George Herbert, Anglican Poet-Priest

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Preacher: Dr. Maxine Hancock

[0:00] Good morning everybody, and welcome to some places that are unfamiliar to me. We are glad to see you here, and we don't think that any of us will go empty the way.

It is my pleasure, my privilege, to present Dr. Hancock to you. Maxine has been a colleague of mine at Regent College for the last eight years, and a truly distinguished colleague, may I say.
Somebody once described C.S. Lewis as a literary bloke. Well, I'm inclined to describe Maxine as, I'm going to say a literary lass, I'm going to say a literary lady.
She moves in our interdisciplinary world at Regent, drawing links between Christian faith and English literature.
She's a specialist in the 17th century, where I sort of paddle around a bit, and I greatly appreciate what she brings to the study of Christian writers of the 17th century.
[1:34] As Bill has said, we're going to have a double dose of her wisdom in this area. And this morning, she's going to begin with George Herbert, the Carson poet, who produced some of the lyrics that we love to sing in our worship still.

Let all the world in every quarter sing, my God and King. That's George Herbert. And, see, thrustful, punchy, glorious.
And I think we're going to have quite a bit of that, mediated by Maxine. And I will not keep you from Maxine any longer. I will sit down. Maxine, will you please stand up?
Thank you. Thank you. And at this stage, I'll take laughs. Thank you, kind of. That's just fine.
I'm very glad to be with you this morning, and I want to thank you for being here. It has been my husband, Cam, and my pleasure to be participants in this congregation in a very kind of quiet way over the last two and a half years since we moved into your area and could actually walk to this as our parish church. And because I teach all week at Regent, and because I often speak on the weekends, we have just sort of slid near the back row and just been blessed.
[3:15] And we've just kind of let the good preaching happen, and we've been there for the Eucharist, and we have just let your congregational life bless us after many years of very intense involvement in local congregations.

It's been a real blessing. So this is my little love gift back to St. John's Shaughnessy, so thank you for being here to receive it from us. It's a small thing to bring to you, something of my joy and love for these wonderful poets from the 17th century.
And I particularly am just pleased when the dates Bill was asking me for coinciding with a pre-Easter time, because that way I could focus my choice of poems and my reflections with you around some Easter poems and around something of the risen life of Christ and these wonderful poets.
So with that as sort of a setting, let's just look to the Lord to bless this time together, and then I want to tell you all I can in the time we have about George Herbert. Father, I do thank you for the privilege of this gathering.
Thank you for this pre-Easter season when we stop to contemplate the cost at which our redemption has been bought. Thank you for the gifts of the risen Christ by which you apportion to us those gifts that bless one another.
[4:35] And we especially today give thanks for George Herbert's life and his poetry that has blessed the Church down through these hundreds of years. We never know where those gifts are going to be for this generation, but we pray that you will bless as gifts are given and received, that Jesus Christ will be honored and glorified in our midst in his name we pray. Amen.

Chronologically, I should have started with John Donne. He's somewhat elder, the elder poet of the two that I want to present to you in these two weeks. However, for a number of reasons, I want to

talk to you about George Herbert first, and then I'm going to go back to John Donne next week, and largely because I want to present a particular pre-Easter poem next week from John Donne's work that will be most titling next Sunday.
So I'm just flipping the chronology in terms of their history so that it fits the Easter season that we're in. But let me tell you, before we turn to look at some poems, something about George Herbert, I realize many of you here will know all this, and so I'm hoping it will just be a refresher for those of you who have been reading Herbert for years, and that it will be an encouragement for those of you for whom he is a new poet to explore just to do that.
Just by way of a little short commercial, you can certainly buy George Herbert's complete works at the Regent College bookstore. They have a wonderful hardbound edition at a very modest price, and it's an investment that almost any believer would find well worth their while to make.
So that's someplace that you could follow up on this. George Herbert was born into a very prestigious family. He came from, if not quite aristocracy, certainly highlanded, actually aristocracy on his mother's side, and highlanded gentry on his father's side, and he was really born to privilege and expectation of a life, most likely at court, because he had brothers in the army, a brother in the army, a brother at court, and so he was, from early years, groomed for a life that would combine the best of learning with civic responsibility.
[6:49] That would be what his class would expect, what his family would have expected of him, and what his expectation of life would be. So he went to Cambridge. They went to Cambridge very young in those days.

We think of Cambridge scholars as, you know, in their mid-twenties now, but they really went as teenage kids. And he studied at Cambridge and studied with great distinction. As you read his poetry or his prose, you can well imagine that he was a star pupil.
And he certainly gained a distinction at Cambridge to the extent that he was named Cambridge's public orator. The role of public orator at Cambridge was to do the Latin declamations when important personages came to the campus.
So if the king were to visit Cambridge, then it would be George Herbert who gave the Latin speech of welcome that would be a great flowery sort of exposition on the virtues of this king who has now graced Cambridge with his presence in the classical mode.
The only time I've ever heard this kind of a Latin declamation given was a few years ago when a son-in-law of mine graduated from Harvard, and I was there at a graduation in pouring rain.
[7:56] Apparently, you never get rain on these convocations at Harvard, but I was there, and the one that it's rained on. And in pouring rain, we heard a student stand up and do the Latin oration.

And it was in continuity with this long, long tradition, of which Herbert was one of the very brilliant occupiers of that position. So when one becomes that public orator, you are already a visible public figure.
You are already being noted for court position and court appointment. But George Herbert, somehow or another, although he had all this promise, was passed over for what would have been more or less expected court appointments, partly because his older brothers already got some of these appointments, and partly because King James I was beginning to lose power, and Charles I was beginning to gain power within the British court at this time.
And Charles I was surrounding himself with a certain kind of class of courtier, which would not have included a man of deep Anglican faith like George Herbert's, and didn't include Herbert in his sex, basically.
So it was almost like a changing regard in any other political regime. Some were coming in, and some were being pushed out. And Herbert and his friend Nicholas Farrar, who was another brilliant young Anglican academic, were just kind of set aside.
[9:30] They just didn't get those posts that one might have expected for them, given their training and their background. They did become parliamentarians by election or selection, whatever the process exactly was, by 1625.

