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Empathy That is Simply Divine

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Empathy That is Simply Divine

Abstract

"When we stumble through the desert places of our lives, when we'd give anything for a drink, He understands."

Posting about Christ's love for us from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/empathy-that-is-simply-divine/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Empathy That Is Simply Divine

 inallthings.org/empathy-that-is-simply-divine/

James Calvin Schaap

March 29, 2018

in things

She said she remembered Black Sunday—that she’d never forget it, in fact—because they were in church—it was a Sabbath afternoon—and her family was at worship when “the roller” came in. A curtain of darkness, a huge wall of dust swept up from ground shorn of its ancient grasses. When that roller arrived, she said, the church filled with dust, blinding them all. What she had never forgotten was that the only thing she could see up front behind the pulpit was the pastor’s white collar.

It was April 14, 1935, and all over South Dakota, a “black blizzard” swarmed into churches and barns and houses, through villages and towns. No one escaped. It wasn’t the first and wouldn’t be the last, but it was the biggest, something none who were there could ever forget.

Another woman who remembered that Sunday told me she had laid out her children’s everyday clothes on their beds before they left for church earlier that morning. When the family returned, “Black Sunday” had left so much dust over everything that the outlines of those clothes on the bed simply weren’t discernable. The house was that full of dust.

I’ve been reading Frederick Manfred’s first novel, *The Golden Bowl*, the story of a man named Maury, who is frantically looking for work. His parents are already gone, destroyed by the dust in Oklahoma. After he turns to a family who’ve been kind to him, “the Big Wind” comes, and when it does, it threatens everything.

The dry, hot wind lashed at the breasts and shoulders of the land. Soon huge dust eddies ran swiftly along the road. Whirlwinds scurried on the paths of the fields and scuffed the bark of the roadside willows. The hot wind moaned in the cracks of the house, sometimes shrilly, sometimes hoarsely, moaning and crying against the house. Towers of dust rose blackly in the night... The earth lay gray. The dry wind filled its lungs with dust.

At that time, wells coughed and went dry all over the region. Men and women dropped to their knees and prayed for rain. Hucksters showed up with cannons, hoping to pierce clouds that seemed to have forgotten to drop their precious burden. People went cotton-mouthed. Dust-

laden lungs killed animals and children, and the elderly. There was no water. Most of the parched Great Plains went thirsty.

When Jesus stammered "I thirst," he offered us the brutal truth of his humanity. He could have diverted the Sea of Galilee right then, directed the River Jordan to flood Gethsemane. He didn't. But, he was parched and dry as any of us would have been. He was human. He was us, for us.

And because he was, we can know that he understands. He gets it. When we stumble through the desert places of our lives, when we'd give anything for a drink, He understands. Been there, done that.

In those Dust Bowl days back then, lots of folks around here took great comfort from that unforgettable last testimony in the book of Habakkuk.

*Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

He knows. He was there. Once upon a time, the Living Water was thirsty, too. For us, he was us.

A variation of this devotional appeared at christiancourier.ca.