

The Little Book of Listening



James Webb

Welcome

Why does storytelling work?

Why did Jesus use parables when he told his followers about God's Kingdom?

James Webb's *The Listening Book* is a collection of parables, told in the style of Fred Craddock or Walter Wangerin Jr., that attempt to capture some of the mystery and excitement of the master storyteller.

This is a cut-down version of *The Listening Book: The Soul Painting and Other Stories*, available in Hardback, Softback, eBook and Audiobook online and via good bookshops. Visit the website below for James's Blog (weekly) and more details.

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"Show me your ways..."

Impex maria

INTRODUCTION

Are you listening?

I hope so.

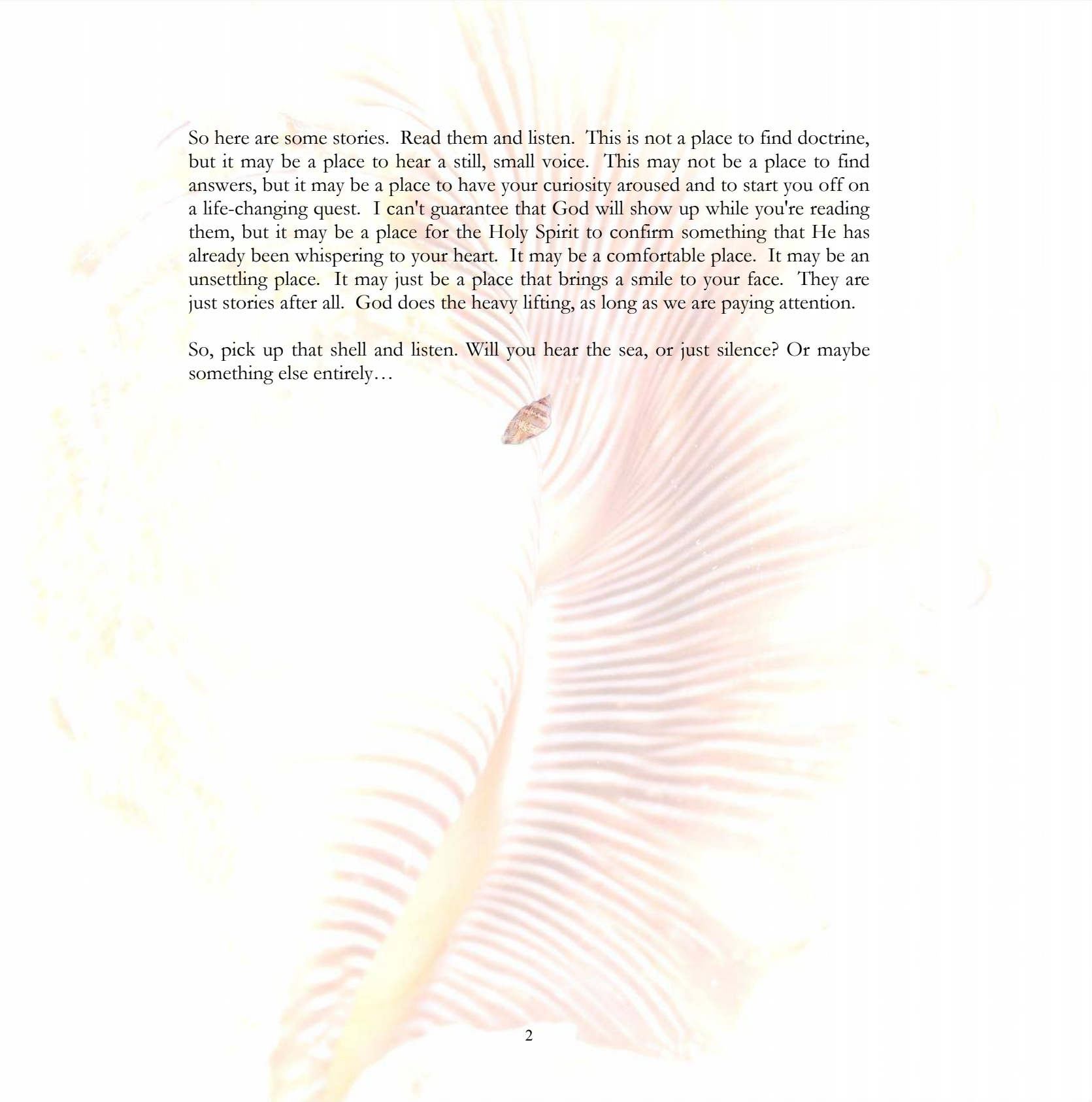
We can spend a lot of time concerned with whether or not God is paying any attention to us. It's probably better to spend that time being concerned about whether or not we're paying any attention to Him.

You see, God is speaking. He's always speaking. It was the first thing He did. What about us? Do we fill the silence with the sound of our own voice, or do we listen?

Do you know what God does when He has something really important that he wants to say to us? Do you know what miracle He performs; what amazing sign He uses? When God has something important to say to us, He tells us a story.

It works, doesn't it? Stories are a guaranteed way to get someone's attention. When you're talking to someone and their eyes are glazing over, looking this way and that for an escape route, try the line, "That reminds me of a story..." and see what happens.

The Bible itself is a story. An adventure story. A war story. A love story. Jesus never taught about the Kingdom of God without telling a story. Read the book of Acts and see how the early Church shared Jesus by using people's own stories. You see, stories aren't really about communicating facts. They're really about communicating a vision of how things could be. You just need to listen carefully. We shouldn't be surprised that such tiny things as stories can carry such a big vision. After all, when you put a shell no bigger than your hand to your ear, don't you hear the entirety of all the oceans?



So here are some stories. Read them and listen. This is not a place to find doctrine, but it may be a place to hear a still, small voice. This may not be a place to find answers, but it may be a place to have your curiosity aroused and to start you off on a life-changing quest. I can't guarantee that God will show up while you're reading them, but it may be a place for the Holy Spirit to confirm something that He has already been whispering to your heart. It may be a comfortable place. It may be an unsettling place. It may just be a place that brings a smile to your face. They are just stories after all. God does the heavy lifting, as long as we are paying attention.