They were sitting in parliament, but they were, again, very much not in the power set. They weren't in the inner circle. And they realized somewhere in there that things were not going to go in the direction of an ongoing, peaceful country where they could exercise their civic responsibilities in a way that they felt would be God-honor.
And so both Nicholas Farrar and George Herbert resigned their seats in parliament and went into the Anglican priesthood. And this was a bit shocking in court circles, because these young men

were visible and were parliamentarians, but they felt, I think, they must have felt, that there wasn't really room for them in the political process of their day in a way that, as I say, they felt they could exercise well.
Charles I was really surrounding himself with unsavory courtiers. And in many ways, the stage was beginning to be set for what would become the Civil War and the whole upsetting of the English system because of Charles I's both pro-Catholic tendencies and his very French-style court, to use an English expression about it.
If something goes wrong in England, they say it's like the French. And Charles I was a French-style court in the sense of a king with a great deal of power surrounded by courtiers of various kinds of dubious connections.
[11:19] And it was no longer a safe or good place for these men. So then they, after heart-searching, entered the priesthood, and George Herbert was a pretty reluctant, a pretty reluctant or cautious entrant into ordination.

We know quite a bit about George Herbert, at least from his early reputation, through one of the earliest biographies in English. Isaac Walton, who wrote the first biographies in English, wrote the lives of both George Herbert and John Donne.
And so we have, published as early in 1670, these life stories of these men, which gathers up sort of the stories and what was known as an... In fact, Isaac Walton himself knew George Herbert, at least...
I'm not sure of that when I say that so quickly. Knew very close around. I'd have to double-check whether he knew him personally, but certainly knew him very closely by replication. So here's how Isaac Walton describes George Herbert's entry into the priesthood.
So I'm reading now one of the earliest English biographies. Just at the time an English biography switches over from hagiography to true biography in an attempt to try to really render a life. So Isaac Walton, who is very admiring of both Herbert and Donne, says, In this time of Mr. Herbert's attendance and expectation of some good occasion to remove from Cambridge to court, God, in whom there is an unseen chain of causes, did in short time put an end to the lives of two of his most obliging and most powerful friends.
[12:53] And not long after, King James died also. And with them, all Mr. Herbert's court hopes. So that's how Isaac Walton puts this shift in the political climate.

So he presently took himself to a retreat from London to a friend in Kent, where he lived very privately and was such a lover of solitariness as was judged to impair his health more than his study had done.
In this time of retirement, he had many conflicts with himself. Whether he should return to the painted pleasures of a court life, or betake himself to a study of divinity and enter into sacred orders to which his dear mother had often persuaded him.
There's always this, now of course, what happens with later biographies is to ask the question, is this actually the case, or did his mother actually not want him? Was his mother the main reason he didn't go into the priesthood sooner?
So this is an ongoing biographical debate on this, but Isaac Walton thought that his mother had been encouraging him to go into the Anglican priesthood. These were such conflicts as they only can know that have endured them, for ambitious desires in the outward glory of this world were not easily laid aside.
[14:02] But at last God inclined him to put on a resolution to serve at his altar. He did his return to London acquaint a court friend with his resolution to enter into sacred orders, who persuaded him to alter it as too mean an employment, and too much below his birth, and the excellent abilities and endowments of his mind, to whom he replied.

So here's George Herbert's reply to the friend who says, you're a crazy man. Don't go into the priesthood. You've got all this training, all these gifts. Use them at court. So here's the George Herbert reply as Isaac Walton records it.
It hath been formerly adjudged that the domestic servants of the King of Heaven should be of the noblest families on earth. And though the iniquity of the late times have made clergymen meanly valued, and the sacred name of priests contemptible, yet I will labor to make it honorable by consecrating all my learning and all my poor abilities to advance the glory of that God that gave them, knowing that I can never do too much for him that has done so much for me as to make me a Christian.

And I will labor to be like my Savior by making humility lovely in the eyes of all men, and by following the merciful and meek example of my dear Jesus. And with that, this really great young man dedicated himself to God for the priesthood and was named, was ordained as an Anglican priest.
Now, one would think, once you have all these gifts, that somebody would quickly offer you a major London parish. But George Herbert lands up as the parish priest of a teeny little village named Bemberton.
[15:40] And he's about 15 miles away from his friend Nicholas Farrer, who now has the Little Gidding Parish. And these two friends who would be stars at court are now the country parsons, to use the language of the day, of these little village churches, which, first of all, were tumbled down and in poor repair, and one of the first things they had to do was actually repair the churches, physically, physically repair the fabric of the churches.

I don't mean that they did it with their own hands, but of their own means, actually, repair the fabric of these little village churches and set them to order again. And then they had to sort of install good liturgy, good preaching.
Nicholas Farrer and his family at Little Gidding have become quite famous to our century because of T.S. Eliot's poem in the Four Quartets. Many times seen as T.S. Eliot's conversion poem or a poem that's very close to the line when T.S. Eliot comes to faith, he writes out of the Four Quartets, one of the sites is Little Gidding.
So those of you who are T.S. Eliot people can go look this up. But I'll just read you just a little piece about T.S. Eliot's poetic persona's visit to the Little Gidding church, way deep into the, this would be in the 1920s or so.
If you came this way, taking any route, starting from anywhere, at any time, or at any season, it would always be the same. You would have to put off sense and notion.
[17:13] You are not here to verify, instruct yourself, or inform curiosity, or carry a report. You are here to kneel, where prayer has been valid.

And prayer is more than an order of words, the conscious occupation of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying. And what the dead have no speech for when living, they can tell you being dead.
The communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. Here, the intersection of the timeless moment is England and nowhere, never and always.
That's a little piece out of T.S. Eliot's Little Giving. One, a site where he locates within his poetry this ability to come to faith because of a place where prayer has been validated.
Nicholas Farmer set up a little community, mostly made up of his mothers and sisters, mothers and sisters, who actually became like a small monastery, a small Protestant monastery with the hours of the day marked by prayer, tried to install a life of prayer as the dominant theme.
[18:23] George Herbert, on the other hand, seems to have ministered in a more sort of normal parish community where the people came on Sunday for the liturgy, the Eucharist, and preaching of the word. So, out of this period, Herbert takes up his little parish church in 1630.

