

Ashes to Fire  
**Tell Us Plainly**

Opening: Italian Technology  
Text: [John 10: 22-30](#)

Poetry is not for your everyday reader – especially not for the 21st Century multi-tasking American, who lives by the credo, **get it now – get it fast – and get it done!**

For most people, reading lines of poetry that are not “self evident” create too much strain on too little time.

Poetry isn't meant to be up front and in your face! The richness of its spoke mystery is powerful.

Elizabeth Perry (one of the writers from Ashes to Fire series) puts it this way:

*“In understanding poetry ... I looked forward to the mystery. I was starting to get it, or rather I was starting to get that I didn't get it, and that getting it, was never the point. That instead, the poetry was getting me, reading me and discerning me somehow.”*

Let me illustrate with an unpublished untitled poem, by an author some of you will recognize. Poem by Heather Dobrie (poem not included here)

About now you might be asking yourself – Where is he going with all this?

I want you to consider what you know about God.

If you were to tell someone else about the God of the universe, how would you begin that conversation?

What would you start with?

How would you draw a picture with words so they would understand Him like you do?

For most of us, our attempt to explain God would probably be more about us than Him. How He has changed our life through His Son Jesus. Interesting isn't it?

But what do you actually know about God himself?

Would you focus on God's most prominent attribute His love, quoting [John 3:16](#) in the process?

Again you are slipping back into what God means to you and why He is so real to you, what he has done for you and what He has brought you through in your life.

You know a lot about what He means to you and yet if you're honest you will admit, no matter how long you have walked this road of faith with Him, there are times you just can't figure Him out. You can't understand the events that are happening to you or others. At times you wonder where God is and what could He possibly be up to?

His ways are mysterious, and there are moments in every person's life when we are caught off guard, flat footed and stunned unable able to offer a satisfactory explanation for events.

For Christians who've had a real encounter with God, the only resolve is to hold our ground, hold tight and remind ourselves that God has been faithful in the past can be trusted now. That's what faith is all about!

This past Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup> 755 Boylston Street was one of those moments.

The horrific unprovoked attack by two young men 19 and 26 (one a U.S. citizen) left three dead, two of them children, 17 in critical conditions and 40 horrifying military type injuries.

We're left aghast, mouths hanging open, that anyone, let alone Jocar a handsome, baby faced assassin could perpetrate and carry out such a plan on an innocent civilian population.

Like the words of a poem we don't quite get - our thoughts are suspended in air as we try to grasp meaning of all this.

→ We grapple trying to make sense of it, trying to understand. How God could allow such a thing? Let me caution you – be careful in trying to give reasons or make excuses for God.

There are behind the scenes battles going on – [Ephesians 6](#) “*We wrestle not against flesh and blood but ...*”

Turn back to [John 10](#)

**Backdrop** – takes place in December the winter season of Judea during the *Festival of Dedication* or *Festival of Lights* or as it is called today Hanukkah.

An 8 day Jewish celebration commemorating a national and historical hero figure, **Judas Maccabaeus** who led a revolt in 170 BC against the Seleucid King who had killed 80 thousand Jews, crucifying mothers who circumcised their sons, and publicly disgraced the temple by sacrificing a pig on the sacred alter. Turning the temple of Yahweh into the temple of Zeus

Judas Maccabaeus was a political/military messiah who defeated the Seleucid King.

This was the hope so many including some of his own 12 disciples had for Jesus.

In John 10 we read that Jesus was surrounded by the Jewish leaders in the colonnade – outer court of Solomon's temple.

They pressed in on him demanding an answer. “*How long will you keep us in suspense? Tell us plainly – are you the Messiah?*”

Jesus had been careful to reveal who he was to only a handful of people, it wasn't until Palm Sunday that all of that changed with crowds shouting Hosanna – declaring it for Him.

Have you ever considered why? Why the secrecy? Why did Jesus refer to himself as the son of man – not the son of God?

- The Woman at the well - “I know that Messiah” “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” [John 4: 25, 26](#)
- Martha the sister of Lazarus who had died. Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." [John 11:27](#)
- Peter - Jesus asks his 12 disciples– “*Who do men say that I am?*”

→ **These next words** are oh so important because they explain what we know about God and how we know it!

Peter replies – You are the Christ the Son of the Living God!

*“Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”* [Matt 16:17](#)

Did you get that? We are able to know who God is in any other way but by His Spirit!

In this church we talk a lot about relationship - instead of religion.

We emphasize that we don’t want to be religious – devout, but cold and distant from God.

These are good talking points ... but do we understand them?

James Macdonald author of The Vertical Church, wrote this:

“Church was never meant to be safe. Or comfortable. Or predictable.

God isn’t any of those things. Church is supposed to arrest our pride.

Church is meant to crush our selfishness.

Church was created to carry our heartache and comfort our affliction.

Church is where we find community, express compassion and engage in mission.

**But church without God does none of that.”**

The Jewish leaders cornered Jesus at the temple because they were afraid, they didn’t know what to do about him. His ways did not fit their paradigm for dealing with God.

They were afraid because his works and popularity had captured the imagination and hearts of the nation and they were losing control.

They were losing their grip on an already tenuous situation with the Roman government who wanted things kept quiet and simple.

Jesus was neither and they couldn’t understand it and wouldn’t allow it!

Tell us plainly are you the Messiah or not? -

This is how we sometimes react when feeling cornered by life. Where are you LORD? If you care why haven’t you come to help me?

Jesus’ response – “*I’ve already told you but you **refused to believe**. The proof is in the work I do in my father’s name. But you do not believe me because you are not of my sheep.*”

[John 6:63](#) “*The Spirit alone gives life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But some of you do not believe me.*”

Human effort and intellect alone are not enough!

How do we get this spiritual understanding? By spending time in prayer with Him, by reading, eating taking your daily bread the Bible His Word.

We have been on a journey together here at Patchogue, we have entered into a promise a covenant – with each other and God to humble ourselves and pray and seek His face.

The results have quietly startling –

A revitalization of ministries that to a great extent were going through the paces. We have retaken lost ground and have begun to make a difference in the lives of each other and the community around us.

Your prayers lead to spiritual encounter here together at church.

Read pages 18, 19 The Vertical Church

As we continue down this road of revival together the obstacles will be many, and the challenges great – but the rewards even greater.

Your prayer time – encounter time will begin to give you spiritual understanding and ability.

You will begin go understand that God is loving and wants a close up relationship with you but also that he is awesome and fearsome God Almighty.

You begin to grasp what the Psalmist means when he writes: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. [Psalm 111:10](#)

Start to grasp the meaning of [Proverbs 9:2](#) “Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time.” *NLT*