

FIRST REFORMED

Written by  
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TOLLER, early 40's, a cleric, dressed in a worn black clerical garb like a small town judge, tends the historic cemetery of historic First Reformed Church, upstate New York, his face like a half rubbed away engraving on those tombstones, revealed in degrees of shadow. His angular body lists to the right, as if resisting weight. He is in Agony. And he writes.

### TOLLER STARTS A JOURNAL

Still images of First Reformed Church, Snowbridge, New York, and environs:

--A yellow on blue iron historical marker reads: "First Reformed Church, Organized 1752, Built 1765. Occupied 1776 by New York Provisional Congress. Station in Underground Railway 1845 to 1850. Placed on National Register of Historical Places. State of New York Education Department, 1934."

--A Dutch colonial spired church built on a fieldstone foundation under a low fluorescent sky against a mountain ridge.

--Oft painted door jambs, slightly askew.

--An ancient churchyard lined with weathered grey and uneven tombstones. A faded inscription reads: "...in memory of Effie Vei Planck Born 16 of February 1737 and Departed this Life November..."

**CUT TO:**

A hand writes in a black flecked composition notebook. We hear what the writer writes:

TOLLER (V.O.)

I have decided to keep a journal.  
Not in a word program or a digital  
file, but in longhand, writing  
every word out so that every  
inflection of penmanship is  
recorded, every word chosen,  
scratched out, revised to set down  
all my thoughts...

In a background an unaccompanied **keyboard** plays, "Pass Me Not  
(O Gentle Savior)."

...and the simple events of my day  
factually and without hiding  
anything. When writing about  
oneself, one should show no mercy.  
Who are you hiding from? God?...

3

INT. FIRST REFORMED - SANCTUARY - DAY

3

--Brochures in a pamphlet rack feature an antique photo of  
the church. "A Short History of Historic First Reformed."  
Tours every Tuesday and Thursday at 10 AM.

--Hands playing the **keyboard**.

--A framed and faded Continental Army flag "raised at the  
edifice June 1774" hangs beside two glass covered bullet  
holes.

--"From this spot in March 1855, Calvin Verlander escorted 16  
Free People of Color to the Canadian border."

TOLLER (V.O.)

I will keep this diary for one  
year, twelve months and at the end  
of that time it will be destroyed.  
Shredded, then burnt. The  
experiment will be over.

"Pass Me Not" draws to a finish. JOHN ELDER, 60, the steel  
guitarist, steps back and takes a seat.

Wider angles reveal the nature of the sanctuary, a functional  
colonial rectangle lined with white painted pews. High  
stained glass windows let light in from above. The walls are  
lined with memorial plaques and remembrances.

Seven PARISHIONERS stand in the pews. Three single elderly worshippers, one middle aged couple and one younger couple. A token turnout at best.

Reverend Toller, dressed in a collarless cassock, stands at the pulpit. He reads from the Heidelberg Catechism:

TOLLER  
"What is thy only comfort in life  
and death?"

The parishioners, Psalter books in hand, join in the response, their voices a communal mumble:

PARISHONERS  
"That I with body and soul, both in  
life and death, am not my own but  
belong unto my faithful Savior  
Jesus Christ, who with his precious  
blood hath fully satisfied for all  
my sins..."

4 INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

4

Toller writes in his journal. His voice plays over the reading of the Catechism:

TOLLER (V.O.)  
These thoughts and recollections  
are not so different from those I  
confide to God every morning, when  
it is possible, when he is  
listening...

5 INT. FIRST REFORMED - SANCTUARY - DAY

5

The congregants shuffle from their pews, wait at the altar for communion. Among them are ESTHER, 40, a well dressed woman and MARY and MICHAEL, a working class couple in their twenties. Michael stands at a distance as Mary awaits the communion cup. An Older Man and Older Woman fill out the group.

John Elder assists Toller as he offers the silver communion plate and tray holding bread squares and wine cups.

Esther and Toller exchange looks as she accepts the wine.

TOLLER (V.O.)

...This journal is a form of speaking, of communication from one to the other, a communication which can be achieved simply and in repose without prostration or abnegation. It is a form of prayer.

**MEET MARY AND MICHAEL**

6

INT. FIRST REFORMED - VESTRY - DAY

6

Toller removes his cassock and stole, hangs them in the closet beside an alb (white cassock). Underneath he wears, as he will always, a worn long sleeve black sweater and black slacks.