And he died in 1633. So, we have a very short little period of time when his life has finally found its channel to grow and he is actually in this country parson role.
He writes poetry. We don't know exactly how much of it he was writing as part of his church work or if he ever used anything in the liturgy. But he writes poetry through this time and just prior to his death at age 40.
One of the things that always stuns me about these 17th century writers is how little time they had to produce work that's lasted for 400 years since. Or nearly. It always kind of blows me away.
At any rate, he died at 40 and he has a body of poetry that he has gathered together and titled The Temple. It's a group of religious lyrics, devotional lyrics.
[19:40] I shouldn't say that they're in critical terms in the literary academy they're called religious lyrics. But these are devotional poems. Lyrics written and then laid out along the floor plan of the country church.

So it starts with the porch to the temple and then from the porch you get the ten commandments applied to your life. Then you look down the nave and you see the altar and the altar is the Christian's heart.

Some of them are allegorical, some of them are epigrammatic, some of them are emblematic and maybe you'll get a chance to explain some of those distinctions to you if you want to ask. But at any rate, each poem is itself a perfect little work of art.
And then they're laid out on a floor plan which takes you through the life of the village church. the church windows representing in which he meditates on the amazing thing that humans can preach God's holy word and that only if the light passes through the person is the word heard with anything that is resembling the truth itself.
That kind of thing, you have many, many sites that the church floor is written about, the church windows, all of the appointments of the church and then the church year. So you have the church fabric, you have the church, the liturgical calendar, the church year, poems about that.
[21:03] And through it all, the work of the Spirit of God in the life of the person, so the individual person as the temple of the Holy Spirit. And all of those poems locking and interlocking together in a very rich way.

Now these were published during Herbert's life, but when he was dying, he sent them to his friend Nicholas Farrer.
He said, to his friend Mr. Duncan, Mr. Herbert said, Sir, I pray give my brother Farrer an account of the decaying condition of my body. I think he probably died of tuberculosis.
They called it consumption in those days, but probably he died of tuberculosis. And tell him I beg him to continue his daily prayers for me and let him know that I have considered that God only is what he would be and that I am by his grace become so like him as to be pleased with what pleaseth him.
And tell him that I do not repine, but I am pleased with my want of health and tell him my heart is fixed on that place where true joy is only to be found and I long to be there and do wait for my appointed change with hope and patience.
[22:11] By the way, the 17th century Christians were really good at dying. It was a culture in which people died well. It was a culture in which many people lost loved ones John Dunn lost his wife to childbirth.

George Herbert married quite late but never had any children. We don't know if he lost children along the way in conception or gestation. Those are things we don't know.
But at any rate, they were very familiar with death and they contemplated it and they prepared for it and it became one of the major events of their lives to die in the faith to make this kind of a statement about their acceptance of the will of God.
They simply did not flinch. They didn't deny death. They recognized that it was the crossing of the point of the presence of God and they wrote about it, they thought about it and indeed, as we look at John Dunn, we'll see that he actually preached his last sermon the week before he died on death's duel.
He actually was willing to stand in the pulpit almost a dying man. I mean, he's a visibly dying man and preached the victory of the cross in death. So, like I say, they were really good at dying.
[23:24] They were young too, of course, and had that resource in this. Having said this, he did with a sweet humility as seemed to exalt him, bow down to Mr. Duncan, his friend, and with a thoughtful and contented look, say to him, Sir, I pray deliver this little book to my dear brother Farrar.

This is the little collection of poems that we now draw from. And tell him he shall find a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom.
Desire him to read it, and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public. If not, let him burn it.
For I and it are left from the least of God's mercies. Thus meanly, did this humble man think of this excellent book which now bears the name of the temple.
So, on this fragile trust to his friend lies this amazing body of devotional poetry which, as you get into it, will stir your heart and enrich your life, I can assure you.
[24:39] In fact, I would say that one of God's great gifts to his church is this little volume of poems because it has never stopped being read. From the time it was published on, it lodged itself in the minds and hearts of Christian people right across from high church to low church, from Puritan to Catholic.

It didn't matter. It represented that deep love for God and that deep, as he says, the conflicts by which we come into a position of surrender to God are particularly well reflected in his poetry and representing probably that earlier stage of his own conflict about whether he should take up the priesthood or not.
And then, of course, I should just mention that there was a small body of prose also published called The Country Parson which, together with Richard Baxter's book on the Reformed Pastor, gave us two of the best windows we have into the idealized way by which the pastor would meet the needs of his flock and meet the needs of his people.
Herbert's The Country Parson out of the Anglican tradition and Richard Baxter's the Reformed Pastor out of the non-conformist tradition and those two give us a pretty good overlapping picture of what pastoral concerns would be and should be and were designed as sort of manuals to the pastors of the time.
Well, I don't want to just talk about Herbert, I want to read poetry with you but I do just want to say that theologically Herbert has been a subject of great interest and you need to know that while Herbert's poetry went into the devotional reading strand right from 1633 when it was published on or 16, yeah, published almost immediately, posthumously, 1633, it immediately became the laws of the church, the church read these poems, they passed them on, they again sang them, I'm not sure when all the settings were set but a number of them were set to music and entered hymnody.
[26:44] Nonetheless, his poetry was not taken terrifically seriously by the academy for literary criticism until this century. That is, it was seen as devotional poetry, religious poetry and therefore a certain subsection or sort of minor poetry.

It was part of a group of poets that were called the metaphysicals because Samuel Johnson called them that and nobody quite knew what that meant but it put them into a category of poets who worked about things that had to do with not the material world but the spiritual world and so by categorizing them, sometimes it was called the dumb tradition, there were a number of ways it was sort of made a subset, always seen as distinctly important from a good point of view but not necessarily read and studied as part of the canon in the academy until T.S. Eliot and T.S. Eliot at first dismissed this kind of poetry as minor poetry and then he began to see that Dunn was really an extraordinarily important poet and he began the rereading of this group of poets, George Herbert, John Dunn, Richard Crayshaw, Vaughn, Traherne, this group that were called the metaphysicals, in the academy and in the sort of mid part of the 20th century Dane Helen Gardner of Oxford did major editing work, looked at all the necessary work to give us good editions of these works and that's always extraordinarily important to actually making good critical work be done and now Herbert and Herbert in particular is very, very seriously studied in the academy and is seen as one of the great English poets.
His work with the language is seen to be amazingly intricate and yet managing a sweet simplicity. When you read him, when you read Dunn you're going to really puzzle over lots of lines in Dunn. When you read Herbert the first thing you feel is just kind of like ointment is being poured out. You just sort of feel like the alabaster bottle is being opened and you're in the room with the fragrance. Really. Then you'll sort of go, okay, how did he do that? And you'll start to look at an intricate use of language that belies its sweet simplicity with an enormous complexity and that becomes subject of great interest in the academy.
[29:02] So if any of you are looking for a wonderful poet to do a doctoral work on George Herbert was just waiting for you. It's actually a lovely thing when I encountered these poets, when you first encounter these poets in survey courses at the university they usually show you something that doesn't take you deep into their theology so John Dunn has lots of love poetry and that's usually what you encounter and Herbert they give you a few of his more personal sort of subjective poems.

