

## eNews for 12/20/2023

### *Just by Chance*

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “In the Bleak Midwinter.” For years I rolled my eyes at the first verse’s ahistorical description of a snowy Christmas in Bethlehem, though over time I’ve come to appreciate the English hymn-writing tradition of comparing the hardness of winter, when everything lies fallow, to our hearts without Christ when, in the words of Augustine, “our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”

This year, as I stand looking out over the snow-blanketed Merriman Valley, I feel it in a way that I have not while I lived in the South for the last 30 years. I feel the chill and the hardness, but I also feel the possibility that is created when things rest and lie fallow for a season. In the spring this valley will be green and lively again; in the spring Easter will come, Christ will rise, and we will rise with him. For that to happen, however, first things must be still, lie fallow, catch their breath, rest, be plowed over, and go down to the grave so that they can rise.

I pray that these coming twelve days of Christmas may be a fallow season for you—a time to receive the gift of God’s presence in your life—undeserved and freely given—so that where your heart is restless it might rest with the God who is in the manger. I pray that in this season you might catch your breath and strip away all the flashing lights, rich foods, and wine strained clear—that you might strip away all of the pretenses, distractions, and excuses to humble yourself before the one wrapped in swaddling clothes and dedicate yourself in new ways to the Way that he brings. Perhaps then you might return to Christina Rossetti’s poem and sing,

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wiseman, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him; give my heart.*

May the Peace of Christ be with in this Christmas season,  
Barry