John Elder counts out the collection from the offertory, places the bills in a small lock box.

The Vestry, like the sanctuary, shows age and use. One bit of decor contrasts with the Old New England ambience of the room: a framed poster of the Abundant Life in Christ Church of Fellowship, a mega church in a rural setting surrounded by parking spaces. "We are Spirit-filled ... Non-denominational ... Evangelistic ... Welcoming." A smiling photo of Joel Jeffers, "Head Pastor," a fit black 60 year-old preacher in a dark T shirt, invites newcomers to services.

Toller stacks the communion plate it on a shelf beside the collection plates.

ELDER

There is a leak in the men's restroom.

TOLLER

I fixed it.

ELDER

I was just there. It's still leaking. Same place. Under the hot faucet.

TOLLER

Did you check the women's?

ELDER

The women's is fine. Do you want me to call the plumber from Abundant Life?

TOLLER

Let me have a go at it again. I don't like to be always asking Abundant Life for little costs here and there.

ELDER

They don't mind. That's what they're there for. You are totally within your budget.

TOLLER

Still...

ELDER

Have you posted the sermon?

TOLLER

I did it this morning.

A KNOCK on the door.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Yes?

(beat)

Come in.

MARY MENSANA, 30, seen during the service, pokes her head into the Vestry. **Behind her, MICHAEL MENSANA, 30, sits in a pew.**

MARY

Reverend?

TOLLER

Come in. Mary, right?

MARY

Mary Mensana.

TOLLER

Nice to see you again.

MARY

I wanted to talk...

John Elder excuses himself.

ELDER

I'll be right back.

Elder exits, **closing** the door behind **him**. **Mary is pregnant.**

TOLLER

What is it?

MARY

I wonder if you could speak with Michael, my husband.

TOLLER

Of course. Ask him to come in.

MARY

Not now. He's got to go to Home Depot and work. He's filling in.

TOLLER

Mary, what is it?

MARY

(she sits)

I'm worried about him.

(he waits)

He's involved with the Green **planet movement.**

(Toller nods)

He was in jail in Canada. He got out a couple of weeks ago. He just sits at home. He doesn't go out. I got him to fill out a temp form for Home Depot, so that's good.

TOLLER

Are you sure you wouldn't rather go to Abundant Life? They have a staff of counsellors who are much more experienced--

MARY

No, he won't see them. He says they are more like a company than a church. He said he'd talk to you.

TOLLER

Of course. Tomorrow?

MARY

(nods)

After lunchtime.

TOLLER

I'll come to you.

(she nods)

I'll need your address.

(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)  
(nods again)  
Can you tell me any more?

MARY  
He applied for Compassionate  
Release when he found out. He was  
at Ft. Providence. They let him out  
two weeks ago.

TOLLER  
Found out what?

MARY  
That I was pregnant.  
(beat)  
He says it's wrong to bring a child  
into this world.  
(beat)  
He wants to kill my baby.

**CUT TO:**

**THE PARSONAGE**

7 EXT./INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

7

A 19th Century brick building stands to the rear of First Reformed. Light glows from within.

Still life tableaus:

--A single bed made with military precision

--A shelf of books, "St. Augustine's Confessions," "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," "Remembrance of Things Past," "The Seven Story Mountain," "Living Buddha, Living Christ," Guidelines for Mystical Prayer"...

--A medicine cabinet stacked with over the counter remedies: Pepto Bismol, NyQuil, Immodium, Advil, Migrane...

8 INT. PARSONAGE - DEN - NIGHT

8

Toller writes in his journal:



TOLLER (V.O.)

I assisted Sunday the youth group at Abundant Life. The young people were so excited, so full of life. They were open, they welcome communion. Maybe I shouldn't care about whether people like me? Did Jesus worry about being liked?

9 INT. PARSONAGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

9

On his **rear**, he prays at his bedside.

10 INT. PARSONAGE - DEN - NIGHT

10

Toller pours himself a glass of scotch, sips it. Toller's bed, unmade, messy, empty.

TOLLER (V.O.)

I look at the lines I last wrote with disdain. Twelve months? Can I keep up an exercise that long? I read these words and see not truth but pride.

CLOSEUP: diary.

TOLLER (V.O.)

I wish I had not used the word pride. But I cannot cross it out. If only I could pray.