So, pick up that shell and listen. Will you hear the sea, or just silence? Or maybe something else entirely...

A painting of a fan palm frond with pink and white stripes, set against a light, textured background. The frond is the central focus, with its ribs clearly defined. The background has a soft, painterly quality with some yellowish and white tones.

The Soul Painting



There was once an Artist who believed in people. He believed that every single person who had ever lived had within them one great masterpiece, a Soul Painting, and he devoted his life to this belief. As an in-demand artist of considerable talent he could have committed himself to his work and lived in comfort for the rest of his days, but he rejected such things to travel, to be with people and to pass on the message of the Soul Painting.

One day the Artist met a woman whom no-one had ever believed in. She was enchanted by the Artist and his message of the Soul Painting. Although her wounds were still too fresh and raw for her to believe in herself, she dared to believe in his belief and began to paint. It took her many years but eventually she had finished her Soul Painting. It was strikingly beautiful, tragic and unique; one of the most amazing works of art that anyone had ever seen. During this time the woman had learned to love the Artist and his message and devoted the rest of her life to spreading the story of the Soul Painting. Wherever she went, people clamoured to see her. Many were amazed by her story, and many more captivated by her beautiful Soul Painting.

One of the men who heard her speak wanted more than anything to possess his own Soul Painting. He had heard her talk about the Artist and the beliefs which had led to her painting, but he was too afraid and intimidated by her amazing Soul Painting to pick up a paintbrush himself. "I could never paint anything as good as her," he told himself, torn between his desire and his doubt.

One day he had an idea and, at a time when no-one was watching, he took out his camera and snapped a good photo of the woman's Soul Painting. He took the camera home, printed out the biggest, best quality copy of the Soul Painting that he could afford and had it framed. He told his friends of the Artist and invited them to come and see his own Soul Painting. His friends visited his home and were awestruck and touched by the beautiful masterpiece on his wall. They too wanted their own Soul Painting. The man only knew of one way to pass on the magic of the Soul Painting, so he invited his friends to take their own photo of his photo and then it could be their own Soul Painting. His friends readily agreed, as it seemed like an easy way to get a masterpiece.

The friends took their photos home and showed their friends, who in turn asked to take a photo of the photo of the photo. They in turn invited their friends to take a photo of the photo of the photo of the photo, and so on it went. With each layer of photos, the detail and beauty of the original painting was distorted further and further until there was a crowd of individuals, each clutching photos showing nothing more than an ugly splodge of random colours. The beauty had been lost a long time ago.

Over time the number of people wanting to take photos declined. Every now and then another person would be convinced to take a photo of one of the photos, but whatever their motivation, it was now never because of the beauty of the Soul Painting.

One day the Artist will travel from town to town crying out, "Bring me your Soul Paintings," and he will be crowded by a mob of people waving grubby, crumpled photographs shouting, "Master, Master, look at my Soul Painting, my beautiful Soul Painting!" The Artist will look at them and say, "Get away from me. I never knew you."





Rufus and the Troll

No-one used the bridge any more. Instead they trekked the extra mile downstream to where the river was shallow enough to cross. People got wet, but at least they didn't get eaten. Everyone knew that the Troll who lived under the bridge was angry and mean and always hungry. Everyone would rather get wet.

Sometimes, in such times as this, everything changes because of someone who didn't know what everyone else knew. Or, perhaps, because of someone who knew what everyone else knew, but refused to accept it. One such person was the carpenter's young son, Rufus.

“Has anyone ever seen the 'Troll?” Rufus asked the townsfolk. They would look at one another, and no-one would speak.

“So how do you know there's a 'Troll under the bridge?” To Rufus, it seemed like the logical question to ask.

“I've heard him! I've been to the bridge and heard him, hollering and yelling and screaming. He told me that he was a 'Troll and he was going to eat me!” the baker spoke up, as the latest witness to the monster that lived under the bridge.

“But did you actually see him?” asked Rufus.

“Well...no,” admitted the baker, “but if it screams that it's a 'Troll and that it's going to eat you, it's a 'Troll!”

“And it lives under a bridge,” the butcher piped up, “which is where 'Trolls live. Everyone knows that.”

“It's the plain facts,” offered the baker.

“Hmmmmm...”

Rufus was sceptical. The thing is, he had no real reason to be sceptical. The townsfolk were convinced, and he had to admit that if you took the evidence at face value then it seemed that they were right. Yet Rufus remained unsure. There was

only one way to find out for certain. So, Rufus resolved that the next morning he would head out to the bridge and see for himself.

The sun rose and Rufus packed. The bridge was not far, so he was confident that he would arrive by mid-morning. He packed some cake and an apple so that he could sit by the river and eat if it turned out that there was no Troll after all, and he set out with his faithful dog, Parakletos, at his heel.

The bridge was further than he'd thought, and the sun was nearly at midpoint in the sky when he finally arrived. Parakletos barked with delight as he splashed in the river by the bank, and Rufus looked for a suitable place to sit and eat. His eyes were drawn, of course, to the crumbling, ivy-covered stone arch that formed the bridge over the river. No time like the present.

Rufus wondered down to the bridge and cleared his throat. A booming voice responded:

“I am the Troll who lives under the bridge, and I will eat you!”

Rufus was certainly taken aback and more than a little frightened by this declaration. His thoughts about cakes and apples were pushed aside and the idea of running away presented itself.

