole his body while the soldiers slept.
The judges told the guards that if this came
To Pilate's ears, then they would firmly justify
Such dereliction of a soldier's duty,
Substituting one lie for another.
The soldiers kept their silence, took the money,
And so, kept their conspiracy intact.**

**All of his followers went to Galilee,
Where Jesus had them gather on a mountain.
They praised and worshiped him, and yet some doubted;
But Jesus said, *Now all authority
In heav'n and on the earth, is given me.
Go out therefore and preach to all the nations.
Baptize them, in the name of God the Father,
And of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;
And teach them to obey what I command,
Remembering that I am with you always,
Now and forever, to the end of ages.***