**CUT TO:**

**TOLLER MEETS MICHAEL**

11 EXT. CORNER GAS STATION - DAY (OMIT)

11

12 EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY (OMIT)

12

13 EXT. MENSANA HOUSE - DAY

13

A woman walking a dog passes. Toller parks in the drive of a modest house, goes to the front door, rings the bell.

Mary answers the door, They speak. He enters.

14 INT. MENSANA HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

14

Inside the house, Toller looks around as he hands Mary his coat. **A framed photo of Mary and Michael side by side hangs by door.**

MARY  
Thanks for coming.  
(about photos)  
Our honeymoon. A bike honeymoon.

Michael Mensana joins them. He wears khakis and a checked shirt.

MICHAEL  
**Ireland.**

They exchange greetings.

MARY  
Thanks for coming. Would you like  
some coffee?

Toller is concerned about his stomach:

TOLLER  
Yes, but...

MARY  
I think we have some tea.

TOLLER  
That would be better.

Mary heads toward the kitchen as Michael leads Toller into a small office.

15 INT. MENSANA HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

15

They sit in the cramped space. The room is filled with books, literature and announcements about ecological activism. Comparative graphs and global maps show the projected consequences of global warming: the rise of the oceans, drought, vanishing species, migratory patterns.

Michael, uncomfortable, shifts his weight:

MICHAEL

I don't know why Mary...

TOLLER

No reason to apologize. You've been in Canada?

MICHAEL

Ft. Providence. That is in the Mackenzie Delta, way to the north.

TOLLER

Beautiful country, I imagine.

MICHAEL

It is.

Beat.

TOLLER

Mary says things have gotten you down.

MICHAEL

"Things?" You could say that, yes.

Mary, tapping on the door, enters with a cup of coffee and another cup of tea. She closes the door behind her.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Mary is pregnant.

TOLLER

**I noticed. How far along is she?**

MICHAEL

**Twenty weeks.** How old are you, Reverend?

**(beat)**

TOLLER

Forty-two.

MICHAEL

Thirty-five.

**(beat)**

**(MORE)**

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

That's how old our child will be in 2050. Five years older than I am now. You'll be seventy-seven. Do you know what the world will be like in 2050?

TOLLER

It's hard to imagine.

MICHAEL

You think?

(Toller waits)

The world is changing fast. Right in front of us. One third of the natural world has been destroyed in your lifetime. The earth's temperature will be three degrees centigrade higher. Four is the threshold.

Michael hands him a printout resting beside the keyboard:

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

...“severe, widespread, and irreversible impacts”--when *scientists* use words like that--**the** National Center of Atmospheric Research, Lawrence Livermore, the Potsdam Institute...

Michael stands, hands Toller reports from various agencies, speaks as he walks. A GIF plays on Michael's computer screen: the computer animation displays the mutating planet from 1850 to 2050--less green, less ice, more flooding, more drought, decade by decade. Toller speaks over:

TOLLER (V.O.)

He went on for some time like that. By 2050 sea levels two feet higher on the East Coast. Low lying areas underwater across the world. Bangladesh, twenty percent loss of land mass. Central Africa, fifty percent reduction in crops due to drought. The western reservoirs dried up. Climate change refugees. Epidemics. Extreme weather.

CLOSEUP of wall map as Toller speaks over. Chart depicts the ecological “Nine Planetary Boundaries” which lie between mankind and extinction. Of these four (i.e., “ocean acidification”) have been crossed “beyond the zone of uncertainty.” Three are within the zone of uncertainty, two are as yet undetermined.

MICHAEL

...the bad times will begin. From that point everything moves very quickly. The social structure will not bear the stress of multiple crises. Opportunistic diseases. Anarchy. Martial law. The tipping point. This isn't some distant future. You will live to see this. My children will experience this...unlivability. And the behavior it causes...this...

Toller waits until Michael pauses and sits. Michael realizes he has begun to repeat himself.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I thought something could be done.  
I thought people would listen.

TOLLER

Mary said you would be willing to talk to me?

MICHAEL

Yes.

TOLLER

Why is that?

MICHAEL

I respect you. I respect what you've... been through.

TOLLER

Do you have thoughts of harming yourself?

MICHAEL

No. Did Mary say that?

TOLLER

No, she didn't.

