

JERRY HARP

*Practical Theology*

Depictions of our arguments come crashing  
In the mud. Rats scratch inside the walls.  
A bare branch scraping the house makes

The only sound we sing for days.  
It's more than what one does, more yet  
Than reading the scribbled hand of one

Who died in a distant country where  
The late, mailed letter fell like sand.  
Her eyes became the service stairs. Look now.

Sometimes, folding the morning paper, you said,  
The love of God requires two things:  
The preparation and the putting away.

When I try speaking, cricket sounds come out,  
And the page falls to an alphabet I've not  
Yet learned to read, discordant notes,

Sand blowing in my eyes, a purple sun  
Going down beyond the trees. So look.  
The answers turn out wrong because

The text is off by one—one sound,  
One declension, one breath released,  
A distant resignation in the trees,

A key turned to likenesses a sense away.  
Cinders grow in waves I stumble in.  
The voice of one I've never seen

Is why these missives fall like sand, a sudden  
Country awakened to in a distant room,  
A tarnished ring passed on for centuries.

I can't remember what it means.  
There was a letter, but the letter's lost.  
The song comes scraping on the stairs.