

“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

(Joshua 24:14-15)

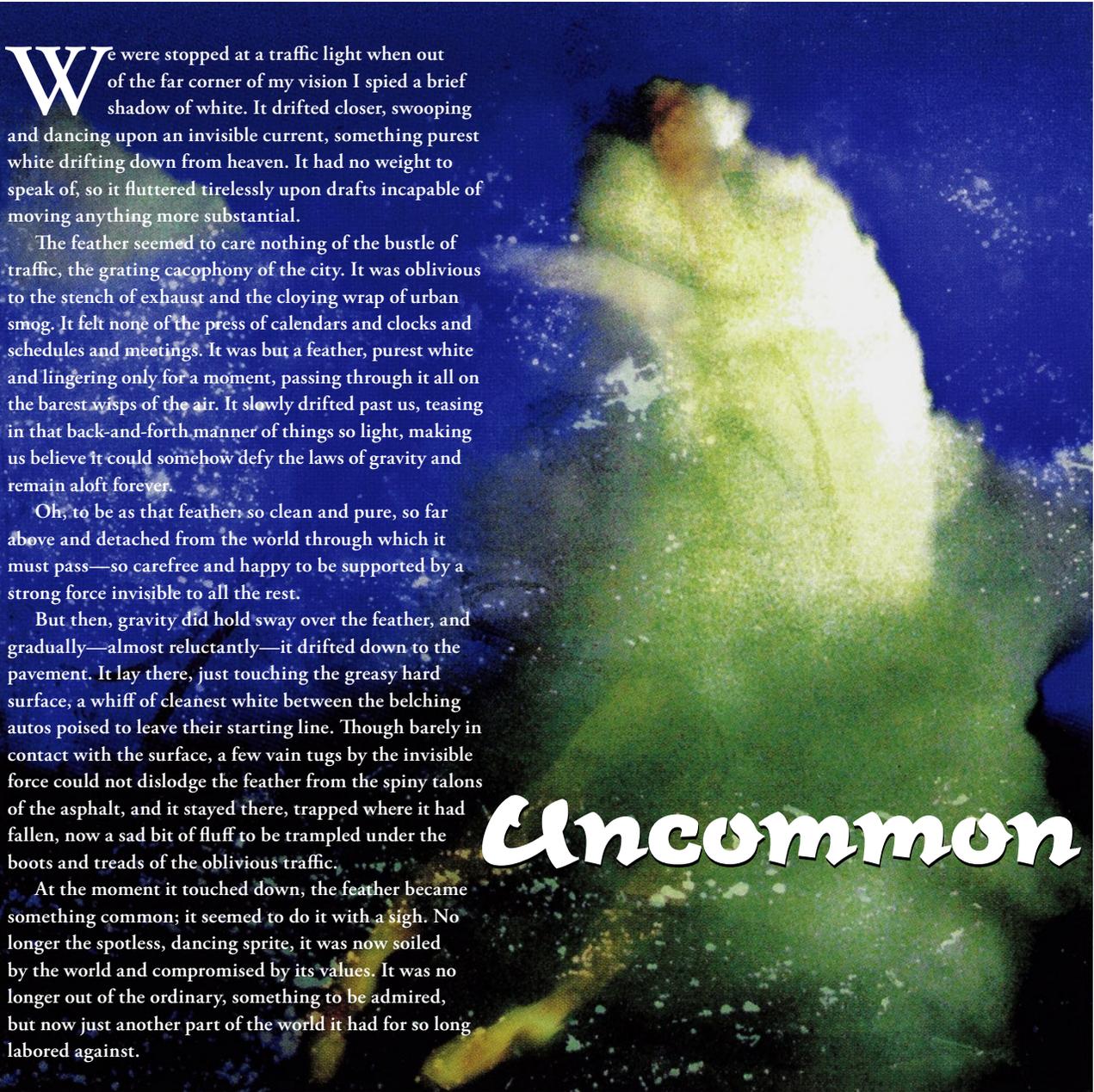
We were stopped at a traffic light when out of the far corner of my vision I spied a brief shadow of white. It drifted closer, swooping and dancing upon an invisible current, something purest white drifting down from heaven. It had no weight to speak of, so it fluttered tirelessly upon drafts incapable of moving anything more substantial.

The feather seemed to care nothing of the bustle of traffic, the grating cacophony of the city. It was oblivious to the stench of exhaust and the cloying wrap of urban smog. It felt none of the press of calendars and clocks and schedules and meetings. It was but a feather, purest white and lingering only for a moment, passing through it all on the barest wisps of the air. It slowly drifted past us, teasing in that back-and-forth manner of things so light, making us believe it could somehow defy the laws of gravity and remain aloft forever.

