

Merton in the Middle of Things

By **J. T. Ledbetter**

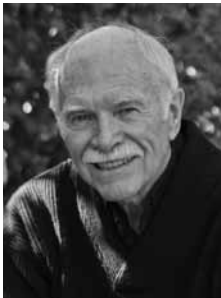
You tell us take it easy and pray a lot,
swim in a pond and hike around,
have good friends you never see
and find God in their breath.

I've been there, he tells us,
I've carried a cross or two and nailed
myself to it, oh yes – never look back
as Satch said . . .
but there it is, isn't it: the rub, the rock
in the shoe reminding us we are human –
as if we could forget it – as if you could –

right smack in the middle of life, weren't you
old Tom, Father Louis, our brother?
and you walking with Jesus every step though
you knew him not until you knew him as he
knew you from the beginning of beginnings . . .
there's a lesson there, you say, yes many . . .

what size shoe or sandal, Tom? what size heart
to hold so many, so much doubt/fear/hope/love
you in the middle . . . sounds like a children's game
"Tom in the middle of things . . ." yep, our friend
and guide, we hear you sense you love you

so let's skip rope and make up rimes and songs
and let the swish-swish of the rope cutting through
galaxies and our hair (got hair?) fly in the wind
off ponds and hidden coves and ice fields and deserts
where God lives in the middle of things with you, with us . . .



J. T. Ledbetter

J. T. Ledbetter is a charter member of the International Thomas Merton Society and Professor Emeritus at California Lutheran University. He has published poetry, fiction and nonfiction, including *Gethsemani Poems* (1994) and other poems and articles on Thomas Merton. His latest collection of poetry is *Old and Lost Rivers*, winner of the Idaho Prize for Poetry and published by Lost Horse Press in 2012.