

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16

Living by the Word

Donald Demers (detail)

Pity those with no reference for living.

Those who are perishing go through life like hapless landlubbers in the midst of a storm at sea. All around them the world rages, a world without foundation or stability, a world that blows with reckless abandon first one way then the next. They make for themselves a life raft, but it is worthless against the power of the storm. It offers no protection or support, but crashes up and down the towering waves, tipping and heaving at the mercy of the unbridled wind and the watery, bottomless deep.

They seek refuge in a boat, but they fail to notice that it is simply another extension of the storm, and in

league with the tempest's evil caprice. The boat is too small to offer stability or security; the powerful waves are not held back by its inadequate sides, and both stem and stern heave with a nauseating rhythm.

All around those who are perishing is the shouting and tumult of a world gone mad, a world that whispers sweet lies while sticking a knife between the ribs. It is an inhospitable place that plays by dark rules based on deceit. It is ruled by a dark lord who masquerades as a lord of light, a master of evil who presents himself as the master of all that is reasonable and good. And they are part of it; they do not stand on the periphery, but dwell in its midst. They subscribe to its logic. They reason by its wisdom.

And all the while they are going down.



There are others, however, who are in the boat with them, but are not *of* it. Because they are kin to their shipmates, they experience many of the same twists and turns

of the storm, but they are not on their way down with them.

More than that, they know it. They know that someone stronger than the storm rides along with them in the boat, for they had invited Him.

So when the storm hits, and the small boat begins to rock and be tossed about, they could rest comfortably and unafraid in the knowledge that all things—even the elements and the turbulent sea—are in the reliable hands of the Lord. But because they are still kin with those who are per-

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

ishing, there may remain a germ of doubt and forgetfulness. They may forget that they have no reason to worry.

Even so, when doubt and unreasoning despair strike, their small faith at least takes them to the One who can help. And He wants them to know that, unlike their woebegone shipmates, within them dwells His word. It is a part of them; they carry it around with them as a library of knowledge, a governor of their thoughts and actions, a guidebook and a light. That which dwells within them is larger and stronger than any storm that comes their way. It is reliable. It is truth.

So He reminds them of this word, this quiet strength that can at once speak the universe into existence and whisper tender mercies to a child.

And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

Mark 4:39

For those who are perishing, "truth" is a moving target, subject to the whims and vagaries of the human species. For the believer, truth is Christ's word—His spoken words, as well as the message of His life. They embrace it as the rock upon which they stand, salt that cannot lose its savor, the light they cannot hide under a bushel. It represents Jesus Himself, along with everything His life stands for. Jesus is *the* Word, come to give His life for man, and His word is what was left behind when He returned to the Father: His thoughts, His

commandments, His law, His personality, and His pervading Spirit that seeks out a dwelling place within each of us. Living there, He guides us through

the perils of this temporal life—speaking truth, defining truth, *being* truth.

Believers can look upon the cross, and be moved in their spirit. As they consider the bloody sacrifice made there, they feel the tug of their spirit toward God's. In a similar way, believers can look upon the life of Jesus Christ and be moved in their spirit toward His. Beginning with the prophecies in the Old Testament that told of Him, and His mysterious pre-incarnate visitations, we can read His spoken words and of the events in His earthly life. We can read how He treated people—both followers and enemies—to see how Jesus might have us treat fellow believers, as well as those who are perishing. We can read of His times in prayer to the Father, moments of intimate communion and pain, to draw lessons for our own times with the Father.

We begin with the template of His perfect life and, growing slowly in our sanctification, make it our own.