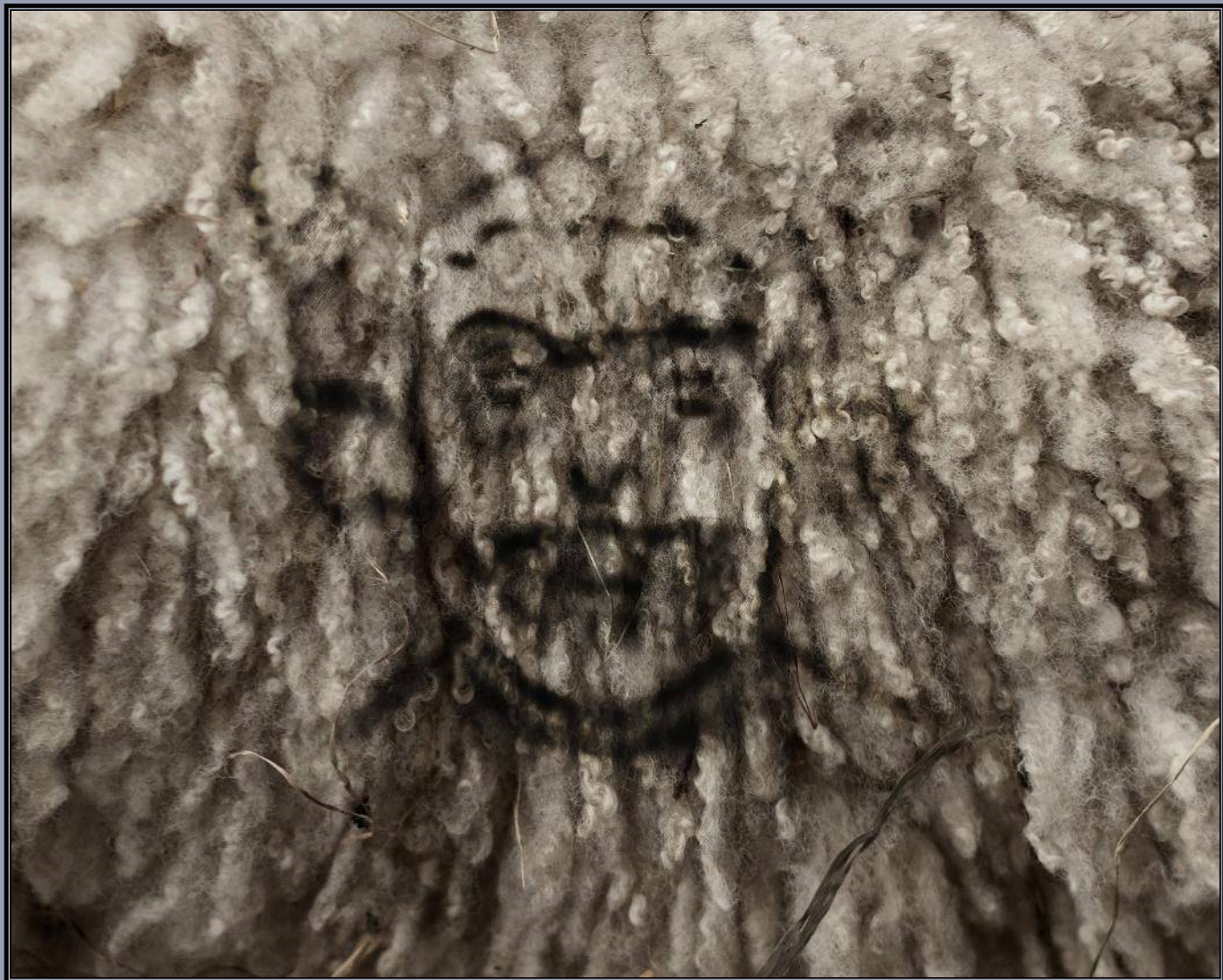
Thankfully, Rufus had not come alone. Parakletos was not dissuaded by the threat of being eaten. He scampered down to the bottom of the bridge and barked loudly.

“I am the Troll who lives under the bridge, and I will eat you!”

Parakletos barked louder.

“I SAID, I am the Troll who lives under the bridge, and I will eat you!”

Rufus knew something was up. Parakletos was by far the smartest dog in the village, and he was not one to hang around if there was even the slightest chance of being eaten. More likely, his fine nose had detected the smell of something other than Troll.



“Well,” said Rufus, his courage returning, “you're going to have to eat me then.” There was a prolonged silence, punctuated only by the sound of Parakletos barking.

“Really?” came the uncertain voice from under the bridge.

“Yes. Really.”

“Oh...OK...well...ummmm...right then. I'll eat you.”

“That's fine by me,” said Rufus, though it certainly wasn't fine by him. Sometimes courage makes you call a bluff so that a greater wrong can be righted.

“Ummm...it's just that...well, I've never eaten anyone before,” the Troll explained.

“Oh?”

“Yes. To be honest, this is the longest anyone's ever stayed around. I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to do next.”

“Why don't you come out? That would be a fine place to start,” suggested Rufus, feeling a little sorry for the bridge-dweller.

The Troll crawled out from beneath the bridge, while Parakletos jumped up and down and barked. The Troll emerged, with white fluffy wool and a black, meek face.

“You're not a Troll!” exclaimed Rufus,

“Yes, I am! I'm a Troll! A mean, people-eating Troll! Baaaaaaa!”

“No, you're not a Troll. Unless I'm very much mistaken, you are a sheep.”

“A sheep? Why would you say such a thing?”

“Because you are!” It seemed very clear to Rufus.

“Are you sure?” the 'Troll' asked.

“Very sure. I know the shepherd in our village. I play chess with him every Tuesday while he's watching the sheep. I have seen sheep at dawn and at dusk and from every conceivable angle. Well, almost every conceivable angle, and you are most certainly a sheep,” Rufus said with a firm voice.

“Huh!” the 'Troll' seemed thoughtful. “Well, that would explain a few things...”

“Such as?”

“The wool, for starters. And the fact that deep down, if pushed you understand, really pushed, I would much rather eat some lovely green grass than a person,” the 'Troll' admitted.

“So why are you telling everybody that you are a Troll?”

