

Go On
by Jeremy Peters

On February twenty fourth,
John Wesley wrote to Wilberforce,
If God be fore you,
Who can be against you?
O be not weary of well doing!
Go on, in the name of God.

John Wesley was eighty seven years old
When he told that young man to boldly
Go and oppose the most unholy evil of slavery,
And maybe the image of that worn out Saint
With his shaky hand
And his hair turned gray
Leaning in close to see the page
Just six days before he passed away
Tells us everything there is to say
About how Methodists do retirement.

The fire went on burning in the old man's belly
Even as he strolled through the valley of the shadow of death,
And if Wesley were with us yet,
If he were before us here today,
I believe we would hear Mister Wesley say
O be not weary of well doing!
Go on, in the name of God.

By all means go, and tend to your lawn -
Spend some money on a new riding mower
But don't be surprised when you're out zero-turning
if you suddenly notice a bush that is burning
But not consumed
And boom! Like Moses,
You kick off your shoes
While the great I Am calls out to you,
O be not weary of well doing!
Go on, in the name of God.

Go write epistles,
Go on resisting evil and injustice and oppression,
Go on and mentor the next Athanasius,
Raise her up against the world,
Go on and worship,
Go on and serve,

Go on and speak the beautiful word that you heard at first
And works in you still,
Go on to perfection,
Go on until you're filled with the all-excelling love that takes away our bent to sinning,
Your career may be ended
But your ministry is just beginning,
So go on for the poor and them that mourn,
Go on for the weary downtrod,
Grow on like a tiny mustard seed,
Grow on like Jesse's rod,
Go on for the pearl that is without price
And the treasure beneath the sod,
I said O be not weary of well doing!
Go on, in the name of god!

Go on resisting evil and injustice,
go write epistles
Resist oppression by deed and pen
Go on lifting your voice in worship
Go on to call and mentor
The next athanasius against the world
Go on and serve in rotary
And go on and preach at tim Horton's
And go on like old john Wesley
On February twenty fourth
Go on and grow in the love
That takes away our bent to sinning
Your career may be over
But your ministry is just beginning
So go on to perfection
Go on for the oppressed
And the outcast
And the downtrodden;
I said o be not weary of well doing!
Go on, in the name of god.

Go on like Athanasius

The Child Who Retired

by Dillon Burns

They say that youth is wasted on the young
But I wonder if retirement doesn't right the scales.
I'm no expert, not by any means
(Are there experts in retiring?)
But I'm a preacher
And what preacher lets a little thing like
Being uniquely unqualified
Keep us from talking?

After all, we who have never died
(Not even once!)
Still preach at funerals
To crowds of the living
About the wonder of things
We have felt but could not see
What we can taste but cannot touch.

We preach and we preach and we preach
Until the people rise up ready
To follow us onward and upward
And on into the casket
That unavoidable ending
Which puts all things in perspective
And might just offer a new beginning
For us all to keep on living.

That's where all good faith seems to end:
With us all a child again.

There once was a man who asked Jesus,
What kind of a fool do you take me for?
The child grown up can't grow back down
And it's impossible to try.
I've come too far and can't return
if even I knew the way.

Oh, said Jesus to the man,
My dear sweet summer child.
Surely you remember
what it was like
when you were very young.

Don't you remember
bike rides in the alleyway,
and baseball in the park?
Ovaltine in the afternoon,
and fireflies at night?

Don't you remember
Splashing in the little creek
and rolling in the mud?
Laughing with glee and living with joy,
wherever we might be?

Don't you remember
the guppies in the little creek
and crickets hiding in their field?
When all the world was ours to find
and nothing out there could stop us?

Don't you remember
the stretch of those summer days
with nothing much to do?

Don't you remember
Dreaming and believing
that anything could be?

Oh, said Jesus to the man,
My dear sweet summer child.
It can be like that again.

Do you feel that warm wind blowing?
Something new is blooming.
Something new is brewing.
You do not have to be
Who you have always been.

Take off today
and all that you know,
and leave it behind
for tomorrow.

Youth is surely wasted on the young
But retirement may be a gift to the seasoned
That returns the timeline
to the very beginning.

