

# BLOOD Poured OUT KNOWS NO WALLS

*Gretchen Bailey, Companion*

Precious Blood spirituality has a voice, but before it replies, it must listen for cries, whispers, or stirrings that jostle the spirit. Precious Blood reads between the lines, seeing what lives between cracks, behind dumpsters, between the buildings where a few feet of precious real estate is left for a sleeping bag and tent. Inside, a human, unbathed, except for the tears of a God who weeps in waiting for someone who will offer Self in the form of hot soup, a tarp, or a clean pair of socks.

Stocks are up and the sun sets behind a redwood tree in the park where a homeless man camps out of sight, hidden from patrol cars and neighbors. Randal's tent is tethered to bushes and leans against a wood fence. He exchanges greetings with those who walk up the knoll to a cul-de-sac of well-kept homes. "God is good!" he waves. I say, "Amen!" as I pass his encampment on my way to school.

The jobless rate is 3.9%, the lowest since the Great Recession. Number crunchers don't count those who have given up looking for work or those who work, but don't make enough to live on the inside. The lucky ones sleep in their cars. Others camp under the over passes, pitching tarps between shopping carts, sleeping on layers of cardboard atop cold cement. They say, "Thank you" and "God bless" for a cup of hot coffee and a Snickers bar. The poor you will always have with you.

In a parking lot bordering the bank that advertises money at 4.5% to those who qualify, a man with no teeth and dirt-streaked hands holds up pants that are falling below his waist. He spies a cigarette

butt on the curb and bends over to pick it up with a shaking hand. His pants fall. He pulls them up, putting the cigarette butt in his pocket then reaching for the egg sandwich and coffee a passerby gives him. "Be careful, the coffee's hot." "Thank you," he says hunching over the coffee and two-buck meal. We watch him shuffle down the street as a line queues at the auto-teller across the parking lot, where people shove twenty-dollar bills into wallets, purses and pockets so they can go out for breakfast or shop at the grocery store.

The voice of the Precious Blood is hoarse from repeating words that rain down on ears that selectively listen to music or talk radio hosted by the left or right of center. The voice says, "See me. I am here in stinking socks. I'd wash but the water in the creek is cold. And I'd get up, but my feet hurt from walking all day or all night to find a place to lie down out of the way of wind or police. You see, I have no place to rest my head."

A man rages at the air, sometimes raising his fist while he stares up at the gray soot-streaked ceiling of the underpass. The cars going to work, home or the shopping mall roar on the freeway above. The freeway is not free. You've got to have money to be up there, in a car. The man has his things neatly arranged in a Samsonite bag on wheels, the bag covered by a zebra-striped blanket. Carl stops raging long enough to receive a chicken sandwich from Subway. "Hey! It's still warm!" He gives thanks. He's been off the street for a while, on the "inside." He says, "Yup, I was on the inside, but I had a backslide and now I'm on the outside again." Carl lives under a river of cars. The voice of the Precious Blood says to Carl, "You are forgiven." And to us, Precious Blood cries, "Now will not one of you give me a place on the inside?"

I work at an inner-city school in Oakland, California. Santos arrived in our kindergarten last March, in the latter part of the school year. He came with new red tennis shoes, a 49er's beanie, and wore flannel pajamas with rows of basketballs. He wore the same clothes day after day. One of the mom's gathered clothes from

her sons and gave them to the family. Santos spoke neither English nor Spanish, but an indigenous language, so communication was an adventure in gesture. Like many who come from Central America, he'd never been to school nor had he been in a place that had blocks and toy cars and trucks and free lunch.

Santos ran everywhere. The linoleum halls seemed to be made for skipping. He ran to the drinking fountain, to his desk, to his friends, to the bathroom and the shelf where the cars and trucks were parked in a box. He loved lunch. Even loved spinach and kale.

On his first day he was given a new box of crayons and a notebook to take home. His mother took out her wallet, thinking she would have to pay. We told her, "Bienvenidos a Los Estados Unidos! Aquí, la educación es gratis!" ["Welcome to the United States! Here, the education is free!"] We did not tell her that our school is one of the poor ones, where we have 50 computers to share among 400 students and they are locked in a closet after hours. Only the principal has the key. We are thankful for the computers we have and want to make sure they do not "walk away." Santos' mother was happy with the notebook and crayons, though he would rather have had the trucks and cars.