The 'Troll' seemed to be thinking hard.

“I remember one day coming to the river to get a drink, and I found a lovely place to drink in the shade under the bridge. Someone came along and I made a noise—”

“What kind of noise?”

“Well, now that you mention it, I suppose it was a kind of 'Baaaa'ing noise,” the 'Troll' explained.

“I see.” Rufus smirked, “Continue.”

“So then someone said, 'What made that noise?' and someone else said, 'It came from under the bridge,' and someone else said, 'It's a Troll!' and they ran away. A Troll! So I looked around in terror, and I couldn't see anything, so I realised that they must be talking about me.” The 'Troll' took a deep breath before continuing.

“Well, I was afraid to leave the bridge. If I was a Troll, then I should stay under the

bridge. That's where Trolls belong. When people came to the bridge, I called out to them, and they all said the same thing, "The Troll! There is a Troll under the bridge! Run away!" and they ran away. So, I came to the only logical conclusion, namely that I was a Troll and I should live under the bridge and behave accordingly," the "Troll" concluded.

"I can definitely say that you are not a Troll. You are a sheep. If you don't believe me, have a look in the river. Look at your reflection. And Parakletos, you can stop barking now," Rufus said. Parakletos was not an obedient dog, but he was a clever one and that's nearly as good. He stopped barking.

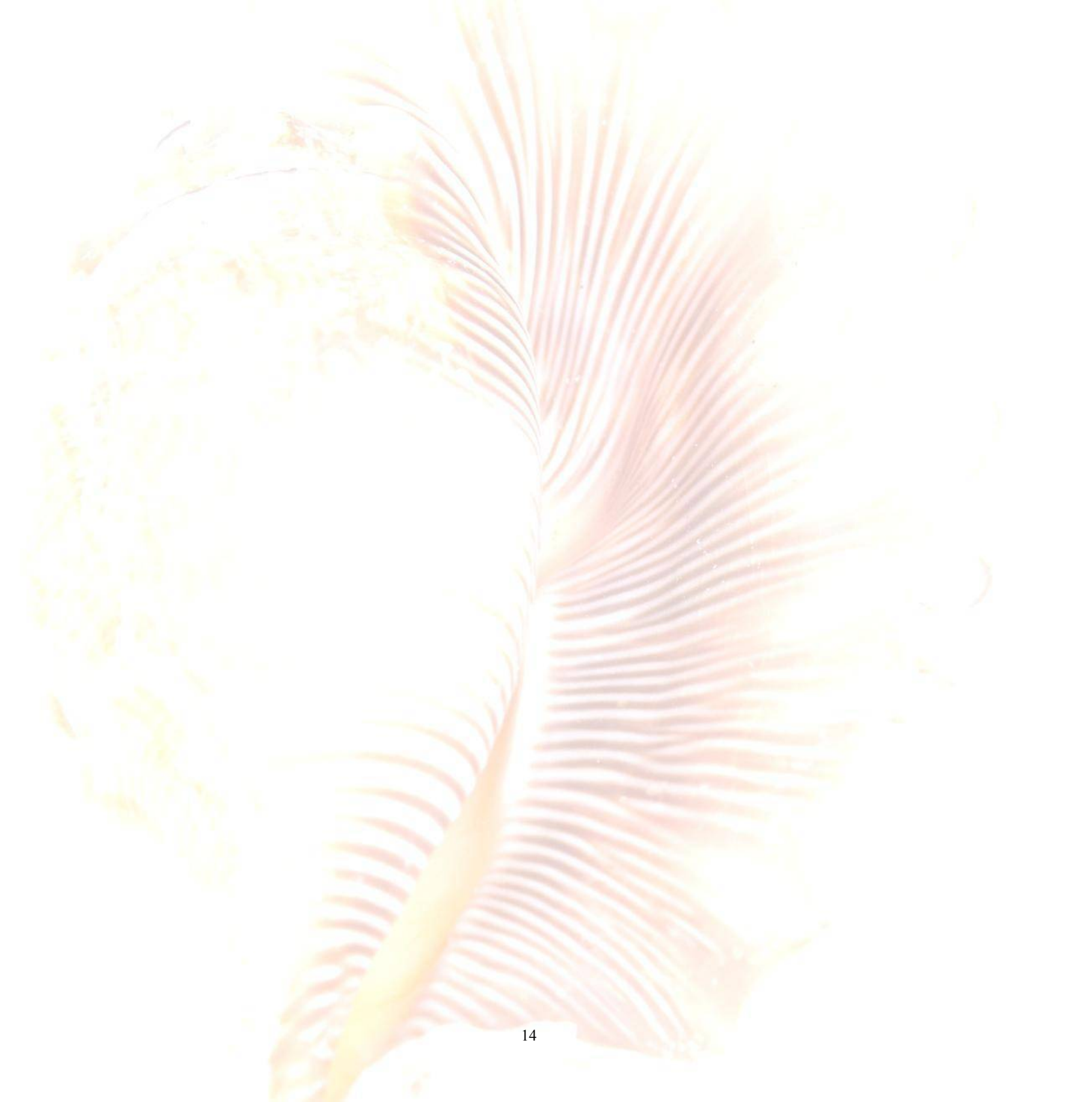
The "Troll" looked at his reflection in the crystal water and saw himself as Rufus saw him and as Parakletos had smelled him.

"Well I never..." the sheep said.

The villagers had said, 'If it lives under a bridge and threatens to eat people, it must be a Troll'.

Not always. Sometimes it's just a sheep who's been made to believe that he's a Troll.







Look on the Bright Side



The troubles started with the old man's cow. It got really sick, very suddenly. We all felt sorry for him. Things were hard and none of us could afford to lose an animal. The vet came out and wandered around the beast, looking and touching and measuring, and his conclusion was that it wasn't promising. I commiserated with the old man. "Looks bad," he admitted. "Tough loss," I replied. He looked at me and said, "There's always hope".

