

Reorientation: A Personal Journey



Reorientation

We have forgotten where the color of the rose came from
where Earth gained her green
the Lilacs their hue

We have forgotten that stones were once turquoise and terse
incarnations of possibility
yellow with age

Even the sea obeys the light
Even her power reflects Her sight

Let us remember where life began
why beauty can never fail

Prolepsis: When the Future Collapses into the Present

Beaches swell and disappear with the tide. The weather on the Oregon coast is fickle. Sun and fun one day can easily become a dripping, dreary trudge through the mud the next. Always, though, there are three things around the beach that catch my eye.

To the west lays the Pacific Ocean. It roils and churns with both power and beauty. The ocean is awe inspiring, in any weather.

A few feet to the east are cliffs of compact sand. People of means build their homes on them overlooking the sea. Recently, being told by architects and engineers that they are more than safe from erosion for at least 100 years, they find the sand is calving away beneath them. It does not bode well for the future.

And then there are fellow travelers. There is always somebody on the beach. They may be playing, walking their dog, or shivering in their overcoat trying to keep out the wind and the rain. When I lived in Newport it was this overcoat crowd I grew to trust. We rarely spoke, but I knew they understood the sand and sea intimately. We were on the same journey.

Late in 2007 I was asked to be a speaker for the Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon. I took the following image by Oregon eco-artist Sandy Roumagoux with me, and a poem. I shared thoughts on “mission,” a growing awareness of being a “beach bishop,” and what it might mean to be Church in the 21st century.



Sandy Roumagoux, *Modern Babel*, 2006, oil on canvas, 72" x 108"

*Palsied pink along the shore,
Church of Christ forever more,
Caught between 'was' and 'will be,'
Waiting on the cleansing sea.*

*To the east where life began,
Cliffs of clay and marzipan,
Filled with fear - we can't go back -
Feigning truth we stack rip rap.*

*Blowing sand about my feet,
Let me know that life's complete,
Battling demons in my sway,
Pray the tide wash all away.*

*Trust ye now tempestuous seas,
Kyrie, kyra-i-e.
Siren's song and Spirit's call,
Kyrie, Lord, love us all.*

As 2019 unfolds I have had cause to revisit this sense of 'beachiness.' Always I carry with me the notion of ongoing transformation. It has shaped much of my work as a bishop. However, until recently I had forgotten the longing I expressed for the sea to finish her work.

*Caught between 'was' and 'will be,'
Waiting on the cleansing sea.*

Many people I talk with express this sense of being caught between "'was' and 'will be'." Because it marks much of what we feel and experience today I have become fluent in the language of change. People feel stuck. Do we wait on the "cleaning sea" with hope or fear?

"Mission, for me, means trying and failing - or trying and succeeding, but not for long." I shared with my Episcopal sisters and brothers over a decade ago. "Mission means having the freedom to write in the sand . . . it is not about preserving the past, nor creating the future, but simply being in the present. Mission means assessing what I cannot live without and experimenting with letting go of things I have decided are not essential."

I am a relatively non-anxious person. Learning to live in the "now" is a skill I've cultivated. Yet, living in the now has its shortcomings. Some things must be planned for, committed to, and pursued to become reality.

*Blowing sand about my feet,
Let me know that life's complete,
Battling demons in my sway,
Pray the tide wash all away.*

These words are a prayer. I still seek assurance, hope, and joy. Yet, the world has pivoted on its axis. The tide is changing.

I am no longer a beach bishop. The season of holding space is ending. The time for decisions has come. I feel something new is required of me.

The Earth has called the question. No longer is humanity neutral in the future of this planet's survival. We have stolen from Nature her ability to care for us. Now we must now care for her.

America's partisan dysfunction has called the question. Tribalism means death and only unity can clear the path ahead.

Mass migration has called the question. The world's obscene divide between rich and poor destabilizes everything. It cannot stand.

And water now calls the question. The seas are rising, hurricanes are blowing, and fresh water is becoming scarce.

Then there is our baptism.

