

Samuel Returns

William Morris

The call to go back. After days preaching, raising his voice to a people
become for themselves. A people who mocked his warnings (fools
mock), saw him as filthy and loathsome. Mistaking cankering riches
for rightness, whiteness for delightful; heritage for righteousness;
ignoring

your dual inheritance—

your two traditions,
the intersection of promises:
to blossom
after days prolonged,
to speak from the dust
after cycling to extinction.

You
called Lamanite
yet
a child of
the covenant.

You knew your tradition.
You were cast in the mold.

Raised up
after the ancient pattern.

Called out,
filled with visions,
given to see,
and sent forth
among strangers
to testify.

And it came to pass that after days ignoring his preaching, they cast
him out. And he, eyes heavy with sorrow, but fixed homeward—he,

there on the road ready to return to his own land—he, weary as sin,
heard the voice of the Lord and the call to go back

back to a people

with hearts chiseled
from flakes
of brittle
pink
sandstone.

This people with those hearts: they had suffered his upbraidings long
enough. Having already been cast out, he now tries to return? They
will not suffer him to enter their prosperous city: they have no need
of such sanctimony, such doomsaying. And so you are welcomed
back with shut gates,

but shut gates

have never deterred
you—you covet
to prophesy.
You turn
your gaze
towards
the city wall;
find an unguarded stretch;
pray for strength
and stealth,
a veiling of
the Holy Spirit.
And as your
fingers and toes
find purchase in
the crumbling mortar
you begin
to climb,

all too aware

that like Abinadi

(he the roots; Alma the trunk;

Lamoni the grafted branch;

and you the bud)

you must deliver

a final,

damning

testimony,

a sealing witness.

That old

repentance or doom dialogue.

A triple wo.

At the wall, Zarahemla's watchtowers stand empty. No sentries posted; no one to overlook the land and see the enemy from afar off—well, sure, Nephi upon his garden tower but he is much more talked about than listened to—what need has one of prophets when there is delicate living at hand, when there are the softest raiments, the finest apparel to wear, and vanities to babble, and boastings to proclaim and treasure to heap up, and what warnings are needed when society is secure within stout walls

and as you climbed

the city wall

was there fire on your mind?

Knowing as you know

what the Lord

has required

of his servants in times past.

Wondering if

your blood

would be required

to seal

your testimony
against
the blind minds
below—the earth
crying out, your sojourn
cut short,
your soul saved, but elsewhere;
your mortal
eyes unable
to witness
your beautiful family
one
more
time
in this life.

The news spreads like wildfire, like disease, like envying and pride and strife: the Lamanite has returned. Has the gall, the poor taste to resume his warnings, to stretch his hand forth in judgement; to shout down on the people from on high, the city wall his Rameumptom. At least Nephi had the good taste to stick to his own property. And what sorcery is it that this man's voice is so loud, so piercing; and why does he speak of curses and slippery treasure; and how is it

the words you are given

—these mysteries
and peaceable things
that
flow
from your
mouth
like rain
rushing
to fill

a dry
creek bed
—how is it
that these
words are
not
yours,
yet sound so
familiar, issue forth in such
startling
abundance
as if your tongue
had been touched
by a hot coal
or by angels?

And still he will not cease. This Lamanite, this self-righteous fool,
this man who is not from our city and knows not our ways and yet
dares accuse of such horrible things. This man must be stopped.
Pry up stones; run and fetch my bow. Grab a couple of slings while
you're at it. We don't want to dirty our beautifully woven sashes.
And as the people of the city fling stones and loose arrows like
doves or darts or warnings at the foreigner standing brazenly atop
the city wall, a hail of fire swarming, clotting, converging
like rumors or bees

did you shrink

from
their biting touch
or did you
stand firm: braced
for consequences,
for martyrdom,
for a deserving,

triumphant

return

but not

the one

you had

wanted.

And when you realized

they could not

harm you,

did you wonder

if you, the good and faithful

servant

would yet have

his reward?

And did

a seed

of hope

enter your breast,

and begin to swell?

And did you dare

nourish it?

Or

were you intent on

scanning the faces

of the mob,

searching

for some soul,

even

just

one

who had listened to

your words—

or rather
the words
that had been
given
to you—and
was now
ready
to repent?

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