

## **AT THE SHEDD AQUARIUM ON YOM KIPPUR**

atone for me dumb fish finning through cobalt waters  
atone for me oh distracted priest  
with your incessant motion prayers  
swing a curved staring fish over my head  
wash me in the tank waters of mikva

leave me on the bottom of the sea like Jonah  
burp me out of that big dumb dutiful fish  
who stares stupidly at the crowd  
waiting for a better dinner  
than a lousy cantankerous monkfish prophet  
waiting for scallops in Szechwan sauce or classic drawn butter,  
or perhaps waiting for an order of brazier-grilled conch and barnacles.

I stand to the side of my people  
swimming between schools to Patmos  
because I am a lowly Jew  
who believes in the sign of Jonah  
who believes in IXTHUS, the sign of the fish,

an article of faith that would surely pfisch off Maimonides  
for I believe with perfect faith in the lowly Jewish carpenter  
whose friends were a lower-class band  
of loud-mouthed fishermen, sons of thunder gonif types  
who most of the time didn't quite catch what was going on  
like a whole lot of us yakking crappie know-it-alls  
who might, in a rare moment of silent honesty,  
admit that there is no efficacy, no antidote, no bleaching agent  
potent enough to scrape and tear off the stinky scales of sin  
rough necks who might in a fit of truthfulness  
find it plausible to make a philosophical move into unknown waters  
penitents who might finally concede  
that there's no net and trawler tough enough to haul us back  
there's no fast excruciating enough except starvation  
to erase the guilt of a dirty world sinking into itself  
trusting to save itself in its Titanic luxury liner  
trusting to save itself by sheer will, grit, and works.

What bosh this is to the mollusk ears of a common day worker  
who will tell you in a minute how futile is his service,  
how insignificant his labors in the immense face of God.  
Trusting myself to save myself is crazy, illogical, a slippery fish credo,  
a millstone dragging body and soul to the depths, as one fated

to be cracked in half like the giant limestone carrier *Carl D. Bradley*,  
whose stern rose high and then plunged straight down  
exploding to the bottom of Lake Michigan.  
Here's where self-reliance jettisons its faithful.  
I should shed my pride, strip down to basic faith,  
and like Peter, swim to the shores of Galilee,  
to dry off in Nazareth's sun rays  
to join a band of misfits who hold no money in the bag  
except for a coin yanked out of a fish's mouth to pay Caesar.

The fog horn shofar keeps blowing  
from the Waugoshance Lighthouse  
warning of our wild and unpredictable nature  
of our shoals, jagged rocks, and cold undercurrents.  
We're in the trap, up to the gills in guilt,  
stuck in the snare of self

Atone for me, IXTHUS—  
save a drowning man;  
pump out the dirty water;  
breathe in new life.  
Write me in your waterproof book,  
oh Son of man, oh fisher of men,  
you who got some nasty fish-hook scars  
in the house of your salty friends.



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