MICHAEL

I'm not worried for myself. This world will be what it is.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

But how can you sanction bringing a girl, for argument's sake let's say my child is a girl, a child full of hope and naive belief into a world...when that little girl grows to be a young woman and looks you in the eyes and says, 'You knew all along, didn't you?' What do you say then?

TOLLER

You say what a father has always said. "I love you without qualification."

Michael responds with a sardonic smile.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

There is something growing inside Mary. Something as surely alive as a tree or an endangered species. Something filled with nature's beauty. You speak of "sanctioning" this birth-- is it really your decision? Do you have that right? What does Mary think?

Michael doesn't answer.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

It is *her* decision?

MICHAEL

Yes.

TOLLER

You've told her that?

(Michael nods)

So it is not about the child. Or about Mary. It is about you and your despair. Your lack of hope.

**(beat)**

Throughout history humans have woken up in the dead of night, confronted by blackness. The sense that life is without meaning. The Suffering Unto Death.

MICHAEL

But this is something new.

TOLLER

Man's achievements have brought **him** to a **great** place where life as we know it may cease in the foreseeable future. That is new. Our powerlessness. The blackness is not. Because we are people of science we like to solve things. We want rational responses. If humankind can't overcome its immediate interests to ensure its survival, that requires a rational response. And that response is despair.

**He** lets this sit a moment.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Do you believe there is existence apart from this...?

Gestures to indicate the material world.

MICHAEL

Yes.

TOLLER

Before us? After us?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

They continue as Toller speaks over:

TOLLER (V.O.)

I felt like I was Jacob wrestling all night long with the angel. Fighting in the grasp. Every sentence, every question, every response a mortal struggle. Fighting for existence itself. It was exhilarating.

Michael brings us back to the moment:

MICHAEL

...Do you believe in martyrdom, Reverend?

TOLLER

I'm not sure what you mean.

MICHAEL

The Saints of God, the early Christians who would not renounce their faith, the missionaries attacked in the jungle--do you believe they died for a purpose?

TOLLER

I do.

MICHAEL

Every week activists are killed protecting the environment. One hundred and seventeen last year. For their beliefs.

Michael points to a photo of a framed middle-aged Brazilian couple posing in an Amazonian logging camp. Black ribbon curtains the upper corners.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and his wife Maria were gunned down in 2011 in the Amazon. They protested free cutting of the rain forest. Dorothy Stang, 2005, a nun from Ohio. What was the purpose of their deaths? In 2010 the IPCC predicted that if dramatic action was not taken by 2015, environmental collapse would be irreversible. Nothing was done. It's now 2017.

TOLLER

You said you respected me. What I'd gone through.

MICHAEL

Yes.

TOLLER

You know my story?

MICHAEL

You were a chaplain.

TOLLER

My father taught at VMI. I encouraged my son to enlist. It was the family tradition. **Like his father, his grandfather.** Patriotic tradition. My wife was very opposed. But he enlisted against her wishes.

(MORE)



TOLLER (CONT'D)

Six months later he was killed in Iraq. There was no moral justification for this conflict. My wife could not live with me after that. Who could blame her? I left the military. Rev Jeffers at Abundant Life Church heard about my situation. They offered me **a position at First Reformed.** And here I am.

Pause.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Michael, whatever despair you feel about bringing a child into this world cannot equal the despair of taking a child out of it.

MICHAEL

What was his name? Your son?

TOLLER

Joseph.

MICHAEL

That's right.

TOLLER

The boy thrown in the well.

MICHAEL

And you were able to go on?

TOLLER

The Old Calvinists used to preach a doctrine called the "Unforgiveable Sin." You don't hear about it any more. **It** was the sin against the Holy Spirit. It was the sin against Hope. The only sin that lies beyond forgiveness.

(beat)

It comes down to choice. We choose hope or despair. We cannot avoid choosing. We are not free to not decide. It's what we truly are. Courage is the solution to despair.

(beat)

Reason offers no answers. We cannot be certain what the future holds. We must choose despite uncertainty.

(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Wisdom is the ability to hold two contradictory thoughts in your mind simultaneously. Hope and despair. A life without despair is a life without hope. Holding those ideas in your head together is life. Itself.

Pause. The conversation is winding down. Looks at a lonely liquor bottle:

MICHAEL

Are you a drinking man, Reverend?

He's inviting Toller to join him.

