

# Negotiating the Shadows



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*Daily Meditations for Lent*

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WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

## NEGOTIATING THE SHADOWS

Daily Meditations for Lent

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Wipf & Stock

An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3

Eugene, OR 97401

[www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com)

ISBN 13: 978-1-60899-854-8

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

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*For Erika whose light leads me out of the shadows.*



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## Preface

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

—ISAIAH 43:1–3

## ASH WEDNESDAY ENCOUNTER

In my hands I hold a bowl of hope  
oil and ash for anointing  
a mark of dust,  
of sins committed in thought, word, and deed

this is not why they come  
not one needs to remember the dust  
they come seeking the breath  
Your breath  
light in the darkness

they line up before me  
brows wrinkled with worry  
fear, pain, loss  
bowed down with the burdens of living

they look to me for forgiveness  
a simple mark of the cross  
to give them hope in the face of their despair  
it's not for me that they come,  
it's You

will You not honor us with Your presence?  
grace them with a whisper?  
even echoes would be enough

they come seeking, hoping, wanting, needing  
You went to the wilderness once  
in the same manner  
fasting, praying, seeking  
with echoes of "Beloved" in Your ears  
naming You,  
claiming You

You went to find Yourself  
we wander in the wilderness of our own making  
more often than not  
we lack the surety You found there

where You resisted the Tempter  
we give in  
we think that we can feed—or starve—  
our hunger into submission  
we think we can be strong by taking from others  
or by losing ourselves  
we think we can create our own gods

in Your wilderness wanderings  
You found Yourself  
and Your God  
You stepped into the role of Beloved

so they step forward  
asking for a sign of You  
from You

I hold hope in my hands  
their eyes hold doubt  
and need

I give them what I can  
a reminder that they do not walk alone  
in the desert  
in the dust  
in their sin

it's hard for me to hold  
this bowl of oil and ash  
the promise of forgiveness  
tumbles from my lips  
but fails to reach my heart  
or their eyes

who am I to lead this wilderness wandering?  
I, too, listen for the echoes  
but I hear silence  
and yet this is why You went to the desert  
for the silence and space  
to confront and claim Yourself  
to reach into brokenness and  
draw out life

will You not draw life here  
in this line of lost,  
seeking, searching, doubting, sinning?

honor us with Your presence  
bathe us in Your silence  
until we can claim ourselves  
until Beloved fills our ears  
and the Tempter holds no power

their need fills the bowl  
in exchange for  
a simple cross of ash to adorn them  
mark them Yours  
will You not claim them  
sit with them in their brokenness  
until the possibility of healing  
enters in?

my words are lost in the wilderness  
absorbed by the heat and dust of the desert  
but even whispers of You  
would make a difference

they will go home  
I am alone with a bowl too heavy to carry  
there is no one who will put Your mark on me  
if I am to lead  
will You not guide?  
in silence  
I leave the bowl for You  
and sit waiting, wanting, needing

forgiveness  
wholeness  
an echo of Beloved

will You not meet us in the wilderness?  
we come seeking, praying, fasting  
as You did once

claim us  
as once You claimed Yourself

Beloved.



## Acknowledgments

IN ACKNOWLEDGING all the people who encouraged, inspired, or otherwise supported me in writing this book, I must begin with Merle Jordan. I would not have written this book if he hadn't insisted that I could. Words do not begin to express my gratitude. I am also indebted to my early readers who all encouraged me to keep writing: C. Elaine Watkins, John McGuirk, Tim Thomas, Derek VanGulden, Michael Livingston, John Hall and Erika Sanborne—you all made it much easier to finish this project. I also offer a special word of gratitude to my early listeners: Promise Church members, Star Island Mid-Week 1 '08, the women of South Church, and the New Hampshire Hospital community—your enthusiasm and appreciation kept me going. In addition, thank you to Beth Nordbeck, Mary Luti, Sharon Thornton, and Jed Rardin for your encouragement and support in getting this project written.

