

“RIFFING”

A Sermon Poem in 4 Parts
by Rev. Benjamin Broadbent
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Part I - A Love Supreme

It starts with a cry
A mixture of grief and hope
But cool like, and playful
Then the familiar rumble
The thump of the deep that invites your heart to match it
And on top
Like life itself
The busy, complicated, yet mathematically beautiful percussion
Of kit and keys
The waves ebb and flow
The cry experiments with emotion
Expression
Depression
Inflection
Acknowledging that truth it never told definitively
Only by experimentation
Only by a deliberate casting off of custom
Yet maintaining steadfast faithfulness to the key
To the original melody
Faithful not by copying copiously
But by changing perspective
Exploring the range
You cannot see the globe with one glance
But only by moving around it
And never all at once
One chance to glance at a time
Taking it all in by memory and anticipation
Breathing, searching, sometimes with eyes closed
Uttering not only “What next,” but “thank you”
And you never finish
The listener’s experience is to perceive a snapshot in time
That is beauty
Not a final, finished form
No, an enduring becoming

Part II - A Cloud of Witnesses

This race is not yours alone
You who are bone tired
You whose weak knees drag on dusty roads
You whose hands droop and swell

No, this race is not yours alone
Because you are not alone
Whether you see it or not
Whether you hear it or not
Whether you think you've seen their faces
In dreams
In window reflections
In echoed words on Sunday mornings
You are not alone
The cloud is there
It's wispy presence chills your bones
And its aching hiss urges you on
This race is not yours alone
It has already been run
Already been won
But keep on running
In this race there is more than one winner
The runners, in running, have already won
Against expectation, they have conquered mighty kingdoms
Demanded and doled out justice
Wrestled impossible promises
Shut the mouths of lions
Quenched raging fire
Escaped the swipe of a sword
Prevailed in weakness
Faced down aggression with perseverance
And their names
Their names are like yours and mine
David, Sam, Rebekkah, John, Sarah, Larry, Scott, Craig, Phillis
The cloud darkens and grows
It lines the road
Their rumbling cheers build
Their voices reach your ears
They call your name
He calls your name, even as he carries an impossible load
Much like you've carried on days you dared not stand up
Let alone run
You are not alone
The cloud swells
Lift your drooping hands
Their faces glow
Strengthen your wobbly knees
Their voices lift and urge
Find your feet
Their stories are your story
Allow your weakest joint to be your point of strength

You are not alone
The race's end is not up ahead
The race's end is your running it
And you are not alone

Part III - Thoughts on the Works of Providence

Why *arise*?
Why *start* with Arise?
Arise from *what*?
Arise
She sounds like Shakespeare
And it's a word Shakespeare used
"Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon"
It would be like a man, a renaissance man,
To invoke the sun to kill the moon
But she was no renaissance man
No man
She bore a *man's* name
A *white* man's name
She *bore* his name
And she joined his Boston family
First as property, then as daughter
Arise, my soul, she wrote
Enraptured, rise
A world away from her birthplace
Senegal, 1753
She urges her soul, arise, on wings enraptured
"To praise the monarch of the skies"
Monarch of the skies
Not of the household
The monarch of the skies
Who is no bright, shining sun
But the morning's rosy glow
He is no blunt, waking sun
But slumbers in the arms of the ocean
In her arms
She who moves with easy grace
She, whose prayer is
To arise, enraptured
To what?
To this Infinite Love
Love, whose sole purpose,
"Heard in Nature's constant voice,"
And seen in "fostering rains and dews,"
Love's sole purpose is to nourish,
To nourish all,

To nourish the "good of man"
But she is no man
No man, she sees the cloud of rain and dew descend
No man, she can see that
"Man, ungrateful, pays but little homage, and but little praise"
She, the grace-filled ocean
Whose open arms embrace the sun,
She, the light-filled horizon, pays homage
"To him, whose works array'd with mercy shine,"
Enraptured, she grieves
What songs should rise, how constant, how divine!
What songs should rise
Arise, my soul
How constant
On wings enraptured
Not caged bird captured
Arise to praise this Infinite Love
So often lost on man.

Part IV - Reprise

It starts with a cry
(Love Supreme sax solo)

Then the familiar rumble
(Da Dum Da Dum Bass line begins)

Then the cloud
(drums and piano begin)

So great a cloud of witnesses
Repeating the claim
The claim that love, and love alone, has the power to save
And not just any love
But the only love worthy of bearing the name
Listen...
The cloud...

(Congregation chants "A Love Supreme" as band plays the rest of
"Acknowledgement")