After 3 months he still could not count to 3. He did, however, recognize the letter "S" for Santos. He was to repeat kindergarten this year, but he never came back to school. No one has requested his file. So, likely Santos is not in school, perhaps not in California, perhaps no longer in the United States due to the current anti-immigrant stance of the government.

In this part of California there are regular ICE raids. At apartment complexes, men in jeans, baseball caps and hoodies, the uniform of the immigrant, are "swept up." The school children have seen neighbors and relatives loaded into the backs of white Homeland Security vans and driven to detention centers. Students are afraid to come to school. Parents are afraid to allow them to go on field trips.

After school one day, I watched Eric hold a sycamore seedpod in his hand. He stroked the prickly exterior telling his mom, "Mira, ¿es bonita la semilla, No?" ["Look, isn't the seed beautiful?"] Beauty only a five-year old might appreciate, the promise of a tree, the seeds excised and devoured or buried beneath earth like the dreams of his mother who wears an ankle monitor. Precious Blood has no walls.

A mother speaks to us of how her child was kidnapped by gangs in Guatemala, of how she sold her goats and chickens to ransom her daughter. She spoke in a broken voice of leaving her home at 3 a.m., holding the little girl in her arms. They fled in darkness carrying nothing but the clothes on their backs, leaving behind family, and also hoping to leave behind violence and gangs. Together they walked during the nights, across mountains, skirting cities, avoiding bands of men. They slept on sticks and leaves with only two plastic garbage bags to shield them from the rain. She walked with her child for 2,700 miles to the United States border.

She pleads, "Please teacher, my little girl cannot read. I cannot help her because I've never been to school. I come here for her to be safe."

Maclovio lives two blocks from us. His family shares a house with another family. Two bedrooms, one family in each bedroom. One day, he says, "Mi mamá esta triste porque tiene bebe aquí." [My momma is sad because she has a baby here.] He pats his tummy. He continues, "And she don't want it. The bebe." In those brown eyes rests a world of knowing, yet, this is a child who runs and skips from place to place. He delights in everything. He does not know walking. If there are walls, God willing, Maclovio will find a way to breach them.

People come to a country that has shelves brimming with food, clean water, electricity and infrastructure, an educational system. Some come from areas where the water has been polluted, the land degraded by oil extraction and mining companies that have their

origins in the United States. We consume from the land of other nations. That is part of what it means to be a global economy. But the blood of our fellow world citizens cries out from the ground as we consume what we pillage from another's land seeking profit and the cheapest price, soaking the land with spilled oil and toxins from our production.

The soil and fisheries in other countries are severely compromised as a direct result of our consumption. Yet we refuse to share what we have. We do not compensate the other justly for his labor so that we can fill our bellies and our shelves. We walk with the gait of the engorged, shameless of our gluttony, our arms outstretched over our stuff. And, like cranky two-year-olds, many seem to think that building a wall will allow us to keep hold of our cell phones, dishwashers, Big Macs, and cheap gas. It seems our society would rather subsidize hamburgers than healthcare.

As Precious Blood people we realize that the "Rule of Law" is superseded by the covenant of I AM. Birthing, bearing and living out our covenant means having less so that those who have nothing or very little can have healthcare, a roof, clothes and food for tomorrow.

Precious Blood spills in the streets, outside the reinforced walls, rebar and retrofitting that keeps stained glass in place. Precious Blood has no walls. See it in the faces of those who cross. See it in the faces of those who rail at demons. See it in those who live on the outside.

The covenant of Precious Blood is borne in breaching walls or tearing them down a section at a time. Men build walls. People tunnel under them and rats gnaw through them. There is not enough galvanized steel to keep a mother from seeking a safe place for her child. Precious Blood people stand up to a government that would exclude the hungry, the poor, the black, the brown, the victims of violence caused by the international destabilization of

power in Central America, Africa and the Middle East that traces its roots to these United States. Precious Blood cries, "Sanctuary!" to all whose blood runs red. Sit at His feet. Listen to Him speak. Have the better part for a time, then act.