The cow died.


A little while after that we began watching the weather with concern. The clouds were full and black and the harvest was just around the corner. A pounding rain would be bad news for most of us. The old man had been around for a while, brought in a lot of harvests, so I asked him what he thought. "Looks bad," he agreed. "We're in trouble," I sighed. He looked at me and said, "There's always hope".

The heavy rain came and we suffered.

Some of us went hungry that season, but we made it through. All of us, except the old man's son, that is. The doctor came with a smile on his face, and left with grim and stony features. "What did he say?" I asked the old man. "Looks bad," the old man said. I didn't say anything else. He looked at me and said, "There's always hope."

His son died.

The rains continued. The dams were full, but so were the rivers. It wouldn't take much more for them to break their banks and then we'd all be in trouble, even the smart ones who had questioned the wisdom of settling in the foothills. I asked the old man if he'd ever seen anything like this. He admitted that he hadn't. "Looks bad," he nodded. I wondered aloud whether the storms would break before we did. He looked at me and said, "There's always hope."



The floods came. I drowned.

The first thing I did after I walked through the Pearly Gates was sit on a log next to Jesus and begin complaining. “The old man's crazy,” I ranted, “Bad things just kept happening and he just refused to face up to it. He lived in denial of the truth. At first it was inspiring, but then it just became annoying.”

I asked Jesus, “Do you think he'll ever realise that life is actually a bleak and difficult thing?”

Jesus looked at me and said, “There's always hope.”



Mustard Seed



My hands were full, but the mustard seed looked so tempting. The man was giving them out for free, and how could I refuse a bargain like that? True, the seed did not look nearly so attractive as the precious gems that I was already carrying around. I could only carry so much, so I had to be discerning. I had already discarded everything but the most beautiful and valuable treasures, and I had hardly enough strength to carry even those.

But the seed was so small, and the man made it sound so good. And it was free. I was sure that I could make just a little space, just a little more space for the mustard seed. So, I jammed it in there, just between the sparkle and the shine of my treasures.

Years passed, and sometimes some of the treasure changed. I would exchange something I had for something that was even more valuable, and then on rare occasions I would exchange it back again. But the mustard seed I never gave away. It stayed there. It was so small that I always had room for it, and it did give me some comfort having it there. Like a lucky charm, it gave me some peace and some calm in times when I needed it. The man had been right about that.

Then one day I met a man carrying nothing but a bush. He looked so out-of-place, so silly in the world in which I moved; the world of the valuable and the beautiful. I asked him about the bush.

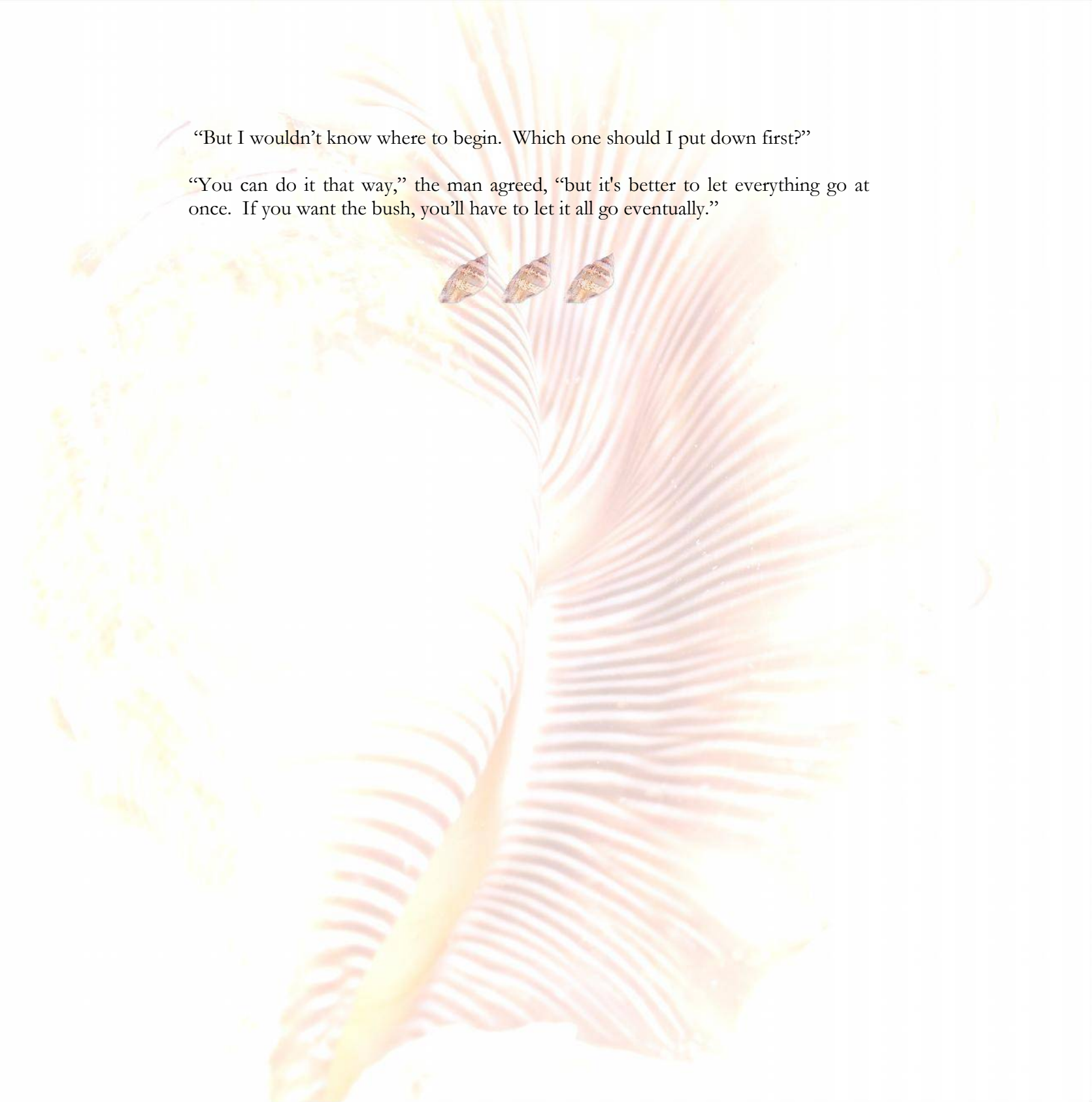
“This grew from my mustard seed,” he told me.

