

POETRY

Handmaid

Clifton Holt Jolley

*"I have not spoken in secret,
in a dark place of the earth." –Isaiah 45:19*

She turns at the well, the pot on her hip,
resting before filling it,
lifting it, returning home. The Pool of Siloam.
Hezekiah's Water Tunnel,

the western fountain on the Road to Emmaus.
The Pool of Bethesda.

She could swim Jerusalem from well to
dreaming issue beyond

the western wall. "The word of God is like
water in the desert,"
she whispers, lowering the pot to the damp,
"although darker

than we imagine; deep, rare, like happening upon
the blossoming
of dates in a savannah where the only grass
is sand, the trees

this one tree beside a well. The word of God
is an accident
we discover or do not, except for these
wells in this place

where one knows the way from Siloam to
Hezekiah's channel,
from water through the desert and to home."
She is walking,

the water on her hip as though she were
balancing a child. She is singing, low:
"I am the handmaid of my Lord. I am a vessel
for the water that is the world."