TOLLER

It doesn't help.

MICHAEL

No, I suppose not.

Toller finishes the last of his tea.

TOLLER

I'll stay as long as you need me. There's no place I need to be.

MICHAEL

Can God forgive us? For what we have done to this world?

TOLLER

I don't know. Who can know the mind of God? Perhaps we are a way station. But we can choose. To live the righteous life, to believe, to forgive. Grace covers us all.

Michael looks away. Checks his watch.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

We will speak again. Promise me that.

(Michael hesitates)

I won't leave until you promise.

MICHAEL

Okay.

TOLLER

Tomorrow at this time. After lunch.

(Michael nods)

Are you working tomorrow?

MICHAEL  
I haven't heard.

TOLLER  
So it's a plan then. Tomorrow at  
this time.

MICHAEL  
Yes. It's a plan.

Toller stands and, unsure what to do, awkwardly embraces Michael. Michael responds.

Toller opens the door, exits, closes the door behind him.

**CUT TO:**

**MOISTURE AGAINST THE WINDOWPANE**

16 EXT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

16

Snow falls on the parsonage.

**CUT TO:**

17 INT. PARSONAGE DEN - NIGHT

17

Toller writes in his journal by incandescent light. We see some of his words in closeup as he writes them. A glass of scotch rests on the table beside him.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
I went over everything that was  
said, what should have been said,  
what could have been said  
differently, what could have been  
said better.

He takes a sip.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
Despair is a form of pride. "I know  
that nothing can change and I know  
there is no hope." Merton wrote  
about this.

(MORE)

TOLLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Despair is a development of pride  
so great that it chooses one's  
certitude rather than admit God is  
more creative than we are. Perhaps  
it's better I didn't say that to  
him.

18 INT. PARSONAGE BATHROOM - NIGHT 18

Propping one hand against the wall, Toller urinates into the  
toilet. His urine runs dark brown.

19 INT. PARSONAGE BEDROOM - NIGHT 19

TOLLER (V.O.)  
Who am I to talk about pride?

Toller kneels at his bedside in prayer.

20 INT. PARSONAGE KITCHEN - DAY 20

Toller sits at the kitchen table. He tears bread from a loaf,  
eats it. Downs it with a sip of scotch.

**CUT TO:**

**TUESDAY MORNING TOUR**

21 EXT. FIRST REFORMED CEMETERY - DAY 21

Toller, in his civilian clothes, speaks with a MIDDLE AGED  
COUPLE and a COLLEGE STUDENT in the snowy church graveyard.  
The guests hold printed pamphlets detailing the history of  
First Reformed.

TOLLER  
...completed in 1765 in a style we  
now call Dutch Colonial by settlers  
in this region with local field  
stones and timber, First Reformed  
took seven years to build.  
(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)

The Vei Plancks were one of the founding families. Effie's tombstone dates from 1787.

22

INT. FIRST REFORMED - DAY

22

The tour continues inside the sanctuary.

TOLLER

The church was partially rebuilt in 1837 following a fire. This section was preserved. Beside the Continental Army flag, if you look closely, are two bullet holes fired during what was called the Skirmish of Snowbridge.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Do you still have services?

TOLLER

Oh yes, Sunday services are each week at 10 am. First Reformed is the third oldest church in continuous operation in New York State. In a month we will celebrate our two hundred fiftieth anniversary.

23

INT. FIRST REFORMED ENTRANCE - DAY

23

They stand before a breakfront near the entrance. Behind the glass are mementoes of church history and souvenirs.

TOLLER

...here are examples of the original church chinaware brought over from the Netherlands. And the first chalice. On the lower shelf are souvenirs which are for sale. Key rings, pens, postcards, caps and T shirts, although we only have the shirts in size S. We're waiting for more to come in.

The College Student reaches for a cap.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Try it on. One size fits all.

They stand in the choir loft beside a large pipe organ. The College Student holds a "First Reformed Snowbridge NY" baseball cap.

TOLLER

The pulpit was **donated by William Mercer in 1879**. The church organ which unfortunately is not working at this time was manufactured by A.G. Hill in England.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Did you hear the one about the Choir Mistress and the Minister?

TOLLER

No, I haven't.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

She chased him around the church and caught him by the organ.

The Middle-Aged woman elbows her husband as he laughs. Toller responds with a polite chuckle.

