

## **Sonnets of Worship during COVID-19: a Corona<sup>1</sup>**

By Bethany Besteman

### **The Call to Worship**

People of God in whom are you trusting?  
We hear the call familiar; eyes resist  
the upward glance and turn to screens, persist  
in fear, seduced by its excitement, lusting  
for gods who show us charts and give us lists.  
In panic, purpose can be found, a way  
to hold the knowledge of our sin at bay  
and on our own importance to insist.

People of God, let all such idols turn to dust  
The Lord calls you, so harden not your hearts  
against his offered rest; lift up your eyes.  
We hear the call which must disrupt our lives  
We pause; we blink; we sigh; our lips we part:  
Our help is in the Lord in whom we trust.

### **God Greets Us**

Our help is in the Lord in whom we trust  
to lift us from the ordinary dread  
of news—too much, too late—about our heads  
of state who dither, posture, preen: august  
persons by whose conflicting speech we're led  
but never blessed. Greet us, our Lord of love.  
To you be grace and peace from God above  
and from His Son arisen from the dead

and from the Holy Ghost. No patter here,  
no boasts of plans or angling for votes  
instead his quiet confidence removes  
the burden from our backs—the need to prove  
our duty. Us with grace and peace He coats;

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<sup>1</sup> A Sonnet Corona or a Crown of Sonnets is a linked sonnet sequence in which the last line of each sonnet is the first line of the next. The final line of the final sonnet is the same as the first line of the first sonnet.

the loved unlovely now can turn from fear.

### **We Greet Each Other**

The loved unlovely now can turn from fear  
of friends and foes alike and being blessed  
now bless. But distance intervenes and tests  
the ties that bind, and severed is the dear  
communion of the saints. Our love repressed  
by isolation seeks new ways and means  
to pass the peace of Christ. Like Ruth who gleaned  
in Boaz' field alone, we too have left

familiar faces, choosing exile out  
of love, a love that shuns in order to  
embrace. My friends, let us show love that gleams  
with grace, united by the threat that seems  
to wrench apart this body. Church, renew  
the garden of your faith amid this drought.

### **The Call to Confession**

The garden of your faith amid this drought  
is filled with stones, with briars overgrown.  
People of God, confess your thirst; your bones  
lie scattered in the wilderness; cry out  
for restoration, for the body blown  
apart to be enfolded again; desire  
the painful grace of resurrection's fire;  
smear ashes on your brows; lift up your groans.

For you were hungry and you would not eat  
and you were thirsty but refused to drink.  
Repent your choice of lower over higher;  
and turn to God whose mercies never tire.  
He stands prepared to pull you from the brink,  
from Him forgiveness, healing now entreat.

### **We Confess Our Sins**

From Him forgiveness, healing now entreat  
we: we confess that we have sinned in thought  
and word and deed—we've not done what we ought  
and we have done what we ought not; deplete  
our stores of self-sufficiency and clot  
our arteries of pride. Have mercy, Lord  
upon us, sick with Adam's virus. Word  
made flesh, pity flesh grotesque with rot.

We crave your medicine of blood and bread,  
your gifts of death which lead to life,  
a precious sustenance we need not hoard  
as it is found abundant at your board.  
In this strange meal we find an end to strife:  
on broken flesh, flesh broken having fed.

### **The Assurance of Pardon**

On broken flesh, flesh broken having fed  
receive you now assurance of his grace:  
The day is coming soon when in this place  
to all my people healing I will spread—  
and empty streets I'll fill; in vacant space  
I'll pour the sounds of laughter; songs of praise  
will echo in the city square. In those days,  
declares the Lord, to them I'll turn my face.

The fortunes of your land I will restore  
so flocks will graze again and vineyards burst  
with grapes. The fields no longer lie in waste  
but rich with harvest. People of God, taste  
His bread of hope, His springs will quench your thirst.  
Now give Him thanks and praise forevermore.

### **We Respond in Gratitude**

Now give Him thanks and praise forevermore  
for all that He has done and yet will do:  
For time alone to rest and to pursue  
our home-bound hobbies, tasks ignored; and for

technology that reconnects us to  
those out of reach and keeps untouched in touch;  
For bits of beauty: sprigs in bloom and clutches  
of birds in song; For nurses, doctors who

at cost to self persist in treating ill,  
protecting those at risk. For all these things  
we give you thanks, O Lord. Your hand  
which shaped us out of clay, which planned  
and placed each star, sustains us now. Your wings  
cover your Church with love and with goodwill.

### **The Prayers for Intercession**

Cover your Church with love and with goodwill  
in this our time of need. Let us pray to  
the Lord. Lord hear our prayer. For fears subdued  
amidst a global crisis, peace to fill  
the anxious hours (we click, we read, we brood)  
by quiet waters lead us in your care.  
Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, hear our prayer.  
For friendship felt by those in solitude--

be thou our Shepherd with us on this way,  
a lonely, dark, and dismal valley looms  
ahead; assure and guide us through. Help us  
with hope await the coming day and trust  
that in your father's house are many rooms.

Lord, give us ears and hearts for you we pray.

### **The Word Proclaimed**

Lord give us ears and hearts for you we pray.  
Hear now: the Word became a man—interred  
the infinite, his glory, suffering turned  
and into death the source of life. So may  
we life instead of death exchange. God spurned  
his son so He might never us. And yet  
we see disease and death a daily threat.  
We pray, we long, we yearn for His return.

But contemplate this mystery: the Word  
among us now—not then or soon, but now:  
Not leave nor ever shall I you forsake;  
you share my cross, in your cross I partake.  
This suffering grace made evident in how  
our hearts restored, your message having heard.

### **The Benediction**

Our hearts restored your message having heard,  
now let your servants go in peace. Receive  
the parting blessing of the Lord: Friends, leave  
behind your dread and doubt; may you be stirred  
up in the hope and faith that God will weave  
even these days of pain and loss and fear  
into a tapestry of Glory. Dearly  
beloved, although the road is long, believe

God goes before to guide us; protecting  
us from behind; beneath us God supports;  
beside God walks as friend. Church, do not be  
afraid. Depart this place in peace, set free  
to love, to serve each other and the Lord,  
people of God, in whom you are trusting.