Oh, to be as that feather: so clean and pure, so far above and detached from the world through which it must pass—so carefree and happy to be supported by a strong force invisible to all the rest.

But then, gravity did hold sway over the feather, and gradually—almost reluctantly—it drifted down to the pavement. It lay there, just touching the greasy hard surface, a whiff of cleanest white between the belching autos poised to leave their starting line. Though barely in contact with the surface, a few vain tugs by the invisible force could not dislodge the feather from the spiny talons of the asphalt, and it stayed there, trapped where it had fallen, now a sad bit of fluff to be trampled under the boots and treads of the oblivious traffic.

At the moment it touched down, the feather became something common; it seemed to do it with a sigh. No longer the spotless, dancing sprite, it was now soiled by the world and compromised by its values. It was no longer out of the ordinary, something to be admired, but now just another part of the world it had for so long labored against.



Uncommon

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

(Psalm 1:1-3)

Dirty Feet

In a common world, the follower of Christ is to be uncommon. The Christian's path is challenging, for we are to thread our way through a minefield of temptations, distractions, and proffered compromises. We are not to permanently detach ourselves from this world, since it is, in Jesus' terms, a "field...white for harvest." We are always to be serving, reaching, "harvesting" those that do not yet know our Savior.

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

(John 4:35-38)

Yet, as any farmer can tell you, tramping through a field that has been sown will result in dirty feet. Seeds are not planted in clean, level pavement, but in deeply plowed, soft fertile soil. If there has been welcome rain, the soil will have turned to a wet, sucking muck that tries valiantly to remove the boots from our feet. Gnats, mosquitoes and flies buzz irritatingly around our face and bare arms, driving us mad with their mindless persistence. No, tramping through a field ripe for harvest is not the same as a pleasant walk in the park.

Through it all, however, though we are to remain *in* the world, we are not to be *of* the world.

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

(John 17:14-16)

Sanctified

Our lives are to be different from the rest, distinctive, sanctified. We are not to blend in, but to stand out as something out of the ordinary.

Several years ago, we hired someone to paint the exterior of our house. Stupidly basing my selection of painter solely on his low bid, I was disappointed to discover later that I had chosen someone for the job who was a thuggish lout. His personality was coarse and abrasive, his language profane. It took constant effort on my part to get him to follow through on his promises. He would be inexplicably absent for

days, then work for only a few hours when he finally did show up. He promised a crew of 4-5 men, but had trouble keeping two on the job. He said the job would take four days; it took more than four weeks.

The painter constantly cut corners and reneged on promises made. He yelled at his men and called them derogatory names. He promised to pay them, but didn't, causing them at one point to walk off the job. Near the end of the job he demanded more money to do something he had agreed to do for the original price. On the last day, he collected up his ladders and came to the door to collect the balance of his money when there were still many parts of the house which had not yet been painted. The man's behavior was churlish and abusive, full of empty boasts and small-minded excuses. Throughout, he was argumentative with me. On the last day he was here, his work and behavior became so bad that he was ultimately paid off and ordered off the property at once, even though the painting had not been completed.

Early on I had given the painter four tubes of my own caulk to use around the windows on the west porch. Because he never did that part of the job, before he left the property for good I asked one of his workers to retrieve the tubes from the back of his truck. The boss wasn't around, and the hired man could only find two of my tubes of caulk. He did, however, find a couple more that belonged to the hated boss man.

"Here, just take these," he said, offering me the caulk that belonged to the painter.

"No," I replied, "I'll just take the two that belong to me."

The man shook his head disbelievingly. Finally he said, "You're a better Christian than I am."

"No," I quickly answered, "not better. But if I took those, I would be just as dishonest as your boss."

I wasn't being a "better Christian." I was just doing the right thing—which, sadly, today is rather uncommon. In a fallen world in which common decency has become uncommon, we are called to be different. We are called to reflect the image of Christ to those who may never have met Him. dsj

When we pray, asking God to sanctify us, are we prepared to measure up to what that really means? We take the word *sanctification* much too lightly. Are we prepared to pay the cost of sanctification? The cost will be a deep restriction of all our earthly concerns, and an extensive cultivation of all our godly concerns. Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God's point of view. It means to secure and to keep all the strength of our body, soul, and spirit for God's purpose alone. Are we really prepared for God to perform in us everything for which He separated us? The reason some of us have not entered into the experience of sanctification is that we have not realized the meaning of sanctification from God's perspective. Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us. Are we really prepared for what that will cost? It will cost absolutely everything in us which is not of God. The resounding evidence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is the unmistakable family likeness to Jesus Christ, and the freedom from everything which is not like Him. Are we prepared to set ourselves apart for the Holy Spirit's work in us? (Oswald Chambers)