

# Sarah Hall's Beatitude Windows

*J.S. Porter*

The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard believed that people were compelled to speak on at least three occasions: the birth of a child, the marriage of a couple, and the death of a friend. You can add one more occasion for the necessity of speech: disaster.

Collective experiences of natural or man-accelerated devastation — floods, fires, earthquakes, etc. — call forth language commensurate in power to heal, console and encourage.

When St. Pius X Church in Calgary commissioned Sarah Hall to design windows for their sanctuary, she conceived of a design that was inspired by the majestic Bow River winding its way through the city, carrying the words of the Beatitudes down from the mountain and into the Church.

Little did she know at the time that the language of the Beatitudes would take on new urgency in the Flood of 2013 when a normally benign river suddenly turned destructive.

Four people died, an estimated 100,000 residents were ordered to evacuate, 10,000 homes were in a state of ruin and the downtown business core was shut down for days. And in response, strangers stood with strangers, sandbagging and salvaging what they could of other people's possessions.

When the city sent out a call for hundreds of volunteers, thousands showed up.

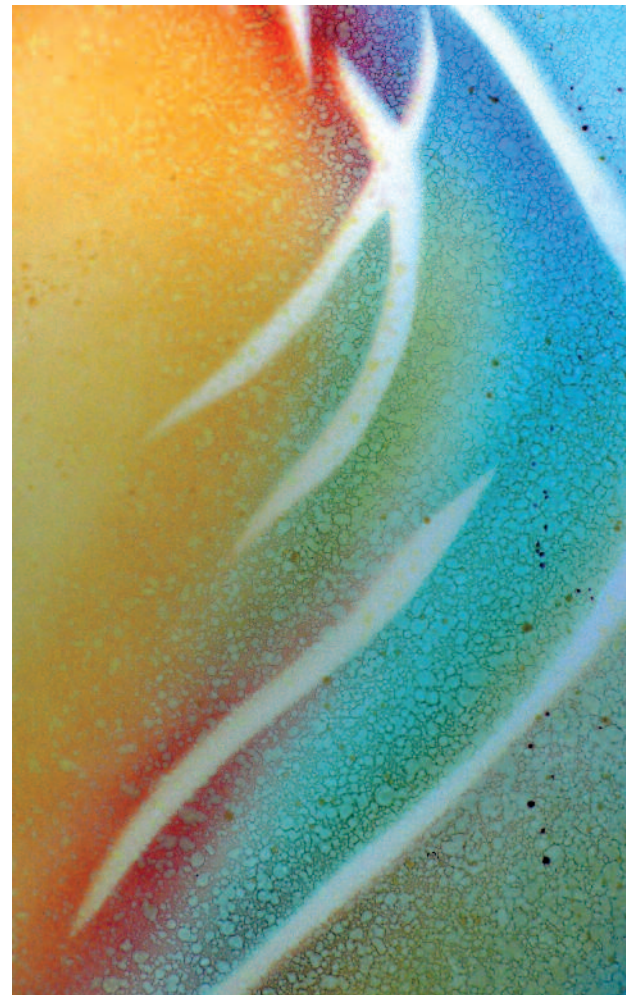
When viewers look at Sarah Hall's windows now — "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" and "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" — they naturally recall the flood and the open-hearted response to it. They experience the power of these ancient utterances to revive and re-orient the heart.

Sarah Hall has great facility with incorporating text as imagery in a visually engaging way, perhaps stemming from her study of Islamic script in Jerusalem. The word is a luminous image.

The windows cradle the congregation in a surround of harvest-yellow with a blend of greens, blues and ochre at the base like a translucent river bottom. Eight Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12), four Beatitude windows on each side of the sanctuary, stream down like sunlight. Each saying carries light and hope.

Notably, there is no "I" in the Beatitudes just as there is no "I" in the Lord's Prayer. The eight blessings present a collective vision of the future in which everyone is responsible for attempting to realize some aspect of the vision.

Beauty and justice go hand in hand in Sarah's visual presentation of Jesus' words, and sometimes in life as well.



Born in the north of Ireland, J.S. Porter is the author of *The Thomas Merton Poems*, *Spirit Book Word: An Inquiry into Literature and Spirituality* and *Thomas Merton: Hermit at the Heart of Things*. In 1999, he received a Catholic Press Journalism Award. His literary achievements are acknowledged in the *Canadian Who's Who*.

