

ST. THOMAS DIDYMUS

~Denise Levertov

In the hot street at noon I saw him
a small man
gray but vivid, standing forth
beyond the crowd's buzzing
holding in desperate grip his shaking
teethgnashing son,

and thought him my brother.

I heard him cry out, weeping and speak
those words,
Lord, I believe, help thou
mine unbelief,

and knew him
my twin:

a man whose entire being
had knotted itself
into the one tightdrawn question,
Why,
why has this child lost his childhood in suffering,
why is this child who will soon be a man
tormented, torn, twisted?
Why is he cruelly punished
who has done nothing except be born?

The twin of my birth
was not so close
as that man I heard
say what my heart
sighed with each beat, my breath silently
cried in and out,
in and out.

After the healing,
he, with his wondering
newly peaceful boy, receded;
no one
dwells on the gratitude, the astonished joy,
the swift
acceptance and forgetting.
I did not follow
to see their changed lives.
What I retained
was the flash of kinship.
Despite
all that I witnessed,
his question remained
my question, throbbed like a stealthy cancer,
known
only to doctor and patient. To others
I seemed well enough.

So it was
that after Golgotha
my spirit in secret
lurched in the same convulsed writhings
that tore that child
before he was healed.
And after the empty tomb
when they told me that He lived, had spoken to Magdalen,
told me
that though He had passed through the door like a ghost
He had breathed on them
the breath of a living man—
even then
when hope tried with a flutter of wings
to lift me—
still, alone with myself,
my heavy cry was the same: *Lord*
I believe,
help thou mine unbelief.

I needed
 blood to tell me the truth,
the touch
 of blood. Even
my sight of the dark crust of it
 round the nailholes
didn't thrust its meaning all the way through
 to that manifold knot in me
that willed to possess all knowledge,
 refusing to loosen
unless that insistence won
 the battle I fought with life.

But when my hand
 led by His hand's firm clasp
entered the unhealed wound,
 my fingers encountering
rib-bone and pulsing heat,
 what I felt was not
scalding pain, shame for my
 obstinate need,
but light, light streaming
 into me, over me, filling the room
as I had lived till then
 in a cold cave, and now
coming forth for the first time,
 the knot that bound me unravelling,
I witnessed
 all things quicken to color, to form,
my question
 not answered but given
 its part
in a vast unfolding design lit
 by a risen sun.

~From Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems* (New Directions, 2002)