But I encountered from time to time in the academy people who actually came to faith because they read John Dunn or George Herbert as undergraduate students. They still have that faith engendering quality because of that deep love for Christ that's all you can call it.
These poems are born out of a love affair and that love affair is the heart with Christ. Well, let's take a look at some poetry shall we? Oh, I can't just yet.
You can start passing the sheets out, okay? But I need to tell you that another major event in the sort of church's awareness of George Herbert came with the conversion of Simone Weil, the very important Jewish convert mystic philosopher from France, Simone Weil, actually came to faith through reading a George Herbert poem.

And the poem Love Three, which perhaps I'll have time to read to you at the end of the morning, I didn't put it on the handout, was the poem by which Simone Weil actually crossed over into faith.
[30:37] And so we have enormous legacy ongoing from these poets in our contemporary literary field. Theologically, while the pages are being handed, let me give you just quickly, theologically, Herbert has been claimed by everybody from absolute Puritan to high church Anglican, but most now would accept that he really represents the Anglican middle way, that he is a poet of the Elizabethan settlements as it moves on to the Jacobian period, that he represents a very deeply Reformed theology, very scripture based, very conversional, but he is within the church, he sees the liturgy, he sees the liturgical years, the frame of the Christian life, so he lines up, not with the high church, with the Archbishop Laud group that was trying to take the church in a more Anglo-Catholic tradition, but rather with the

Anglican middle way, neither the really Puritan non-conformist side, nor the other. So Christopher Hodgins, who is the current scholar of Herbert's theology, positions him in what I'm calling the Anglican middle way, so that's one of the reasons.
I think he's read so widely, perhaps if he was very polemically one or the other, he would be less accessible than he is exactly in this Anglican middle way.
Are we running short? I have one copy which I can open my book for. You're okay. Okay, what I brought to you, and the pages flip this way, not that way, I brought to you some poems around the Easter season from George Herbert, and I want first to look at the shaped poem called Easter Wings.
You can see it because it's shaped like Easter Wings. Got it? You see the wings? Turn the page this way. You can see like two sets of angel wings.
[32:38] So Easter Wings. This is an interesting shaped poem. Herbert has a number of shaped poems. One of the things he does is play with all kinds of poetic genre and poetic devices that are available at the time.

So one of his shaped poems is the altar in which he speaks of his heart as the altar in life. This one is a very famous shaped poem. I've seen this in a very early edition.
I don't know if it was the earliest edition, but in the special collections at the University of Alberta where I studied, there was about a 1640 edition or so of early printing. And in the early editions, these two sets of wings are on two pages of a small volume.
So you open and they lie like this, one set of wings, the other set of wings like this. And you really do notice the shaping of the poem. It's quite a thing.
Some of you will have tried to write a shaped poem sometime. It's quite a thing to write a shaped poem. It's one of the many kinds of things that Herbert worked with. He loved to do anagrams with letters of words coming diagonally through a poem.
[33:44] He did all kinds of fancy end rhyme play with the words. All of this within this centrally accessible meaning. So let's take a look at his Easter wings poem, which speaks about rising with the risen Christ.

You do have to put it this way to read. I think that do it. Lord who createst man in wealth in store though foolishly he lost the same decaying more and more till he became most poor.
With thee oh let me rise as larks harmoniously and sing this day thy victories then shall the fall further the flight in me.
My tender age in sorrow did begin and still with sicknesses and shame thou did so punish sin that I became most thin. With thee let me combine and feel this day thy victory for if I imp my wing on thine affliction shall advance the flight in me.
I can hear it in the room. You get it even before I start doing exegesis on it but let me just walk you through the way he builds this poem. Very typical of the 17th century.
[35:02] He sets up a situation where we look at the whole lot of humanity as macro causes in the first stanza and then the individual life of regeneration in the second.

So it's very typical to think macro causum and micro causes in this thinking. That the whole story of humanity is recapitulated in the salvation of any given person.
We don't think that way very much anymore because we don't think macro cause I am a representative of all of humanity when God does a regenerative work in me. That recapitulates his whole redemptive activity on behalf of all the humanity.

But that was a very common way of framing thought in the 17th century. 16th and 17th century. So the first verse talks about humanity. The fall and redemption.
You got that didn't you? You saw that there. So God created man and humankind in wealth and store. Foolishly he lost the same. decaying more and more.
[36:03] We lost more and more of our awareness of God until he became most poor. And then of course at that most poor you're thinking about Jesus who though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor that we would be able to share in the life of God.

So you could almost put almost at the crossing point of the palm there is the cross. Humanity has become most poor God enters into that poverty.
Oh let me rise as larks harmoniously. This is a favorite poetic image. It's also a favorite painting image of the larks that sort of spring up from the earth and sing with that kind of undulating flight that they have.
As larks harmoniously and sing this way thy victories. Not my victories. I have no victories of which to most. But thy victories. God's victory over this place of humanity's greatest poverty.
By entering into that place of greatest poverty. Now his victories. Then, this is a very intriguing line. Then shall the fall, that is humanity's fall, in which I am a participant, further the flight in me.
[37:17] This interpret takes up a very interesting medieval doctrine of the famous culpa, the fortunate fall. That actually God worked things such that the fall actually, in his redemptive activity, that through the fall, God had a greater victory.