"Caught between 'was' and 'will be'" is a prison of our own design. Its bars are fear and uncertainty. Paul and Silas sat in their unlocked prison for just so long. Then they set out. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were unphased by fire. Yet they too were called out. Divinity always finds a way. Timidity is understandable, but when the question is called one must decide and act or surrender their moral authority to another.

Past and present are neither a choice nor a balance. Past and present are a vector, a direction, a promise. Prolepsis is convergence, a confusion, a mating. "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet." says the psalmist. "Righteousness and peace will kiss each other." This is prolepsis.

At this time, in this place, people of faith must let the waters of their baptisms fully engulf them anew. I am now a creature of the sea. There is no turning back.



Sandy Roumagoux, *Nye Beach Weather*, 2016, oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

***Prolepsis** is the future crashing in upon the present. It makes real that which is not yet. When I am adrift in time it is often only prayer, poetry and pigment that can help make sense of reality.*

Sandy painted this image watching a storm roll in off the Pacific Ocean. Praying this painting I am swept up into this blue harbinger of tomorrow. The seas and the storm are one. So it is written.

*“The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.”*

Isaiah 11:9 NRSV

Prolepsis

*YInMn Blue plucked from the shore,
Church of Christ forever more,
'What will be' now renders 'was,'
Bethel resomates to Luz.*

*Rains fall down sea levels rise,
No more beach with time's demise,
Hope now thunders, Truth revealed,
Human choice the future's sealed.*

*Baptized now one global whole,
Birthing blue what green has stole,
Sea and sky embrace new life,
Linked by storms beauty and strife.*

*Trust ye now tempestuous seas,
Kyrie, kyra-i-e,
Siren's song and Spirit's call,
Kyrie, Lord, love us all.*

Prayer is like a sliver. Sometimes it seizes your attention and won't let you rest until you've work it out. Poetry can be the same. Prophecy and painting as well. Sandy Roumagoux and I (the artist whose pictures you see here) often talk about the "problem" we are trying to address in some work. Sometimes you have no idea what it is until you're done.

"Resomate" is not a word. (At least it didn't used to be!) However, "Resomation" is. Resomation is an eco-friendly process for dealing with someone who has died. It is commonly known as "Aqua Cremation."

The problem I am working with in *Prolepsis* is the end of one thing and the beginning of another. "What will be' now renders 'was'" names a spiritual conundrum. I generally assume it is the past that shapes the present. Yet, the future also plays its part. When does one say, "Enough!"? When do you draw a line in the sand and declare, "This far and no further!"? Indeed, it is only visions of the future that can compel such action. In the proleptic the prophetic finds voice.

And what of my metaphorical "beachiness" in a world of spiritual sea level rise? As I prayed, Aqua Cremation wanted voice. The color blue leapt from Sandy's brush and into my hopes and fears.

And water. The power of the ocean, baptism, chaos, life and death. So many voices in the winds and waves of the proleptic. I have not done these voices justice, but Sandy says she and I have been cast into the same seventh heaven.

It is risky to paint just sky and sea. The artist needs the shore, a rocky crag or lighthouse to ground their work. "Nye Beach Weather" is the only painting I have ever seen that takes this risk, and then makes me own it! But own it we do. Plucked from the shore, called by the Spirit, submerged in the blue, here we wrestle with Leviathan.

Job knew this experience. He also looked death in the eye, and reflected on a similar, fearsome encounter in the Old Testament. It was Leviathan, God's great sea monster, who confronted Job and adjudicated his arrogance. Job was shaken in a way he would never forget. I am told it is the blue flame which is the hottest.

*"I will not keep silence concerning its limbs,
or its mighty strength, or its splendid frame.
Who can strip off its outer garment?
Who can penetrate its double coat of mail?
Who can open the doors of its face?
There is terror all around its teeth.
Its back is made of shields in rows,
shut up closely as with a seal.
One is so near to another
that no air can come between them.
They are joined one to another;
they clasp each other
and cannot be separated . . ."*

Job 41:12-17 NRSV

It is time to make friends with Leviathan, "linked by storms, beauty, and strife" as it were. "One so near another that no air can come between them." We are joined one to another. Earth, sea and sky now clasp each other and cannot be separated. We are the blue, altogether.



