



a publication of kirk irwin and sarah kennedy irwin in ministry with Cru and partnering with Friday Arts Project

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## Birdsong Like a Canopy

When we first moved to Rock Hill, Friday Arts Project did a series of forum on subjects related to arts and culture. That year, 2013, the topic was truth and poetry/art and we called the forum "Dazzle Gradually: The Allure of Poetic Truth-bearing". The title comes from an Emily Dickinson poem called "Tell all the truth but tell it slant" which is worth reading:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -  
Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise  
As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind -

That forum was great—it was our third one in as many years. We thought we might do another but sensed we had come to an end for a season. To host a forum we realized that we needed to explore a topic we loved.

Fast forward to 2023. The Covid outbreak seems to have heightened the need for beauty in people's lives—focus on our immediate surroundings as a result of lockdowns seemed to direct our minds to our own environments—our homes and yards. Beauty/art & homes/environments are things we value in our community.

God started a Garden when He created this world, but He wanted us to cultivate it further—perhaps, by His provision and guidance, to make it even more beautiful. The Fall marred that, and needed restoring by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And He, as the Christ, will return one day and restore that Garden, which will be a great garden-city.

In the year after Covid was identified one of the things I returned to over and over again was a documentary about the writer Wendell Berry called "Look & See". I saw in his life an attempt to live in unity with God's original desire toward a garden-city and the pursuit of Beauty in our lives locally. Hence, the seeds for a new forum were sown!

In that documentary Berry reads one of his poems called "A Vision" in which he writes about what a new earth could look like—not just the one to come, but a shadow of the new earth we could see/experience today? It's a powerful and challenging poem. In describing what this renewal may look like, one stanza reads:

The river will run  
clear, as we never know it,  
and over it, birdsong like a canopy.

The image of the song of birds covering our homes and world like a tent is resonant. We decided to call our next forum for 2024 "Birdsong Like a Canopy: Beauty, Art, and Ecology".

As a herald to our upcoming forum, this past Spring we hosted a "pre-event" called "Greener Hills: The Song and Sacrament of Place-Making". We invited musician Jason Harrod and professor / lecturer Matthew Dickerson to participate. Dickerson has written several books on the Inklings (Lewis and Tolkien) and their ideas about the environment in their fiction. It was a great event. We had about 40 people from our community attend.

As followers of Jesus we have a solid platform to speak into issues related to our environment as well as the source of ultimate Beauty. Though Sarah and I are skeptical about many of the "chicken little" like public ideas regarding climate issues, we do not doubt God's charge to us to "keep and tend" the Garden—His world. This stewardship makes us "saltier" to our neighbors around us, and prepares us for the Day when the skies will be rolled back like a scroll, and the Master Gardener will restore His yard (He is also an urban planner).

Pray for the preparations of this forum for the Spring of 2024. We already have a few speakers lined up—Christian and non-Christian—and we will need to arrange all the details and find a

way to pay for it all. But this subject is a great crossroads for us as believers to be in and like the Apostle Paul in the marketplaces engaging people about where ultimate Truth lies—hint: it dazzles gradually and is in the canopy.\*

\*More to come in future updates. ■

Blessings—

Please Pray

» Pray the prayer with us that we try to pray before every event, "Jesus, help us be a part of someone's next step toward you."

» Please pray for our hearts and souls. This season of losing Sarah's best friend, Audrey and our brother-in-law Wronsky in the midst of life's ups and downs makes life weightier to bear for us and our families.

★ If you would like to partner with us in ministry, visit our giving page on Cru's website: [www.cru.org/0402593](http://www.cru.org/0402593)



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