TOLLER

I hadn't heard that one.

Outside the church, Toller wishes the group farewell as they thank him. The College Student straightens his new cap as he walks.

The Middle-Aged Man walks away then steps back to slip a folded bill into Toller's palm.

**CUT TO:**

**ABUNDANT LIFE**

The campus like environs of the Abundant Life in Christ Church of Christian Fellowship: a main Fellowship Hall, several ancillary buildings and acres of parking. A large sign lists the pastoral staff and hours of the services. "All Welcome." "Lead Pastor Joel Jeffers."

**CUT TO:**

27 INT. A.L. FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

27

Inside the main fellowship hall, church workers and volunteers are going about the multiple tasks which keep the organization humming. **The sound of vacuum cleaners. Several workers clean the chancel.**

**CUT TO:**

28 INT. A.L. REHEARSAL ROOM - DAY

28

Inside the choir rehearsal room, Esther leads a group of **six** teens, **three** boys and **three** girls of mixed backgrounds, **listen as Esther leads on a capella version of "Washed in the blood".**

**"WASHED IN THE BLOOD"**

**"Have you been to Jesus for the  
cleansing pow'r,  
Are you washed in the blood of the  
Lamb?"**

The teen choir members, well scrubbed and fresh faces, brim with adolescent sexuality.

Reverend Toller slips into the room, silently nods to Esther and takes a seat.

**The youth choir joins in on the next verse.** A boy in the second row slowly moves his hand behind the back of the attractive girl behind him, letting his fingers, in time with the lyrics, until it gently comes to rest above the crack of her buttocks. She quickly brushes the boy's hand away.

Toller, touched by the melody and lyrics, cannot help also be drawn to the garden of slender thighs, bulging crotches, tight buttocks and pert breasts, each about to flower and bloom.

ESTHER  
**Very good. Take five.**

She walks over to Toller:

ESTHER (CONT'D)  
A penny for your thoughts.

He snaps out of his reverie:

TOLLER  
Joel wanted me to come by.

ESTHER  
Nothing serious, I hope.

TOLLER  
I assume not.

ESTHER  
Want to have lunch?

TOLLER  
I've got something after, but, well sure, why not?

ESTHER  
(looking at teens)  
Remember that?

TOLLER  
What?

ESTHER  
When everything was ahead of you.

TOLLER  
Try to tell them that.

ESTHER  
See you then.  
(to choir)  
**"In the garden."**

**CUT TO:**



Toller walks down an office CORRIDOR. Voices and phones echo from behind closed doors. His phone dings as he passes a young man carrying the hymnals. Toller checks his messages: "Michael called into work. Wants to reschedule meeting for tomorrow. Mary."

Toller pockets his phone, enters the open door with the nameplate: "Joel Jeffers, Head Pastor."

30 INT. JEFFERS' OUTER OFFICE - DAY

30

Two SECRETARIES sit at computer terminals in the carpeted room.

The walls are meticulously hung with awards, commendations and famous photos. It feels like corporate headquarters.

The FIRST SECRETARY looks, recognizes him with a smile:

1ST SECRETARY  
Reverend Toller, go right in. He's expecting you.

Toller nods, enters JEFFERS' OFFICE.

31 INT. JEFFERS' OFFICE - DAY

31

JOEL JEFFERS, 60, looks up. Toller enters.

JEFFERS  
Rev. Toller. Good, sit down.  
(to Matt)  
Matt, make those two changes.

Toller and Jeffers sit. Joel Jeffers has a charismatic presence. Fit, caramel-skinned, graying, he wears slacks and a blue cardigan.

JEFFERS (CONT'D)  
Need water, anything?  
(Toller shakes his head)  
How are things at First Reformed?

TOLLER  
Good. Busy. You know how it is. You do one thing, then the next, then it's Sunday again.

JEFFERS

I wanted to ask about the 250th  
Reconsecration. It's right around  
the corner.

TOLLER

**Eight** weeks.

JEFFERS

How's it coming?

TOLLER

The invitations are being handled  
by your office. We don't have that  
many seats. Your staff, the Elders  
and Deacons, ecumenical  
representatives, the Mayor, the  
Governor--there's no overflow room.  
The sanctuary, that's it.

JEFFERS

**We'll simulcast the ceremony here  
in the main hall. That's five  
thousand seats.** Have the reception  
afterward in the rotunda. Is the  
organ fixed?