It's a debated theology, but when he says, then shall the fall further the flight in me, that is, and I think also the picture of the lark, that when it, if I'm right, some of you who are more English than I, not English at all, some of you who know the English lark, can tell me if they fly like our goldfishes do.
What I'm seeing is the kind of bird that flies, it sort of falls, and then out of that fall, it has that burst of flight and song, that's how our finches fly. I don't know if that's how these larks, they go straight up, zoom, they come down, that's, okay, so the pattern is right, that the fall allows for, and then up they go, the fall furthers the flight in me.
So the image of the larks of course being very lovely for the Easter season, there's a spring theme and this springing up of new life that's pictured there.
So that's the picture of all of humanity, and then his own story, set into that, the microcosm story.
My tender age and sorrow did begin, and still with sicknesses and shame thou did so punish sin that I became, most thin.
[38:42] I don't know whether he's talking about his consumption at this point. He often speaks about illness and affliction. He isn't a well man through much of his life, and certainly his adult life, at any rate.

Whether it's thin physically or just depleted spiritually, he's at the same point as all of humanity is, most poor. I've become most thin.
I have really no resources left. with thee, and you can put in a therefore, there's often ellipses, with thee therefore, let me combine, and feel this day thy victory.
And then it's a very interesting phrase, for if I imp my wing on thine, it's a falconry term, you've got a little note at the bottom that tells you it's a falconry term, where to strengthen, if a falcon had a wounded wing, or if a falcon, they would actually put a healthy feather and graft it into the wing, to strengthen those wings, they would actually add feathers to the falcon's wing.
And so the picture of actually grafting my life into Christ's life, let me graft my little life into your great wing of life, and as I imp my wing on thine affliction, this suffering, this ill health, whatever it is I'm feeling, just as the fall furthers the flight of the lark, just as the fall may be seen as that out of which we turn and which really makes us ready for salvation, so this affliction that he's feeling can advance the flight in me and the curve upward, this up-spring of lark is again the picture there.
[40:20] So there's your Easter wings, I hope you'll use it as a meditative poem, some of you who are in times of affliction or illness, this is the kind of poem that touches in on our deep human experience of absolute dependence, for salvation but also for daily strength, also for all things and Easter as that which tells us that there is a life greater than our own into which our own little eyes can literally be grafted and lifted on the currents of God's Christ's resurrection, victory.

Okay, that's one little poem. Take a look, I want you to turn over, your pages over, to the poem called Redemption. And this is, when I'm taking a look at this, I'll stop so you can ask some

questions.
But this poem is set up as a small vignette or a little story. We may get a chance to look at this in John Dunn as well. The telling of a poem that almost works like a little tiny miniature drama.
If you listen to it, there's almost a complete drama in these few lines. And the drama is the drama of the soul again. But it's at two levels. It's operating again like the one I've just shown you. Macrocosmically, here's the story of humanity in redemption. Microcosmically, here's the story of me in redemption. So it has that large picture and that particular picture.
[41:50] He starts off as a good epic situation should. Maybe a miniature epic would be the way to describe it because it has all of those qualities. Immediate res. It starts right in the middle of the action.

Here we are. Having been tenant long to a rich lord, not thriving, I resolved to be bold and make a suit unto him to afford a new small rented lease and cancel the old.
I'm going to stop and do commentary, although I hate to interrupt the poem, but I just need to give you a word or two along this. You've got a picture of humanity moving from the old covenant into the new here.
Having been tenant long to a great lord, to a rich lord, not thriving under the old covenant because all it's been able to do is show me my sinfulness, not able to empower me to give holiness, I resolved it to be bold and make a suit unto him to afford a new small rented lease and cancel the old.
So I'm wanting a little smaller farmer. Think of the tenant farmer situation where he's trying to look after a large territory, he doesn't seem to have the machinery or the manpower to do that.
[43:02] So he says, would you cancel the old contract? Give me something I can manage. Something a little more manageable. In heaven, at his manner, I him sought.

They told me there that he was lately gone about some land which he had dearly bought long since on earth to take possession. I straight returned and knowing his great birth, sought him accordingly in great resorts, in cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts.
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth of thieves and murderers. There I him espied who straight, your suit is granted, said, and died.
God is to take us into the story of the cross through the whole old covenant, new covenant, the need of humanity, the need of the individual person for a new deal, a new covenant, a new contract. God is to the soul, the initiative of humanity to is preempted, and in a sense, prevening grace has even prompted it, because something has already happened, God in his eternal counsels, has seen to it that there is a purchase price made for a new piece of land.
[44:34] not something we can manage, but something he has purchased at this great cost. And of course, what it takes to enter into this new covenant is to have that moment where you see him on the cross, and see the price that he has paid, that you can enter into this covenant of grace.

So it's almost like he takes the Easter story and pulls it inside out, so that you see it from a new angle, in this little vignette, which actually encompasses the whole history of humanity, up to and beyond the cross.
There's a crossing over of time that operates here, and of course that last line is the crucifixion scene. I'm sure you all understood it. He brought you in that last line to stand at the foot of the cross, among the thieves and murderers, where one has to find yourself finally.
And there is even almost a biographical or autobiographical kind of story of Herbert having sought Christ or sought to serve Christ in cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts, and finally finding his own place of service among the not thieves and murderers, I don't think, in his little country church, but certainly sinners saved by grace, which is what we all are, and where he finds himself standing at the end of the poem.
A poem for you to spend more time on, you can read it. I find with Herbert's poems that I read them and reread them, and I just sort of, I don't do a lot of work on them until I have let them kind of, I just kind of sit with them for a while.
[46:08] Next week I'll talk to you a little bit more about how to engage these poems on your own. I'll give you some sort of strategies so that you, when you go by your complete works of Herbert and Dunn at the Regent College bookstore, you will know what to do with them.

Okay, I'd love to have, I think we want to have time for some questions, is that right, Bill? There's plenty of time for you to keep talking. Do you want another poem or do you want to ask questions?

Other poem? Okay, let's take another poem. Let's take Easter. There's a poem called Easter 1, it means there's also an Easter 2 and maybe an Easter 3 or Easter 4. So let's take Easter 1, I'm looking at the poem just across the leaf from the poem Redemption.
Once again we start with kind of the lark song, the rise of my heart. He loves this image of Christ is risen and therefore my heart can rise. There's a catching up into the purposes of God that is part of the Easter experience for her.
Rise heart, thy Lord is risen, sing his praise without delays, who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise with him mayst rise, that as his death calcine thee to dust, his life may make thee gold, and much more just.
[47:30] Awake, my loot, and struggle for thy part with all thy art. The cross taught all wood to resound his name, who bore the same. You need to flip your page.