“I have a mustard seed too!” I said. “But it is just a seed, and always has been.”

“I used to be like you,” the man said, “my mustard seed didn’t grow either. Then I realised that while my hands were full it couldn’t grow. No room, you see. It needs space.”

“But, that would mean letting go of my treasure!”

The man looked grim, as he nodded.




“But I wouldn’t know where to begin. Which one should I put down first?”

“You can do it that way,” the man agreed, “but it's better to let everything go at once. If you want the bush, you’ll have to let it all go eventually.”



Old Fool



There was once a small town in the midst of a drought-stricken land. In this town lived a man known to the locals as Old Fool. Every morning Old Fool would emerge from his ramshackle cabin dragging a pickaxe behind him, and he'd spend the day digging a hole. Under the harsh sun for years, his skin had become like cracked leather. His white hair and beard were permanently matted with red dust, and the same hard work that had bent his back double had given his limbs a wiry strength. If anyone ever asked him why he spent his days engaged in such back-breaking labour under the unforgiving glare of the sun, he would give the same answer that he had first given back when he was known as Young Fool. He would tell you that he had heard an Ancient Word which had told him that there was water under the ground, if you would just dig for it.

Every day some of the townsfolk would come and watch Old Fool hard at work, and get some amusement from throwing insults in his direction.

“I’m sure he’ll break the drought any day now!”

“Maybe he forgot where he planted his crops!”

“Foolish redbear!”

Every day Old Fool would dig and dig, and every evening he would return home even dryer than when he had left. After many years of his digging, the dust bowl was covered in pockets and craters, so many that from the sky it looked like the surface of the moon.

One day Old Fool was out carving the red soil with his pickaxe. As usual, a small crowd of those with nothing better to do had gathered to mock.

“I’m sure he’ll break the drought any day now!”

“Maybe he forgot where he planted his crops!”

“Foolish redbear!”

Old Fool has been doing this for so long the townsfolk had run out of new insults

many years ago. On this morning, as on every other morning before, Old Fool ignored the insults and continued to dig. Just as the sun was reaching its highest point, the mockers were interrupted by a low and threatening rumble beneath their feet.

“What’s that?”

“Feels like an earthquake!”

“Everybody run!”

But before a single soul could move, a huge and violent jet of water gushed forth from the hole that Old Fool was digging. It reached into the sky for at least a hundred metres before showering everything. The ground got wet. The townsfolk got wet. Old Fool got wet.

The topic of conversation changed abruptly. Old Fool didn’t seem so foolish anymore.

“Well I never. He was right after all!”

“Did you see the water? He’ll be rich! He’ll never have to work again!”

“Well, I do remember telling you that we should be nicer to him...”

The next morning the townsfolk gathered in great numbers to see Old Fool’s geyser. The water had continued gushing forth all through the night, and the townsfolk were amazed to see that the holes that Old Fool had dug throughout the years had become pools and ponds, full of fresh life-giving water. Then the door to Old Fool’s cabin opened, and out came Old Fool dragging his trusty pickaxe behind him. He nodded at the townsfolk, then turned and walked off towards the dry and dusty distance.



“What’s he doing?”

“He’s still digging? Even after yesterday?”

“I told you he’d still be Old Fool.”

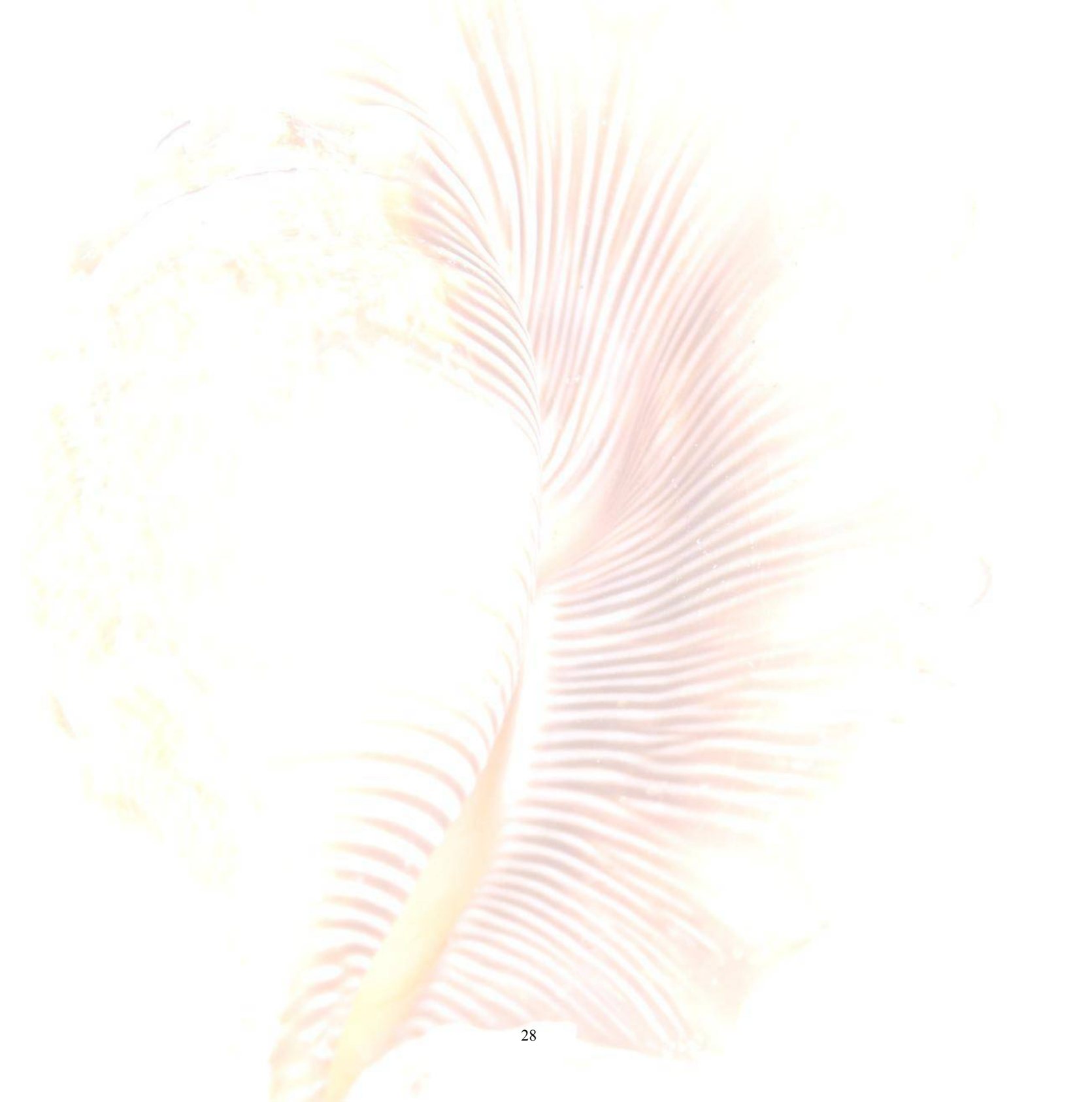
Many months passed. The water that Old Fool had found continued to flow, and the countryside that he had been digging in had become lush and green. Flowers grew, animals grazed and people came from miles around to drink. Yet Old Fool continued to head off alone each morning, carrying his pickaxe into the desert to keep digging.