TOLLER

They're waiting on parts. It's a  
bigger deal than they thought.

JEFFERS

Can't have a reconsecration without  
an organ.

(pantomimes playing organ)

"A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Do  
you know Martin Luther wrote that  
sitting in the outhouse. "A  
Mighty"...

(grunt)

"Fortress"...

(grunt)

"Is our God."

TOLLER

I think every seminarian knows that  
story.

JEFFERS

Can't get the image out of my mind.  
Every time we play that song I look  
at the congregation and know  
everybody is thinking the same  
thing.

They laugh.

JEFFERS (CONT'D)  
Prepared your remarks yet?

TOLLER  
Not yet.

JEFFERS  
The memorial program comes off the press at the end of the month. We're working on my address. When we have a draft I want to run it by you. Make sure everything is right. Ed Balq would like to meet with us, have a coffee.

TOLLER  
Balq Industries?

JEFFERS  
He thinks this is a real opportunity. An important moment in the history of the church, the county. There'll be national media.

TOLLER  
Wow.

Jeffers looks at him. Joel leans forward, strikes a personal note:

JEFFERS  
How are you?

TOLLER  
Fine.

JEFFERS  
I mean really. It's been a while since we've spoken. Even a pastor needs a pastor. We're overdue for a talk. Just you, me.

TOLLER  
That would be nice.

JEFFERS  
You should come around more often. There are so many activities you could help with. The young people really like you. Get out of--what do the kids call it? The museum?

TOLLER  
The souvenir shop. They call it  
the souvenir shop.

JEFFERS  
You're doing a great thing.

TOLLER  
Thank you again for the  
opportunity.

JEFFERS  
No, we thank you.

**CUT TO:**

32 INT. A.L. CAFETERIA - DAY

32

Toller and Esther carry trays from the cashier, find seats.  
The walls are hung with posters of inspirational images,  
quotes and Bible verses.

A group of church TEENS passes by, greeting Esther, giving  
Toller a wary eye. Esther and Toller arrange their plates and  
glasses.

ESTHER  
How was Jeffers?

TOLLER  
He wants me to meet with Ed Balq.  
(shed lifts her eyebrows)  
Balq Industries, Balq Energy, Balq  
Chicken, Balq Peanuts, Balq  
whatnots.

ESTHER  
Why?

Toller starts to speak but is stopped by a short coughing  
fit. He resumes:

TOLLER  
It's all about the 250th  
Reconsecration. Balq wants to make  
sure he gets **proper credit for  
underwriting it.**

ESTHER  
He should. First Reformed would be  
a parking lot if it wasn't for him.  
Did you see the doctor?

TOLLER

I made an appointment. There was a holdup with the insurance. The insurance companies make it very hard.

Esther is not quite sure this is the exact truth.

ESTHER

Well, that's what they do. You need someone to take care of you.

TOLLER

Esther, we tried that. I'm not made for that.

ESTHER

For what? Love? You're not made for love?

TOLLER

My marriage was a failure.

ESTHER

No marriage can survive the loss of a child.

TOLLER

Esther.

ESTHER

Is that what you think? That what we did together was a sin? That we transgressed?

TOLLER

I don't believe that. I've seen enough real sin to know the difference. **Okay?**

ESTHER

(backs off)

Okay. I understand. I care about you. I want you to be happy.

TOLLER

I am happy.

**CUT TO:**

**IN THE GARDEN**

Toller, wearing his cassock, **lifts up a fallen** tombstone. This seems not so much a practical task but a personal one: a form of being.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
Some are called for their gregariousness, some are called for their suffering, others are called for their loneliness. They are called by God because through the vessel of communication they can reach out and hold beating hearts in their hands. They are called because of their all consuming knowledge of the emptiness of all things that only can **be** filled by the presence of Our Savior.

CLOSEUP. These words as they are written in his diary.

Toller's cell phone rings. He sets down the brush, removes his phone from his cassock.

MARY (O.S.)  
Reverend Toller?

TOLLER  
Yes. Mary?

MARY  
It's me.

TOLLER  
I got your message. About rescheduling.

MARY  
You must come over. Now.

TOLLER  
Is Michael there?

MARY  
No, he's at work. You must come  
over. Now.

