

Reflection – Advent 2 – Blue Christmas

Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman in 1953. This little book is very special to me, because it belonged to Joyce Doherty, a long time member of this church, and a faithful disciple of the Master Jesus. It was given to me sometime after she died by her loving husband, Gerald Doherty. There are some wonderful stories, poems and reflections in this little book, and I'm going to use one of them as the basis for my first reflection this morning.

It deals with the problem of suffering, this little story, and so more directly deals with our difficulty in believing what Matthew says that Jesus said in our last reading: *Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* We want to believe it – but sometimes our pain is so great, our anger toward God so deep, that we can't really hear those words.

So hear this story, Gwen's story – I invite you to listen with your heart.

Gwen was a wild, willful lassie – a girl who had always been accustomed to having her own way. Until one day Gwen had a terrible accident which crippled her for life. She became very rebellious, demanding, and complaining. In this state she was visited by the Sky Pilot – a missionary who ministered in remote places.

He told her the parable of the canyon. "At first there were no canyons, but only the broad, open prairie. One day the Master of the Prairie, walking over his great lawns, where were only grasses, asked the Prairie, 'Where are your flowers?' and the Prairie said, 'Master I have no seeds.'

“Then he spoke to the birds, and they carried seeds of every kind of flower and strewed them far and wide, and soon the prairie bloomed with crocuses and roses and buffalo beans and the yellow crowfoot and the wild sunflowers and the red lilies all summer long. Then the Master came and was well pleased; but he missed the flowers he loved best of all, and he said to the Prairie: ‘Where are the clematis and the columbine, the sweet violets and wind-flowers, and all the ferns and flowering shrubs?’

“And again he spoke to the birds, and again they carried all the seeds and scattered them far and wide. But again, when the Master came he could not find the flowers he loved best of all, and he said:

‘Where are those my sweetest flowers?’ and the Prairie cried sorrowfully:

“ ‘Oh, Master, I cannot keep the flowers, for the winds sweep fiercely, and the sun beats upon my breast, and they wither up and fly away.’

“Then the Master spoke to the Lightning, and with one swift blow the Lightning cleft the Prairie to the heart. And the Prairie rocked and groaned in agony, and for many a day moaned bitterly over the black, jagged, gaping wound.

“But the river poured its waters through the cleft, and carried down deep black silt, and once more the birds carried seeds and strewed them in the canyon. And after a long time the rough rocks were decked out with soft mosses and trailing vines, and all the nooks were hung with clematis and columbine, and great elms lifted their huge tops high up into the sunlight, and down about their feet

clustered the low cedars and balsams, and everywhere the violets and wind-flower and maiden-hair grew and bloomed, till the canyon became the Master's favourite place for rest and peace and joy.

Then the Sky Pilot read to her: "The fruit – I'll read "flowers" – the fruit of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness – and some of these grow only in the canyon."

"Which are the canyon flowers?" asked Gwen softly, and the Pilot answered: "Gentleness, meekness, longsuffering; but though the others, love, joy, peace bloom in the open, yet never with so rich a bloom and so sweet a perfume as in the canyon."

For a long time Gwen lay quite still, and then said wistfully, while her lips trembled: "There are no flowers in my canyon, but only ragged rocks."

The Sky Pilot said: "Someday, dearest Gwen, they will bloom, the Master will find them, and we will see them too."

Let us sing now the beautiful words of the 23rd Psalm: The Lord's My Shepherd.