

Hearts on Pilgrimage
Poems & Prayers by Jody Collins
PREFACE

The Path

When I said my initial *yes* to Jesus over 40 years ago, I found poet Luci Shaw's first book, *Listen to the Green*, and was overcome with the perhapses and possibilities of being a poet. I am adept at saying way more than is needed to communicate a point. What would happen, I wondered, if I intentionally pared down my words to say more with less? *Listen to the Green* was the inspiration and beginning of my journey into poetry.

I managed to scribble random lines, gathering thoughts in the margins of my days between chasing children and teaching school. Most of it was very bad "poetry," but it was a start. As I chose to grow and learn, I invested in an informal education— "The School of 3,000 Books," as poet Barbara Crooker would say. The volume you now hold in your hands is the fruit of that learning, a culmination of inspiration and encouragement from poets I've had the pleasure of reading and learning from along the way. These poets include Laurie Klein, Scott Cairns, Malcolm Guite, Luci Shaw and many others.

The Process

When I began the draft of *Hearts on Pilgrimage*, it was early spring 2020. Life in the time of corona has wreaked havoc on life as we know it. *Knew it*. I will never look at spring the same way again, but I am hopeful. And that is the purpose of spring—God's eternal message that new life will come from what seems lifeless and gone. Winter's barrenness provides a creation backdrop that speaks to God's presence in the middle of life when everything has been stripped away, and no year illustrates this truth more than this one.

The Poems

Annual cycles in our physical world also mirror our interior lives, whether we are conscious of it or not. When I sat with these poems, they organized themselves in a way that began with winter and its time of dormancy and rest, moving through spring bringing new life, to summer with its burgeoning growth and flourishing, and into autumn with an eye towards harvest and a future. The Church year, beginning as it does in the very last days of November, also takes us through this cycle of winter, spring, summer and fall. *Hearts on Pilgrimage* follows this path.

The book's title came from a phrase in George Herbert's poem "Prayer" and a line in Psalm 84:5, which says, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage." The phrase seemed to fit this work perfectly.

The Particulars

Nearly half of the poems are anchored in creation—my garden, the trees outside, birds that visit our feeders, the night sky. Someone once said, “Nature is God’s noisiest orator,” and I have found this to be true, writing most often about what I see and hear. I’ve also woven in the mundane alongside the miraculous, from making coffee in the kitchen to doing dishes in the dark. There are poems about children in the sprinklers, picking raspberries and a cruet of oil, all crafted with an eye that sees God’s invisible Kingdom.

I began the book’s sequence with an “Opening Act,” setting the stage with reflections on writing and prayer. Sections that follow are

Act I: Winter – Waiting & Still

Act II: Spring – Sowing & Hope

Act III: Summer – Move & Grow

Act IV: Fall – Harvest & Future

The book ends with Act V: Coming & Going, with a look to the past as well as forward.

I write primarily in free verse, but also play with rhyme and meter a bit, which was a delight to try. George MacDonald’s classic *Diary of an Old Soul* (1880) provides inspiration for the cycle of five seven-line poems included here, and I’ve also written two sonnets in loosely rendered form. Initially intimidated by the constraints of the pattern, I was surprised at the freedom provided in writing within prescribed boundaries; it was fun to play around with the words.

My Prayer

Publishing a book of poetry, noticing the good, true and beautiful, seems a fruitless endeavor in the midst of challenges and heartache. But we will always have trouble and sorrow with us. While we live in a fallen world, we live with a risen Savior, and God’s invisible Kingdom is there for us to see if we are looking. In every season we journey through, what draws us on is an awareness of God’s beauty and presence.

As you read this work through the year or match it to your current season, I pray you will find an echo of our Creator’s voice while walking your own path. There is much to behold, and I look forward to pointing the way, showing you what I see and hear.

We are all on pilgrimage. Come walk with me?

Jody