Dear preacher, do you feel
the wind which here is blowing?
It could be
that something new is blooming.
It could be
that something new is brewing.
I have heard it said and even believe
the impossible could be true:
You do not have to be
who you have always been.

Blessings on your retirement. Thank you.

You Know

by Jenaba Waggy

There was not enough coffee for the armchair fisherman shouting instructions from the safety of the beach in the dawn light the watchmen wait for. There is never enough coffee for the back row hecklers, first in and never around except to tell you the sermon would be so much better, the kids would come back, the program would succeed with the love of the community if you would just put your net on the other side of the boat. Jesus never heckles from the back row, I've found; the front pew is a place He does not fear. Surely, Jesus is not a Methodist. "Do you love Me more *than these?*" Jesus asks the weary Peter, and I wonder if by "these" He meant the fish because I do love breakfast after an all-nighter but my salvation really should rank above lox and bagels. "Yes, Lord," says the rock, because Peter knows the right answer is always Jesus when the teacher asks; "Yes, Lord. You know—"

The full millennium of combined ministry offered here might almost be enough to have the sheer pluck to tell God what God knows with a straight face. Maybe we are all a little more honest without coffee in the dawn. "Simon, son of John, tend My sheep," and we who are pastors but have also been plumbers and web designers and conflict mediators and song leaders and marketing innovators and tech support and last-minute magicians know that it is not as weird as it should be to tell a fisherman to tend sheep. "You know, Lord, that I love You."

Congratulations, ministers who have led for years, whether five or fifty—congratulations from the starting line where I am still sorting out how to get the net out of the boat in the first place. Congratulations on every time someone asked you *do you love me* and you said yes, even on the days when love only looked like not throwing them into the sea behind you to catch their own fish. Congratulations on feeding the sheep and knowing that you are also in need of a Shepherd because we have all fallen short of the glory of God but that doesn't mean Jesus will refuse to cook you fish on a beach, even without coffee. Jesus took the bread and broke it and you who have held the Body together as it heals from all the ways we break each other receive the bread, the fish, the wine that invites all to the new

covenant. Do *you* know? Do you remember, here on the beach where the world is drenched in sunrise and the life you had as fisherfolk is about to be changed for the new adventure of retirement—do you remember you are loved?

Jesus told Peter someone else would fasten a belt around him and lead him where he did not wish to go, and John tells us that Jesus meant how he would die, and we Methodist ministers tell each other that we know how it feels to be tied up and led some days. This, too, is holy, this honesty and remembering, the re-remembering of our dismembered selves rent in frustration because God keeps asking even though God *knows* we try so hard to be good and faithful servants, we who let ourselves be led. Whether the belt is tight or loose and whether ministry has felt like dying or being born again, God so loved you in the world that your ministry offered freely has been blessed every time you said, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You; yes, Lord, here I am, send me; yes, Lord, You say follow and I will.”

“You know,” said Peter, and yet Jesus asked three times because you who have served 1,004 years know how easy it is to say “I do not know that man” when the fire burns too hot and the world is falling down around you. “Do you love Me,” elder, deacon, licensed local pastor, prophet, writer, cajoler, human, child of God; do you love more than the fish and the sheep and the days where the belt around you constricts so tightly—do you love? Please keep saying yes, because retirement from the Church does not mean retirement from the ministry; forget what the conference needs to fill its churches, I say God is not done with you yet. I need mentors, and the Church needs Jesus, and the sheep need to be fed, and what do we know but that sometimes love looks like cooked fish and hope on a beach where Jesus says, “Follow” and we say, “Lord, You *know*.”

Congratulations, descendent of Peter who often got it wrong and always gets it right when grace holds you through the fishless nights and the heckler mornings. Congratulations for every time you said “yes, I love you,” the words easily sliding across your lips or forcibly led from teeth gritted against the sand rubbing you raw. Congratulations, shepherd, fisherman, servant, beloved; thank you that *we* know who and Whose you are. “Do you love Me?” asks Jesus in the morning without coffee and oh, what a terrible, wondrous, holy thing that you, over and over, have said, “You know.”