

Views from the Pews: Lent 4. Adam's blessings, minus one

At Punakaiki Pancake Rocks, on the South Island's west coast, there is a place where one can stand on the cliff path and look down into a natural basin. Every regular swell from the open Tasman Sea surges in, and smashes itself against soaring vertical rock walls enclosing a limited space with no exit. Every previous arrival bounces back into the path of the next wave in a fountain of spray, then both barge around inside the basin in a maelstrom of confused waves and reflected energy. There is never a moment of calm. It reminds me of the fundamental restlessness of human nature. George Herbert explains why:

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
"Let us," said he, "pour on him all we can.
Let the world's riches, which disperséd lie,
Contract into a span."
So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.
"For if I should," said he,
"Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,

And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;

So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,

But keep them with repining restlessness.

Let him be rich and weary, that at least,

If goodness lead him not, yet weariness

May toss him to my breast."

The Pulley, George Herbert, 1633