One day some of the townsfolk followed him to ask him why he kept going. “Why do you keep digging? You’ve found water. You don’t need to dig anymore.”

Old Fool glared at them and replied, “Your mistake is in thinking that I was digging for my own benefit. I was digging so that others could drink.” The townsfolk shook their heads, shrugged their shoulders and walked off. They did not understand.

Soon after this, Old Fool died and was buried in the dust bowl where he had spent his life digging. His grave is a nondescript plot of dirt in the middle of nowhere, marked only by a headstone that has been crudely formed from a large boulder. People continue to visit his oasis, but no-one bothers to visit his grave. If you ask the townsfolk, not one of them can tell you who buried him or who placed his headstone there. But if you ask, a few of them might be able to tell you what has been engraved on it. An Ancient Word. “His labour was not in vain”.







Death

Death, the Stealer of Souls, sat on the precipice overlooking the great cities of all the nations. His legs draped over the side, dangling over the chasm that was so deep that the bottom was merely a suggestion rather than a reality. The wind was so strong that it would have torn his hood back from his head, were he not the personification of an unstoppable, immovable force that wind and rain and lightning could only aspire to. If the gale had been able to fulfil its intentions then it would have revealed only an empty space where a head should be. More than a space, in fact, but rather an absolute space. Not just the absence of a head, but an overwhelming emptiness that would have swallowed up anything that you tried to place there, so that the vacancy was all that remained. The hooded cranium rested casually on a pale, glowing hand.

“All this is mine.” He gestured vaguely at the cities with his other arm, which then returned to his side. He gently caressed the rough and stony ground he sat on as he continued.

“All of these cities pay tribute to me. None may refuse, for they chose me. You know what they’re like. Ardent defenders of their free will. They chose me as their king, and none may refuse my demands and my requests. They serve me, willingly or unwillingly, and I claim each and every one of them.”

You could be listening for the voice very hard and not hear it. You could desperately be trying to ignore its dry, brittle whisper, but still hear it louder than church bells. Death never raised his voice. He didn't need to. When he called, none could refuse. When he spoke, all heeded. He only spoke when he needed to, and he only spoke to those whom he wished to call. No-one else would hear him. Not yet, at least.

“All mine,” he repeated.

If you had been watching this scene from afar you would have been forgiven for thinking that Death was alone. It became apparent that this was not the case. The darkness beside him shifted as a reclining figure moved into a more comfortable position. Death stared past the horizon into other worlds, refusing to even glance in the direction of his companion. The man next to Death nodded slowly, his features still shrouded by the absence of light. Death gestured again.

“A few, of course, are pleased to see me. Others are not so keen. They try to outwit me, to fool me. They don't understand. They cannot beat me at the game I invented, especially as they do not even know the rules. They chose me, and now I make the choices. Sometimes I take the young, sometimes the old. But I always take those whom I choose.”

The voice sounded old, but not old as we might think it. Not *old* as in weak and frail, but rather timeless. Just because an oak tree is *old*, it doesn't mean that it is not strong. It formed gentle laughter now, a horrible grinding sound as though his lungs were full of gravel.

“They wonder. They wonder. They can't understand.” Death's voice sounded more urgent and triumphant than before.

“Some do understand.”

The man reclining next to Death spoke for the first time. His voice was nothing special, but next to Death's it sounded like the very chimes from the bells of the heavenly Jerusalem. Death's posture expressed his displeasure.

“What?” he hissed.

“Some understand. Some see you for what you are. *You* of all people should know that.” The figure turned his head to face Death.

Death nodded, an action which seemed to take centuries, his gaze fixed rigidly on the horizon.

“*Some* understand me, maybe. But how many? What are a handful of grains of sand compared to the beach?”

The man chuckled.

“Very poetic.”



Death shrugged. The man continued, looking out over the cities.

“They defy you.”

“Some honour me. I have songs written about me, books written for me, films and plays performed on my behalf. Many, many more than you do, my friend.”