Title: The Beatitudes

St. Pius X Parish, Calgary AB ♦ 2012c

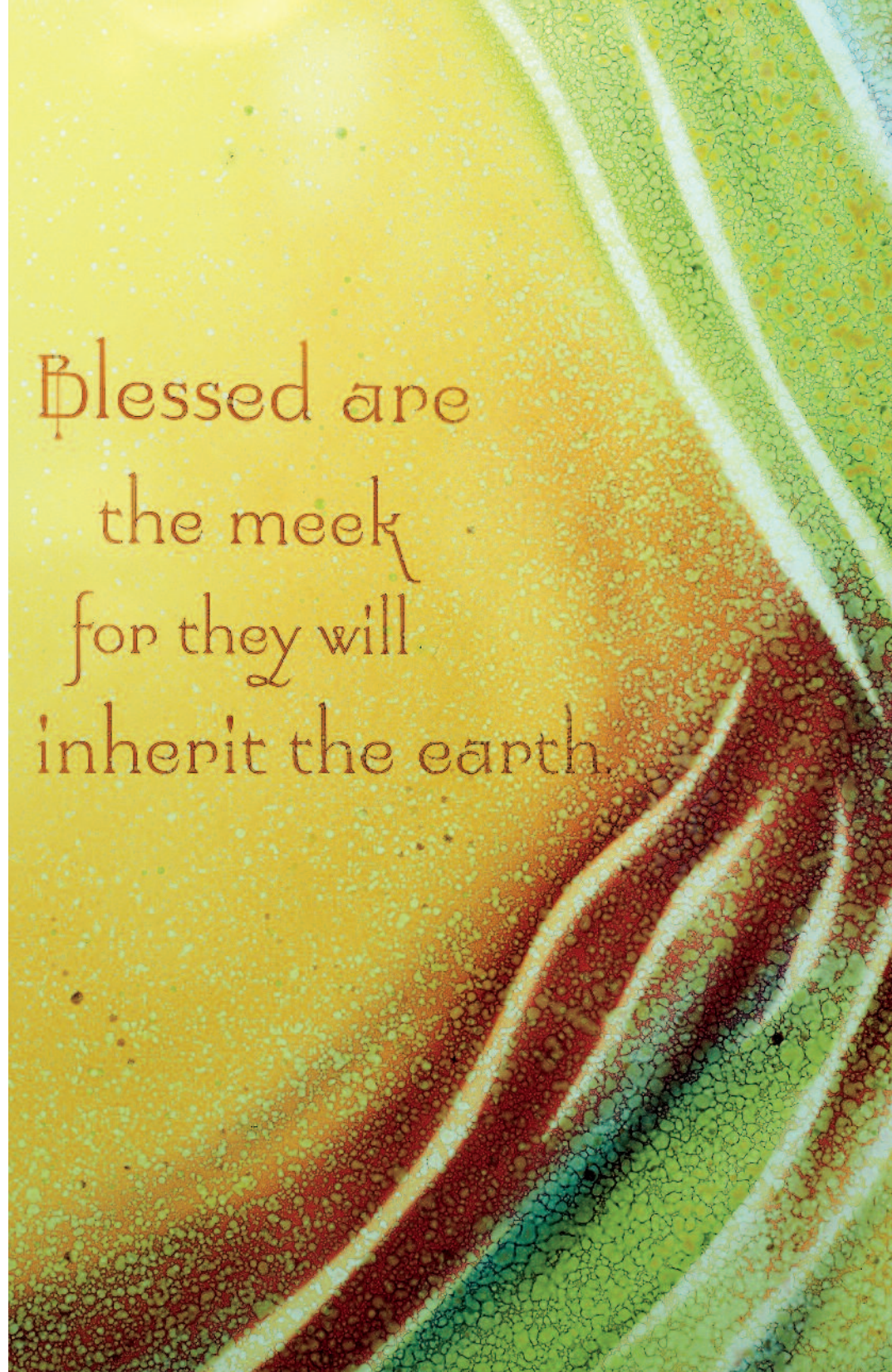


Grant Kernan



*"Sarah Hall imprints her works with a design aesthetic of overwhelming elegance"*

SUZANNE BEEH-LUSTENBERGER



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