

Glimmer (following a reading of John 6:15-21)

Smoky clouds obscure the moon and clear.
My shoulders ache from rowing, my feet are cold and wet
from storm spray in the bottom of the boat.
In the moonlight, I see signs on our faces
where surging waves have come and left their mark.
Our hair shows faintly grey and white;
it seems we have grown older through the night.
I'm longing to see Jesus, but it's hard, hard to see him.

At first this figure walking towards us on the water
seems like a ghost, sea-mist or the foam of a wave.
I cannot see his face— only a moonlit blur
from the other side of the sea—is this
a figure made only of my longing?
A figure made of bible stories and their illustrations,
gold-gilded round the edges of the pages?
A glimmer, only a glimmer:

I rest my oar a moment and remember
times before, when hope came out of darkness.
Times when I knew Jesus was there.
He's treading the pathways of the sea,
the past, the present and the future
as though the sea and sky and earth
were all one furrowed element of light.

And this figure, now the darkness is passing away,
glimmers with the faint light of dawn.
Jesus' face like ours is marked with waves and I see
he has been here, with me, in household illness
and when I lost someone very dear.
He has been here with us in Gaza,
he has been here with us in Ukraine;
all the waves of sorrow and storm.

When we take him into the boat
his feet are wet and mingle with bilge-water.
He sits, no longer holy ghost,
his face older and thinner than when I knew him first.
His face now contains all the Mondays of my life,
the salt tang of a real body. We sit together
beneath the shadow of the mast, a cross of light and dark
looking at the long, stormy lines of waves on the horizon.
Together we prepare to raise a sail
and voyage through the changing shapes of islands
in the mystery of the wild wind.

Barbara Colebrook Peace

November 2024