

TO FRANCIS

I tried to walk away
from vulnerability,
like you

turn my back
on the stench of disease.
But when I remembered

you smothering the leper
with summer kisses,
the holiest of spirits crept within me.

I returned to the boy
shot with spasms.
When he took my hand,

searched my face,
explored the tips of my fingers
for love or enmity,

my need glared
out from his.

We sat together
amongst the excrement
and deformed bodies.

Silence seeped into us.
We spoke
into the unspeakable.

Since then
I am easier
with my humanness.

Now when I see you at dusk,
crouched by the blue river,
fish feeding from your hands,

I am dazzled
by your belonging.

Deer emerge
from the bracken

to nuzzle your palms,

birds fly to your shoulders.
You gave away everything,
riches, power,

undressed your own desire,
exposing your reedy hands,
you begged for bread.

Now as I sit
amongst the fallen masonry
of a derelict church

I think of you,
I hear the call;
Rebuild my church.