His stretched sinews taught all strings what key is best to celebrate this most high day. consort both heart and loot, and twist the song pleasant and long, or since all music is but three parts vied and multiplied, oh, let thy blessed spirit bear apart, and make up our defects with his sweet art.
heart and heart. There it is. I can hear you at the end, you kind of go, you're getting the sense of the alabaster jar open, aren't you? You're sensing that here is great, careful crafting presented so simply that it just lets the perfume out, even though you don't quite know, even if you couldn't go line by line.
But let's take a look at how it constructs this lovely poem. So you start to the invitation to his own heart, rise, heart, thy Lord is risen. This is the Easter, this is the Easter declaration.
On Easter we say, the Lord is risen, and we reply, he is risen indeed. And if your heart doesn't rise up on that, there's nothing that can lift it. Okay? So rise, heart, thy Lord is risen.
[48:53] This is a poem about music. That's the next thing you need to know. Sing his praise without delays. So get along with it. And then this lovely picture, who takes thee by the hand that thou likewise with him mayst rise.

If you can think of some of the sketches, do you know the da Vinci sketches for Christ's resurrection, which just shows them in this powerful upsweep, and it's just like you feel all the energy of the cosmos in this wonderful, rising Lord.
And then just imagine him with his hand out, and you like a little toddler, getting caught up in that great victory. And that's the picture that he's catching us up in his victory. That as his death calcined thee to dust, calcined thee to dust, you need to sound the syllable to get the rhythm.
As his death calcined thee to dust, his life may make thee gold and much more just. And this is a very tight line. It has to do with that in Christ's death, we die with him.
And the calcined is the burning away of, is actually the burning of the ashes. So as his death calcined thee to dust, in his death you die to sin, basically.
[50:06] The Ash Wednesday picture is actually tucked in there, in that image. His life may make thee gold. So there's an alchemy of grace going on here. This is an alchemist thing that can take ash and turn it into gold.

At Ash Wednesday, we remember that in Christ's death, our sin is judged. And we identify with that judgment, calcined thee to dust. But also in his resurrection, he transforms that which is mere dust into that which is gold for him and much more just.
And that's just, there's a lovely play, justified, being justified by grace. We have peace with God. Paul writes in Romans 5. You're not only more just, and there will be another meaning to that in the sense of true, in the sense of true to what you should be.
And even the edges of a poem would be justified. So there's a whole lot of meanings there. But mostly justified. You are now justified. So here's the first part, is the heart that's ready to sing.
The second thing is the musical accompaniment. Awake my lute, and struggle for thy part with all thy art. So you try, the lute now, he's now wanting to bring in the accompaniment.
[51:19] And then these amazing lines. I think Malcolm Muggeridge picks up some of these lines when he talks about, at his conversion. In Jesus Rediscovered, he talks about, suddenly he started to see the cross everywhere he looked.

As he began to reflect on the meaning of the cross, suddenly he'd see telephone poles. And everywhere he looked, he could see that the cross was stamped on all of creation.
So this is that kind of a theme. The cross taught all wood to resound his name who bore the same. And once again, what Herbert does, and this is really interesting in terms of a Protestant poetic,

post-Reformation.
You find the crucifix, that is the picture of the cross, or the crucified one, just sort of hidden in the text. He doesn't, as the medieval lyrics used to have long poems, really focused and looking at the crucified one.
Post-Reformation, the cross is still there, but it's like the poem points towards it. And you imagine it, rather than the poem describing it.
[52:22] So here it is. Here's the cross. All wood resounds his name who bore the wood of the cross. And then, of course, you go on with the crucifix image.

His stretched sinews taught all springs what key is best to celebrate this most high day. And there's the picture of, of course, Christ stretched on the cross, the outstretched arms of Christ, and body of Christ on the cross.
The stretched sinews, which is something that would certainly be part of medieval reflection on the cross, actually is the source of the music of the thing.
But there is no song out of, except out of his suffering. That is, the Christian song comes out of this amazing suffering. And see how quietly he does this.
He doesn't give you long, lots of description. But he says, stop and think about it. It's like just in those lines. His stretched sinews taught all strings what key is best to celebrate this most high day.
[53:25] Easter being the highest of the holidays. Consort them. Now you bring them together. Bring together both heart and lute. And twist a song pleasant and long. And the twist is the counterpoint melody that they were just beginning to explain, just beginning to experiment within this period, where you would actually get the various parts being sung off against each other.

So actually, if you were a musicologist, and somebody here probably is, you would know exactly what this is referred to in music history, because it's actually a particular kind of polyphonic music that they were working out.
Make this song pleasant and long. Or, since all music is but three parts of vide, the idea of three voices in the song, and multiplied, Oh, let thy blessed spirit bear a part.
So we've got heart, lute. What do we need to make a three-part melody? We need the Holy Spirit to make up all the defects. One of those voices you can count on in a choral situation who can bring together the other parts that are being sung and make up our defects with his sweet art.
And that's, of course, what we ask as we present ourselves at Eucharist and as we come together as a congregation. Dear Holy Spirit, make up our defects with your sweet art.
[54:47] This is a sweet art. And I hope that you will enjoy more of her in the weeks ahead. But I think our time is gone. Pardon my wife.

By my watch. Yes. Can I ask a question? Following on the musical metaphor, do you know whether Ray Thorn Williams, who was the son of a country person, and he was born in Down Antony in Oxfordshire, and he actually wrote a hymn that was called Down Antony, which I just very well know.
Ray Thorn also, well, the question is whether he read Herbeth, whether you know whether he read Herbeth, because he also wrote the Lark Ascending.
Yes, that's right. Wonderful. That's lovely, isn't it? That's right. And I was trying to quickly survey, I think, Van Gogh's Larks, the painting of Van Gogh with the Larks Ascending as well.
It's a very important theme. I'm sure he would have read Herbeth. In fact, Vaughan Williams, I tend to look this up. There are some very current, like late 20th century settings of some of these poets.
[56:02] And I'd have to see who set what. But I think you'd find there would be interesting. I'd be very surprised if he wouldn't have known Herbeth. I think that Herbeth would be well known in the university at Vaughan Williams time.

