



## INTRODUCTION

Poetry is important. We are surrounded by poetry. It's in the music we listen to (especially if you listen to Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen). It shows up on TV and at the movies. After all, "Poems are among us | seeking to make us fully | human" (see *Anti-Pods*). Poetry permeates our lives.

This is especially true if you read the Bible. More than 8500 verses or around 27% of the Bible is poetry. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are all poetry. Only seven Bible books contain no poetry. One-third or so of the entire Old Testament and many of the narratives and informational/doctrinal sections of the Bible are written in a poetic style.

The Bible opens poetically, majestically, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." No, it doesn't rhyme, but it is poetic. Why? Because it's a huge idea. An enormous reality condensed and distilled into a few simple words. Those words hit the mind and explode the imagination.

Later, the Apostle John opens his gospel, retelling the creation story in five succinct verses that many Bible translations, such as the New Living Translation, layout in poetic form:

*In the beginning the Word already existed.  
The Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He existed in the beginning with God.  
God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.*

*The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

Even though there are substantially more words than in that first verse of Genesis 1, it is massive meaning packed into a small message.

This is what poetry is. Big ideas, big meanings, big experiences, a big sense of wonder finely wrought. Kind of like us. Poetry is in our DNA.

God is a creative being and expresses His creativity in mysterious and wonderful ways. Just look in the mirror! Poetry is His voice singing to us, His best Creation. And when we write poetry, we are exhibiting and expressing His Spirit-enlivened image in us.

When I write poetry my intention is to make it accessible and inspiring. To take what is considered mundane and reveal it's hidden awesomeness. To write what connects with the heart and lifts up the imagination. Or, as John Ciardi put it, "The concern is not to arrive at a definition and to close the book, but to arrive at an experience." And, that, in some way, always points to the Creator behind the creation.

Like a good sermon, a good poem brings forward the meaning intended by the writer, but also leaves room for the Spirit to activate deeper and personally unique meanings in the minds of the recipients. A good poem, like a good sermon, embeds truth deep into the heart.

We could have used more poetry in our 2016 politics. In 1985, Mario Cuomo claimed of political campaigns, "You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose." Sadly, most of the recent campaigning has consisted of petty insults, whining, profanity, obscenity -- generally scabrous speech not fit as poetry or comprehensible speech. And when it comes to governing? Forget about it. Good prose connects people. There's little good about what's happening in our government or our daily discourse.

We need more poetry. Once upon a time, we were a country of great poets. Whitman, Eliot, Auden, Frost, cummings, Sandburg, and so many more. Those poets inspired our statesmen to high ideals and a better vision for moving our country forward. Now? Well, not so much. There are still great poets, but no one is listening to them. That's just, as one candidate recently liked to quip, "Wrong."

America has been and should be better than the candidates the electoral process throws up. We are a nation created from great ideas expressed through poetic and uplifting language. We need to reclaim this positive founding spirit. Perhaps, through poetry, we can make America great again!

*Copyright ©by Stephen R. Clark. All rights reserved.*

Poetry lifts up, inspires, expands vision, opens new channels of imagination. I hope this is what you experience when reading my poems. Humbly, I share them with you. And I also hope it inspires you to write your own. We need more poetry to make America truly great again!

*Stephen R. Clark*

*Oreland, PA*

*October 2016*