Anyone who heard the voice couldn't have helped but notice that the words 'my friend' were spoken with no sincerity. It was true that these two were not friends, but bitter enemies. Not just enemies, but opposites.

“That may be,” the man said, non-committedly.

“I am the one with the choice. They wonder why a man will live to ninety, despite the fact that he smokes fifty cigarettes a day and lives a life of utter debauchery, and yet why a child of five may heed my call. They call it 'luck', or 'one of those things'. They try to convince themselves that there are ways of cheating me. Ways to extend their days. The truth is that there is no way. They live in fear of the fact that I could beckon them any time I choose, regardless of status and lifestyle. The man who doesn't smoke can be the victim of a road accident, or maybe he'll get lung cancer anyway. It is up to me.”

If you could have seen the face of the man next to Death, you would have seen him raise his eyebrows.

“Really? Your choice?” he said innocently. Death radiated hatred, but said nothing. He hated this man more than any of the other Children of Adam.

“Even you, Death, have your master.”

“My Father?”

“Not your father. Mine,” the man said.

Death snorted.

“My master is He? I do not see Him prevent me working. Every day provides me with new tributes and rewards. He has never stopped me.”

Death threw his hands in the air. Tradition usually armed death with a scythe to reap his victims with, yet he needed nothing but his hands to collect the harvest of souls. They were cruel hands, strong and harsh. Death turned his head for the first time and regarded his companion with his eyeless vision. He slowly lifted his arm and pointed an accusing finger. It was a cruel finger.

“He even let me have you.” Mocking laughter punctuated Death's words.

“For a while,” the man added, nodding nonetheless.

Death turned his attention back to the landscape and was silent. Neither spoke for some time. It could have been seconds, it could have been aeons. Death's companion stood up, the darkness following him as he moved.

“Yes, for a while I was yours. For a short time you had me. You rejoiced on that day, as did your father. You rejoiced. You rejoice no longer.”

More time passed. Death sat and stared at his realms, drumming his fingers on the ground. His companion stared at him, arms folded. Slowly Death turned to look up at the man, but the rebuke he was going to offer died on his lips as the man spoke again.

“You reap the souls of mankind. You wallow in them as a pig may wallow in mud, and you call them your 'tribute' and your 'wages'. They are not yours.”

Death began to reply.

“Be silent! You may take them all, but you cannot keep them. There are many, many grains of sand on your beach that I call 'brother' or 'sister'. More than a mere handful. You are not eternal and even you too will pass. You know this to be true!” the figure spoke angrily. He raised his arms and tilted his head back, his robe and hair wildly blowing in the wind, and with a shouted word of command the darkness fell from around him revealing his majesty.

“You took me, but you could not keep me. You snatched my soul from the Cross like a thirsty man gulping water, and you buried me under the earth. You laughed and sneered and spat and howled and jeered, yet I live!”

The wind fell silent as the Lord of Creation spoke. The ground beneath Death shook and trembled and groaned. Glory surrounded the man as a rumble of thunder from the skies shook the foundations of the great cities. The darkness swirled and forks of lightning lit the clouds like great lights.

“They do not want you!” Death howled, jumping to his feet and shaking his fists at the Lamb of God. He screamed above the thunder in a voice more terrifying than anything that had ever been heard. “They chose me! They helped me claim you! You cannot stop me! You cannot beat me! You can—” Death’s words died in his throat as the Saviour regarded him with narrowed eyes.

He slowly lowered his hands from the sky and held them out to Death, so that he could see the ragged crimson wounds that still looked so tender and painful.

“But I already have,” Jesus said softly.



THE END?

Are you still listening?

Do you have time for one last story?

Once upon a time, Man and Woman lived in a wonderful garden with the God who had created them. Every day they would walk with Him through their amazing world. His voice, the voice that had called everything they knew into being, was the only voice in their world. But one day they met a serpent, and the serpent brought with it another voice; a voice that set itself against the Creator.

“He told us that it was good,” said the Man and the Woman.

“But could it be better?” asked the serpent.

“He has given us everything that we need,” said the Man and Woman.

“Are you sure?” asked the serpent.

The Man and Woman had to choose who to believe, and they made a bad choice. Since that time, men and women have found that the voice of God is now just one voice amongst the many.

But the story doesn't end there. Many years passed and then there was a man who heard God calling his name. This man had the same choice as the Man and the Woman. Would he listen or not?

“What do you want of me?” asked Abram.

“I want you to go,” replied God. Abram went, and in doing so he became a different person. He became Abraham.


In the years that followed, there were men and women who listened to the voice of God, and men and women who listened to other voices.

Eventually along came one who made his whole life revolve around listening to the voice of God. He had a different name for God, however. He called Him 'Father'. Everywhere that this man walked, he made sure that he was walking with his Father. In the wilderness; by the lake in Galilee; on the Temple Mount; in a garden called Gethsemane and on a hill called Golgotha, wherever he went, his Father's voice was the only voice He listened to. He said, "I can do nothing except what I see my Father doing."

Jesus taught his followers that to have seen him was to have seen the Father, and by extension, that to have heard him was to have heard the Father. One day Jesus had to leave his followers, but he didn't leave them alone. He sent them the Comforter. Jesus, the God With Us, sent the Holy Spirit, the God In Us. To this very day, wherever the followers of Jesus go, God goes with them, and like the Man and Woman at the beginning of the story they can hear God, if they listen carefully, because they carry the voice of God with them.

Listen. The story goes on.





“The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary.

He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.”

Isaiah 50:4-5



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James has had a variety of interesting learning experiences in his life, some from being a Baptist minister in the UK and then some from being a member of Cornerstone Community, a mission and discipleship community in Australia. He fancies himself as something of a storyteller, and this book is his first attempt to put some of the things he's learnt into words. James currently lives in Canterbury with his wife and five (yes, five) children.

"...for my hope is in you all day long."



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