He may even have set some of his poems to use. Absolutely. It would be wonderful. Because he did a lot of work on the folk songs.
This was in the early 1900s. Who's the other contemporary? Oh, Benjamin Britten. He certainly did set some of this material. So, exactly. Who did what on which.
I'm not a 20th century musicologist. Maybe somebody would like to look into that. Yes. When people buy their, George Herbert, I have found great comfort from, it's a very long poem, with sacrifice.
Yeah. Is there anything that, I mean, I want to talk about a poem that people don't have looked at, but is there anything you can tell me about? Oh. Because when I suggest, especially for people in

times of pain, that it's a great comfort to know how the depth and breadth of the pain that Christ suffered for us.
[57:15] Can you just share a bit about the background or reflections on sacrifice? One of Herbert's really long poems in the temple, really at the very beginning of the temple, the sacrifice, on which all of our access is based, and really the poem to which all these little crucifixes I've been showing you, these little crucifixion moments, point back.

is a long extended meditation on the cross in the medieval tradition. It basically takes up a long, deep, back in the 12th century, and 13th and 14th high centuries of the religious lyric in the medieval period.
So a good deal, this absolute contemplation of the cost and of the dying Christ. So what he has is, Christ speaking from the cross was ever grief like mine.
The choral refrain of this poem goes again and again, was ever grief like mine. And the voice of Christ from the cross to his beloved us.
So in a very long tradition, it would also have counterparts in the York mystery cycle, that is the plays where they actually enact the life and death of Christ, well the whole biblical narrative including the life and death of Christ.
[58:30] those who would often have a figure on the cross addressing the crowd. All you pass by, take note at what cost I have died.

There would be whole monologues from the cross delivered in those mystery cycle plays. So it's part of a very long tradition. It's a late exemplar of a medieval tradition basically.
And I think that it's, I'm really glad you mentioned it because it's a wonderful Easter meditation. I mean, you know, it's just... I sometimes feel that people think at least in the 20th century, now we're in the 21st, that we've discovered psychology.
Yeah. But the psychological, the insights into the psych, the emotional, the psychological suffering of Christ. Yeah. Yeah. In that poem, are, you know, it's, I mean, it's just quite something to be, am I correct?
Oh, I think so. Absolutely. And I mean, it's born out of herverts where he himself was acquainted with suffering. He lived as an ill man. And so a lot of his poems, you will, once you get into it, you will really sense how many of his poems deal with affliction and suffering, but also then, of course, with this other aspect of capitulation to Christ and in that, the solace, and way beyond solace, the victory.
[59:44] The victory that we're reading about in the Easter poem. Yes. I'm interested in Herbert's influence another British poet, he saw her quite a bit too. That's Jordan Manley-Alkitz.

Oh, yeah. You know, it must be there, but I haven't traced it. I mean, Hopkins is just simply stellar and certainly a suffering poet. As was William Cooper before him, another depressed, a great, great depressed poet.
You know, it's usually depressing and whole, but it helps. No. I don't know. I don't know. But anyway, I would think there would be an influence. I'll have to ask, I'll ask Lauren Wilkinson, he's just finished a Hopkins seminar, he's just finishing a Hopkins seminar right now.
If, you know, who traces that? And you can ask me about that next week, I'll try to remember to ask him. But I know, I'm sure, again, these people have been lodged in the poetry and so once there was a Christian affinity or an affinity for a Christian voice, I'm sure they would be seen as forefathers in poetry in some way or another.
But whether there's direct influence that you would trace, I don't know that. I wouldn't doubt somebody's done some work on it, but it's not something that, it's a little piece of a puzzle I've seen.
[60:59] I do more work where I go from the 17th century to the poets they influence in the 20th, where the arc of my work sometimes goes. Yes. Last three lines of redemption.

Yeah. He searched here high and low cities, theaters, and so on, and one hand visualized he's going along a road or something, where he sees thieves and murderers in ragged noise and murd, as if they are separated from him.
Then he says, there I espied whose strait your suit is granted. and died. Now that's a paraphrase of the words that Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross.
But these are not suffering thieves that he is talking about. Would you say he was identifying with people who are not just a different class from him, but people who have also sinned in looking at that last line?

I think he's finding his place probably with the thief on the cross. In the end, we all have to find our place with those at the foot of the cross.
[62:09] And among those that if you think about a crucifixion scene, you have, of course, you have the mourning disciples. That's a nice place to go. But you also have the people gambling for Jesus' garments.

And so, one positions yourself at the foot of the cross a very ancient way is yourself with the mother Mary. Stand there with Mary. Think what she feels. But in a way, this is even more radical.
Go to the foot of the cross like you are. One of those who would laugh and jeered, mock. This is like a country festival. This is a day's entertainment was to watch somebody die.
And then maybe even be the thief on the cross as it were because you are the sinner for whom Christ died. So he's identifying with the man on the cross with the man, not the God on the cross in a way in having, taking these words unto himself.
I think so. Absolutely. So that's how he sort of draws you to a position. Something, Rembrandt's, I recently had reason to look and think again about Rembrandt's Descent from the Cross which is a magnificent painting of Descent from the Cross.
[63:18] And in that painting, which I have a very profound experience of having stood in front of in the National Gallery in Washington and started the first big Rembrandt I was seeing that was just kind of like this overwhelming experience.

But he paints so that you, in a sense, that's where you have to stand with the rabble. That the only position from which you can actually look at the painting is to stand among the noisy thieves and murderers.
And because Mary's there, you can't stand with her. John is supporting her. And so it's like your eye looks around and says, where am I? Oh, I'm here with the ones who said, if you're the son of God, come on down.
Gamble for his clothes. Or indeed, the thief on the cross. So, yes, that's the motion of the poem. The words, your suit, and the phrase, your suit is granted, they're picking up the third line, aren't they?
Yes. I'm going to make a suit to ask for something better than I have. Yes, absolutely. A suit being a request, of course, a formal legal request. We not only use it in lawsuit, but it would be any formal request made to a person who had the ability to grant that request.
[64:33] Yes, go ahead. The word, straight, who's straight. Yes. Right away. Yes, to be uncluttered. Yes. No nonsense. Mm-hmm. No other demands, no other things.

