

March 2, 1977

I speak as a man, as a woman, as a girl, as a boy, as one looking ahead to many years of life, as one with only a few ^{about five} years or weeks before my death. I speak as one who is rich, one who is admired, one who is poor, one who is despised. I speak as all who have walked on this ground we call the earth, my skin is every color, I live in every age. And I say, "AS A HART LONGS FOR FLOWING STREAMS, SO LONGS MY SOUL FOR THEE, O GOD. MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR GOD FOR THE LIVING GOD." "WHEN SHALL I COME AND BEHOLD THE FACE OF GOD?" Like a deer wandering across the parched ^{prairie of the} ~~grass lands of~~ ~~Western North Dakota~~ in a year of drought, seeking the life giving liquid which will restore and refresh, so I seek God. I seek the one who is whole and complete, just and pure. Men speak of ~~him~~ ^{God} as an idea or a concept, whom they twist and use to support their theories and prejudices. Enough of the theories and ideas of men, let me see the living God, I long to see him face to face.

"MY TEARS HAVE BEEN MY FOOD DAY AND NIGHT, WHILE MEN SAY TO ME CONTINUALLY, "WHERE IS YOUR GOD?" I live a lie, with the smiles and happiness and lightness and gaily concealing only partially the sadness in my heart. The confidence and accomplishments, the power and self-control that others see cannot hide the fear and doubt which lie within. At times the sadness and the fear and the doubt have gotten the upper hand, I can only avoid them by deadening my brain with drugs or alcohol. At times I have sought an even more permanent deadening by ending the sadness with a rope or a gun or an overdose of sleeping pills. My head throbs, my stomach aches, my tears flow as all of life reminds me of my separation from the one who has created my life. I lash out in anger, I hurt, I destroy those ~~innocents~~ who love me most for their love only reminds me of my failure.

THESE THINGS I REMEMBER, AS I POUR OUT MY SOUL: HOW I WENT WITH THE THROG, AND LED THEM IN THE PROCESSION TO THE HOUSE OF GOD, WITH GLAD SHOUTS AND SONGS OF THANKSGIVING, A MULTITUDE KEEPING FESTIVAL. WHY ARE YOU CAST DOWN, O MY SOUL, AND WHY ARE YOU DISQUIETED WITHIN ME? HOPE IN GOD FOR I SHALL AGAIN PRAISE HIM, MY HELP AND MY GOD." You see, it was not always so. There was a time, or so it seems, that God was not a stranger to me. It was a time when faith and belief were natural. Was it a candlelight service on a snowy December evening, small flames glowing in the darkness, the air filled with the sound, Christ the Savior is born? Or was it a bright spring Easter morning with the words He is risen proclaimed

by the smiling faces and the brightness of the sun. The faith I knew as an innocent child, or a bright morning of hope after a long dark night of struggle and doubt. But then there was no distance, no barrier separating me from the warmth of the love of God. And in that warmth, there was no sadness or fear, no doubt to chill me with its icy bareness. Why should I be sad and fearful, what I once knew I shall know again. Or will I?

MY SOUL IS CAST DOWN WITHIN ME, THEREFORE I REMEMBER THEE FROM THE LAND OF JORDAN AND OF HERMON, FROM MOUNT MIZAE. DEEP CALLS TO DEEP AT THE THUNDER OF THY CATARACTS: ALL THY WAVES AND THY BILLOWS HAVE GONE OVER ME. BY DAY THE LORD COMMANDS HIS STEADFAST LOVE: AND AT NIGHT HIS SONG IS WITH ME, A PRAYER TO THE GOD OF MY LIFE. It is as if I have travelled from my home in the warmth of God's love, from simple faith and trust to the foreign land of doubt and sadness and fear, where I can only remember what was before. And now the memory of that simple faith, the knowledge of what might have been comes crashing down upon me like water falling over a cliff. I have passed from the childhood of faith to the adulthood of planning and scheming. I set the course for my tomorrows to insure a happiness which I cannot provide. People and possessions have become building blocks with which I would build a fortress, a castle to protect me. But the blocks keep shifting and moving, some disappear, new ones are added and I can no longer hold them all together. My fortress crumbles and with it the security I had tried to build.

Can I go home again, return to ~~the~~ simple faith and trust. I pray, I sing, I try to love. But I fear someone is not convinced, and that someone is me.

I SAY TO GOD MY ROCK: "WHY HAST THOU FORGOTTEN ME? WHY GO I MOURNING BECAUSE OF THE OPPRESSION OF THE ENEMY?" AS WITH A DEADLY WOUND IN MY BODY, MY ADVERSARIES TAUNT ME, WHILE THEY SAY TO ME CONTINUALLY, "WHERE IS YOUR GOD?" There was a time when the separation from God didn't bother me, when I scarcely noticed my faith slipping away as I lived in the health of my youth and basked in the respect and admiration of others. My life was full then, full of doing and enjoying and full of the promise of the great things which would come to me. But as time has passed the promises have gone unfulfilled, the world is not so in love with me as it once was, and the little wounds between myself and others ^{through the years} ~~through the years~~ have festered into gaping sores. ~~Overwhelmed~~ All I meet, all those I know seem to accuse me, they look as if to ask, "What have you done with your life." Now my days are no longer full, and

in the ^{emptiness} ~~empty moments~~ I look for God. Has he too forgotten me, left me to fester and rot?

VINDICATE ME, O GOD, AND DEFEND MY CAUSE AGAINST AN UNGODLY PEOPLE; FROM DECEITFUL AND UNJUST MEN DELIVER ME! FOR THOU ART THE GOD IN WHOM I TAKE REFUGE: WHY HAST THOU CAST ME OFF? WHY GO I MOURNING BECAUSE OF THE OPPRESSION OF THE ENEMY? What is this? These cannot be my words.. How can I speak of vindication for it is I who have wandered astray. Has another joined me, does he walk beside me and share in my loneliness and separation? Yes, and it is none other than the Son of God himself. They heap upon him the insults that I deserve, they judge him to be godless. He stands with me waiting for God to deliver him, he bears the punishment and the abuse of one who has lived foolishly. He is with me in this land where neither God nor man will care or befriend. The crowd is coming for me, but they take him, they scream now you will get what you deserve, but ~~I know he does not~~ it is I who deserves it. Will God leave him as he should leave me, as I so often feel left. They're nailing him to the cross, this is injustice. Will God forsake his Son, will God fail to help even him? He's dead. It's been a mistake, a terrible ^{wrong} ~~injustice~~.

Or was it no mistake at all? Has God come to me, broken down all that separates me from him in this act? Has he sent his LIGHT AND TRUTH in this one who has walked ~~with~~ me. Shall this one lead me and bring me to God's holy hill, to the dwelling place of God.

WHY ARE YOU CAST DOWN, O MY SOUL, AND WHY ARE YOU DISQUIETED WITHIN ME? HOPE IN GOD: FOR I SHALL AGAIN PRAISE HIM, MY HELP AND MY GOD. Now suddenly these words have a ring of ~~new~~ truth. God has come to break down the wall which separated. He has walked with me in the hours of my darkness, he has come to me when I least deserved and expected it and taken my darkness upon himself. My thirst is quenched, the living God has entered my life. I can again praise him, for he ~~is~~ is my help, my God. Amen.