Sandy Roumagoux, *Ocean/Sky Series, #1*, 2016, oil on canvas, 36" x 45"

Reflections

Hall of mirrors

Sea and Sky

blue answering blue

white caps and clouds

waves of grey with promise, power and uncertainty

"Deep calls to deep," we hear us say

Longing and Love

spirit answering emptiness

souls and songs

words and rituals with promise, power and fecundity

*Such is the sea throbbing with Mystery
Such are the clouds lite and wan*

*Dawn breaking through
Mixture of metaphor*

*The call of tomorrow
Defining today*

Dave Brauer-Rieke, January 2019

I was unable to pray this picture, and those that follow, from the beach. They were beautiful but I did not trust them. I had not done my own soul searching, my own inner work. When we have not done our personal work we constantly search the shadows and miss the light. This is how we distort truth. We look through eyes of fear and preconception.

Facing the blue Leviathan of tomorrow, I am more able to deal with today.

There are many shades of blue, are there not?

*"Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your waterfalls;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me."*

Psalm 42:7

Disorientation. Just when you think you understand something somebody goes and changes the rules. It seems like this might have something to do with our primal fear of the sea.

There are no fixed points of reference here. Winds and weather follow no discernable pattern, at least not to the uninitiated.

This next painting hides my newly found point of reference, the color blue. Sandy, like the sea, has chosen a whole new palette for a wholly new work. The sea will not let us rest.

Sometimes we seek in vain for what we thought we knew.

Disorientation

Where is the blue of this day's journey?
Where is the churning, the calling, the joy?

Suspended

Distant

Coming

Going

*when seas are dark
and skies descend*

*Hope floats
Progress reflects
Movement stills
Mindfulness recalls*

Dave Brauer-Rieke, January 2019



Sandy Roumagoux, *Water, Sea, Sky*, 2017, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

***“Come, behold the works of the LORD;
See what desolation God has brought on the earth;
The Divine makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
She breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
She burns the shields with fire.”***

“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Psalm 46:8-10 NRSV*



Sandy Roumagoux, *Ocean/Sky Series, #2*, 2016, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

Reorientation

*We have forgotten where the color of the rose came from
where Earth gained her green
the Lilacs their hue*

*We have forgotten that stones were once turquoise and terse
incarnations of possibility
yellow with age*

*Even the sea obeys the Light
Even her power reflects Her sight*

*Let us remember where life began
why beauty can never fail*

Dave Brauer-Rieke, January 2019

***Reorientation.** I have not decided if this poem is dystopic and apocalyptic, or affirming and joyful. It depends, I think, on whether prolepsis is really a collapse of tomorrow into today, or only a foretaste of things to come.*

Is the rose in the sky a memory of something that once was, or a reminder of what still is? Are the incarnations of lilac and orange, turquoise and green at risk, robust, or now a treasure held only by the Light?

*It is all here, within the storm of Sandy's vision.
In the sea, the water, the birthing, the baptism.
Here in the wisps of air that are the sky we find ochre and umber,
thistle and heliotrope, grey, gold and mauve.
There may even be a streak or two of YInMn Blue.*

*Which, wert or art it makes no difference.
In the final analysis even the sea obeys the Light.*

*Let us remember where life began.
Let us give thanks that beauty will never fail.
And then, let us reclaim our responsibility for what
the Divine has given us.*

*“O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
You have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

*O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!”*

Psalm 8 NRSV

All poetry and text in this booklet is the work of Dave Brauer-Rieke, former bishop of the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. www.climateimagination.com

All images are of paintings created by Sandy Roumagoux and are used with her permission. You may learn more about Sandy Roumagoux and her work at www.roumagoux.com

Bible quotations from: *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version. Ed. Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print*

** Psalm 46 has been amended to use feminine images for God and a variety of names for the Divine.*