Yes. Straight in there. Men to be with the country. Yes. That's true. And especially in the context of the poem, because he's done this long, there's an epic voyage, he's been to heaven, he found that Christ has already come to earth and paid for this property, he's come back to try and locate them. So it's a long, almost like Theosius Pilgrim's regret, a long, long journey here, and then he meets in it straight, straight away, here you are. Yeah. Yeah.
The wonderful moment of receiving, simply by faith, the gift that was given there. Yes? When you would execute this poem, I presume you did it in a secular university, did you have the sense that you were preaching the gospel this year?
Oh, yes. That's like doing the literature. Because it has that opportunity, especially this period, the 17th century, which is so richly Christian.
[65:46] You just almost have to. You're not telling the truth about the poets if you don't tell what they were saying. Yeah. I have a more biographical question.

So I was intrigued by Herbert's commitment to the priesthood in the late 1820s, I guess, and he had the sense of the Anglican church in decay or needing renewal. Was that characteristic of the era of John's first that actually people generally saw it as in decay?
I mean, there was a little phrase in then, his commitment and so forth, which highlighted that. Yes. In the 1620s, there were two, there were sort of two big pulls on the Anglican church at this time. One is, I can't remember if it was James or Charles who named Archbishop Law to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Do you recall that? Charles nominated him as Archbishop of Canterbury.
James made him a bishop of some other place before that. Right. So he was moved up through the Jacobian system. And it was Charles I who named Archbishop Law.
[66:52] And there was a strong feeling that the Anglican church was being pulled by the crown and by Archbishop Law towards a very nearly Catholic form. In other words, a kind of

pre-Reformation.

There was a huge resistance to that from the, many of the clergy and from most, many of the people in the congregations because they had been deeply taught by Reformation theology. William Perkins was well, well read and known. Richard Hooker, very fine English Calvinist had actually written so strongly and had been very strong in Cambridge and in Cambridge particularly. So the great majority of the clergy were deeply reformed in their theology and really very prosperous. So this new pull was seen both politically towards the continent and towards France in particular and religiously towards a renewed Catholicism.
And so it was both, and it was, it was resisted. Part of resistance comes from the very Puritan movement within the English church which of course was, has over time been more located with the low church in the nation.
[68:02] But people like George Herbert and Nicholas Farrar would have not been pleased to lose what is basically the Elizabethan, what I'm calling the Elizabethan settlement, the Elizabethan middle way which was a negotiated position attested to later by the Westminster Confession between Anglo-Catholicism or Catholicism on the one side and what would later, I suppose, would be a non-conformity on the other.

And so one of the things, one of the reasons we know that Herbert hewed to the middle way is that early Archbishop Law insisted that the communion table be railed back in again.
That was a big thing. The railing, the table of the Lord again be seen as a high altar and be railed. And that was considered, that was a very political statement.
And from pictures, diagrams and drawings we have of Farrar's church which we think would probably be true of Herbert's as well, we know that he kept the lectern, pulpit here, and the table of the Lord as equal, as equal, in equal positions.
That is, the preaching of the word and the partaking of the elements as equal elements within the body, which would represent very much this kind of English Protestant Calvinism, which is a little different from Continental Calvinism but was the English form of it.
[69:24] So that's about what I can tell you about that. I mean, the strains that would create the Civil War are becoming very evident at this time because the Civil War breaks out in 1639 or so.

So, it's, Herbert's gone before that, before that happens but those political and sociological and religious strains are already pretty evident.
The period you're describing is also the period of the Thirty Years' War on the continent which was a struggle between Protestants and Catholics all over North Europe and totally devastating to the economy and the social structure of those countries also resulted probably in the emergence of the nation state.
But I imagine that Englishmen would have been very upset about that and quite possibly frightened, protected somewhat by their geography as an island but not totally.
And so, adhering to the Middle Way as you put it would have been perhaps a position of safety and there's one reason they didn't like Charles I's wife because she persisted in her Catholicism as a French princess.
[70:38] Yeah, it's a hugely complex period because when you have an enormous shift like the Reformation then you have these shifts and it continues the shifting the kind of the pull towards the Middle Way towards a more Puritan form of the church towards Catholicism continues right till what they call the Glorious Revolution when William of Orange comes over and in a sense that's sort of the end of this the political and sociological pulls that are part of this whole century of change.

Yes? So what is inspired by this vision of the dynamic Via Melia the way which Herbert represents it so one could get really enthusiastic about this Via Melia and I thought where is the dynamic Via Melia today?
Woo! We have to hear the quick news! The immediate the middle way I've used it both ways the Latin way and the middle way and by middle way I don't it wasn't a weak-kneed middle way it was a negotiated in the Westminster confession position basically that is reformed theology liturgy that includes a priesthood antiscopal church leadership there's a number of aspects to it which we could talk about more and figure with very interesting question we'll have to give back some thoughts yes I have another question which may not be answerable today but you spoke about this relationship that was felt very profoundly at the time between macrocosm and macrocosm and how the forms so often go from one to the other and there's very much a sense that has been involved that whole

connection of the universe and our relationship to it was lost and I'm wondering if you see in contemporary poetry and contemporary
Christian poetry an attempt to regain that in a new way a very interesting question the question is for those of you who weren't able to hear is there any method of or current project of recovering that idea of the microcosm macrocosm relationship that is that we were looking at in this poetry I don't think you can regain cosmic perspectives after science has changed the way we look at the world and so on I think that that had to do with a whole set of interlocking ideas about how really it still came from the idea of the earth as centered to the universe so that the human person was on this central position and then each human person was this center of activity you do find a lot of contemporary poets working with today's understanding of a boundless universe and a huge universe and the individual before such vastness you do find writers trying to work with that Margaret Abbison I hope many of you know the work of Margaret Abbison who is Canada's premier poet she's won the governor general's award twice a stunning writer and a deep believer she quite often talks about that vast otherness and that finding oneself loved in the midst of this vastness and I think that was part of T.S.
[74:22] Eliot's trying to find voice in the 20th century so I don't think you can recapture except imaginatively by re-entering sort of the mindset of this period but you can say how do we as people of faith position ourselves in our cosmos in a way that is faithful both to what we have learned about it and to the revelation of God's love to us in Jesus Christ I think you have to ask a different question but it's the kind of thing it is what sets up the dynamic of contemporary poetry is exactly that how do you assert that God loves an individual person in this vast space and you do it on the basis of scripture you do it on the basis of experience you do it on the basis of the witness of God's love to us in creation so they struggle to find those voices those paths you