

Dunghills Covered in Snow

by Benjamin Johnson

The last touch of frost remained for a brief moment and then vanished. It reminded me of Luther's portrait of those who come to Christ: no longer dunghills, but dunghills covered in snow. It's a perfectly apt description. What is all that I cherish in myself but dung when I look to the beauty of Christ who made all this—who covered me with His beauty and now sets to work to make me beautiful in Himself?

Some disparage Christianity precisely because they imagine that it keeps one weak, constantly cringing on one's knees in submissive supplication, face in the dust, bowing low, full of wretched humility. I almost wish it did. I've never felt more weak and miserable and absurd than when I was self-satisfied—because I knew then, more deeply than I supposed myself to be of some inestimable nobility, that instead, I was all the while a baseborn fool trying on the King's crown, pretending to wear His armor and sit upon His throne, all of which, of course, are much too big and heavy.

An essential strength of Christianity is that it is thoroughly realistic; it is not at all anthropocentric. What is weaker than panting after delusions of grandeur? We Christians know what we are. That's why Luther was always so endearingly devoid of decency. It kept him an honest knave. All this nonsense about modern "decency" shows little concern with what GOD has already said and done. As C. S. Lewis noted, GOD is not "decent" by society's standards at all. That's what is so very offensive about our most ancient faith. It doesn't follow our lead, doesn't extend to us what we would have expected (or wanted) with all its talk about blood and sacrifice and sin and struggle and law and life—for some, but not all. It isn't that it forces us to believe that we're not, after all, the lead in some Grand Play. It is offensive because it very realistically requires that we admit our ineffable insignificance in *everything*. Our opinions about the truth are insignificant to the universe. Even our sin and our righteousness together can take nothing from Him or add anything to Him. How infuriating to be so ... so creaturely. But if that is really the way things are, it is the height of idiocy to pretend they're the other way around. After all, if you don't like your face, it accomplishes nothing to scorn the mirror.

To be on one's knees in humble adoration of Someone who is utterly priceless is not only natural, but in the face of Reality, it is the only sane and rational way to live. Jesus Christ was such a realist. Though He was (and is) GOD in the flesh, He did not grasp after His position—as though it could be taken from Him—but chose to do what Love always chooses to do: give Himself away.

I once desired to know others fully, to be filled with wisdom and then love everyone unquestionably. I was arrogant enough to believe that I just might be able to pull it off. Some of the wisdom I sought was granted, in time, and I have learned more than I wish of what humans can do. I realize omniscience alone is a terrible thing; for to look upon myself or my neighbor with the naked eye of omniscience without the guidance of Christ's indefatigable compassion would be more than my mind could take.

Dunghills covered in snow ... not a flattering thought ... but it is a truthful one. Yet, this is not quite the hope of Christ. This fact of our existence is only the first part of a more profound revelation. Every dunghill is encouraged to remember that, though dunghills are what we've made of ourselves, He is, at this moment, working in us, underneath our cloak of white, all the while mercifully keeping from our sight the absolute worst realities of our nature. GOD has not turned away from us in disgust but looks upon us with love—love like a consuming fire. In the wisdom of His love, He has chosen to cover dunghills in white raiment *and* to work to make them proper bearers of it. We needn't be as we are forever. We can shine like the Son, and this time, we won't simply be errant fools playing with the idea of a princely existence. Instead, we will be *former* dungheaps who have been made sons and daughters of the King Most High. That is why, in the end, the world will call us, "Fool." The resulting change is that comprehensive—and incomprehensible.

To endure as a Christian, you must lose nothing less than *everything* you once were. Anyone who thinks the process from dung to glory is natural—that it is not one in which everything is turned around and upside down—and that we won't, in utter humility, have to face a great many unpleasant facts about ourselves and endure corrections to our way of thinking, is still gripping too hard at his own greatness.