

In the moments before the beginning, the temple of the seventh day stands empty.
Outside its walls of minutes and hours, the world waits.
As the sun sinks finally below the horizon, sowing its light into the righteous earth,
a new radiance enters the world to replace the glow of day.
It cannot be fully seen, nor heard; instead it must be felt.

Trees shout for joy at the arrival of the night,
As the birds that give them voice prepare to make their rest.
The mountains sing together in gladness,
The wind passing between them like the breath of a trumpet blast.
Islands rejoice, and dance to the rhythm of the ocean's lyre.
The rivers clap their hands, waters tossed up by rocks and fish.
The earth knows the majesty of the presence that suffuses it,
Only we, its proud and humble inhabitants, may remain unmoved.
Our gift alone is the power to remember,
its peculiar cost is our capacity to forget.

Yet still, in the moments after the beginning, we come.
Entering the temple in ones and twos, in handfuls and scores and hundreds at a time, we come.
At first from Japan and New Zealand; from Australia and China and the Russian frontier.
Then from India and Iran; Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.
We pass under the gate and into the sanctuary from Israel, and Palestine,
From Germany and from Turkey; South Africa, Italy and France.
We come from places both narrow and broad, but all of us know our way to Shabbat.

By the time the last have arrived, from islands where the mountains melt like wax,
the first have already departed.
It is like Sinai, but not quite the same.
There is no blood for the altar, no singular prophet to show us the way home.
The pillar of cloud and the great voice of power no longer lead us wherever we go.
The only gifts we can carry are the ones we bring with us, into the cathedral of time.

Even if, like Jacob, we are too sly and cynical for our own good;
Even if, like Samuel, we are too strict and full of zeal to show the mercy that the world needs;
Even if, like Aaron, we are too quick to surrender our ideals to the will of the crowd;
Even if, like Moses, we are slow to speak but quick to anger;
Even then, we still may stand between the walls they helped to build, upon the rock of ages.
As one we come to the silent room, the empty altar to say:

"For six days have I labored, O Holy One:
Here is the love I have given, the justice I have forged, the peace I have built,
Here too are the hopes that have delighted me, the fears that have affrighted me,
The shame that has pursued me, the ignorance that has deluded me,
The pain and the wonder and the uncertainty of one more week of life upon your world."

In this way, we fill the sanctuary of Shabbat with the song of the week now passed.
The ritual is ancient, but each week the song we sing is new.