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Poems I Found on My Way to Work: February 9--Ash Wednesday

David Schelhaas
Dordt College

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Poems I Found on My Way to Work

David Schelhaas

January 31—Icy, the Temperature Just at Freezing

I remember my grandfather
forty years ago walking to our house
with brand new spiked
galoshes on his feet. “Now I
am sharp shod,” he exclaimed, and he not even
a native speaker of the language.

Sometime tyrant, failed farmer, amateur theologian,
he put on English like an old sweater
after his daughters urged him to pray
in a language their children could understand
at our Sunday feasts. Even the most prickly
of us grandkids would be quieted by the easy way
he’d chat with God—about cousin Nels gone to college,
the oats crop, the bountiful table spread before us,
on and on he would pray as if he and God were old
fishing buddies with all the time in the world
and both fluent in English for as long as they could remember.

February 9—Ash Wednesday

This morning, while Christians
all around this blue-green globe received
a fingerprint of ash upon their brows,
you reached down to touch the dead
land where I sometimes struggle to believe
and left a fingerprint of snow and frost.
Grimy streets, old piles of leaves,
corn-stalked fields,
even the tips of the naked trees
were in the night made white,
no, whiter, than snow.