

*Fredrick Zydek*

**Growing Up Polish**

To hear Grandpa tell it, Poland was the heart of Europe just as his farm was the center of the universe. We knew more about Chopin, Paderewski and Rubinstein than any American musicians. We knew that a Slavic tribe who called them the Polians united other Slavic tribes, creating Poland nearly a thousand years before America became a nation. We knew Polish foods: perogies, cabbage rolls, beet soup, smoked sausages, fruited cookies and pickles. We knew that in the year 900 the Poles voted to become Christians and the entire nation was baptized in less than a week. Names like Kowal, Tilenda, Orloski, Atombosi and Dziedzic were as comfortable in our mouths as Smith and Jones. We were told that Russians were thugs, Germans coarse and the English poor warriors; we were told that only the Polish and French were truly civilized and cultured. He said the mountains around his farm were so much like those in the old country that when he spoke Polish he forgot we were all living outside a town near Mt. Rainier.

**Guest to the Pulpit**

They have invited me to speak  
from the arena of my expertise,  
to tell them something about  
the mystery of God and ways  
they might enter that unknown  
place. They have Eden on their  
mind, urges to step out of what  
their lives have become and into  
a moment where they can touch  
what is divine. I will tell them that  
no matter how difficult their journey,  
they are not alone and there will  
be real light at the end of tunnel.  
It will not be enough to tell them  
that God lives within them. They  
have heard that line for generations.  
So I will tell them that God is not in  
them the way a raisin is in a bun  
but as the ocean is to the wave.  
And I will tell them things they do  
not want to hear. I will tell them that  
sometimes their problems are their  
own faults and that there can be no  
happiness if the things they believe  
are different from the things they do.

### **The Geography of Prayer**

You will find landscapes of hidden heroism and great investment in this stuff, glorious roots, the dwelling places of eternity, what happens when a sacred age climbs over the world's fantastic furniture. It will show you how life happens when we discover that fearsome fauna lives within us or like it or not we find ourselves faced with an opportunity to either be brave or stay home under lock and key. The riddle of right choices is always nipping at our heels. It doesn't take much work to find the marks of God's grace in the world - but accepting that we are clearly designed for both sorrow and great delight can make even the best at prayer feel egocentric and presumptuous. You need not be a magnificent activist to cry out for justice when the empire of shadows seems to seep into the essence of things, but you do need to know the lay of the land, how to avoid certain mountains, find their passes, rest in the valley of the shadows between and know enough about your own behavior to appreciate how its features are molded here.