**CUT TO:**

**TOLLER AND MARY AND THE SECRET IN THE GARAGE**

36 EXT. MENSANA HOUSE - **GOLDEN HOUR**

36

The winter light is fading as Toller pulls into Michael and Mary's driveway. She stands on the front porch. Toller approaches her.

MARY  
Follow me.

They walk around the house to the clapboard GARAGE out back. She opens the creaky garage door. They step inside.

37 INT. MENSANA GARAGE - **NIGHT**

37

Mary flips on and overhead bulb. The interior is a collage of tools, trash and abandoned projects. Two well maintained aluminum bikes hang on wall racks.

MARY  
I was looking for some batteries.  
We were out and I thought there  
might be some here, you know,

Mary works her way through stacks of junk as she reaches the far end of the garage where a rectangular wooden box like those used to transport Western rifles is stacked with discarded items.

MARY (CONT'D)  
I put everything back just as I  
found it. I wanted you to see it  
just as it was.

Mary places the objects atop the box on the concrete floor, then opens the box itself. Toller looks inside, not sure of what he sees.

She lifts the item inside out so that Toller can see it. It's immediately recognizable from news reports and Hollywood movies.

TOLLER  
An explosive vest.

MARY  
A suicide vest. Other elements are here. Batteries, detonators, tubes of jelly.

Toller looks closer.

MARY (CONT'D)  
He's been working in the garage. He said he was fixing a motor. I didn't question him. He's been so lonely lately I was happy he found something that made him happy.

Toller furrows his brow. What to say?

TOLLER  
Did you have any...?

MARY  
No. No suspicion. Nothing like this.  
(looks away)  
I can't believe this.

TOLLER  
Does Michael have any hint you know about this?

MARY  
No.

TOLLER  
When does he come back?

MARY  
Later tonight. After closing. Ten PM.

TOLLER  
Okay. I will take this. This cannot remain here. I will dispose of it. Don't let on. Put everything back the way it was.

MARY  
Are you going to the police?



TOLLER  
You don't want that, do you?

MARY  
No.

TOLLER  
It wouldn't help. It would only make things worse. It does no good to threaten him. Don't let on you know about this. I will come and see him tomorrow. Somehow tomorrow, in the course of our conversation, I will bring this up.

MARY  
I'm so frightened.

TOLLER  
I don't think Michael wants to die. I don't think he wants to abandon his child. He is in torment. But there is an end to torment. He needs support. Are you afraid of him?

(she doesn't understand)  
Afraid he might hurt you?

MARY  
I'm afraid *for* him.

TOLLER  
Have other activists been around, called him?

MARY  
Nobody. He has no friends. He's been barely sociable.

TOLLER  
You will stand by him?

MARY  
Absolutely.

**CUT TO:**

**DISCERNMENT**

38 INT. PARSONAGE BATHROOM - NIGHT

38

Toller, using a plunger, struggles with the toilet. It's backed up.

He takes a bottle of Drano, pours it into the bowl.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
Discernment intersects with  
Christian life at every moment.  
Listening and waiting for God's  
wish what action must be taken.

39 INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

39

Toller **lies fully clothed on the bed.**

TOLLER (V.O.)  
My petty ailments have made me bad  
tempered. I fight the urge to write  
down the thoughts which come to my  
mind.

40 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

40

Toller is bent over, clutching his stomach.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
The desire to pray itself is a type  
of prayer. How often we ask for  
genuine experience when all we  
really want is emotion. My hand  
shakes as I write these lines.

41 INT. PARSONAGE DEN - NIGHT

41

CLOSEUP: **Clean shot of journal.**

**CUT TO:**

**COME ALONE**

42 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - DAY

42

A white "Bissel Music" truck is parked outside the church:  
"Pianos Organs--sales, service, repair, moving."

**CUT TO:**

43 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY

43

Two Bissel REPAIRMEN have opened the pipe organ cover and exposed its inner workings. One sits at the keyboard as the other adjusts the ancient pipes. Familiar sounds of organ notes echo through the church.

TOLLER

I didn't expect you for another two weeks.

1ST REPAIRMAN

We got a message from the boss. He said it was a top priority.

2ND REPAIRMAN

You are having a big event here?

TOLLER

It's the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Church. They are expecting a lot of important people.

The repairmen seem impressed. The 1st Repairman **testing**, plays the opening notes of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Toller smiles.

Toller's cell phone DINGS. He takes out his phone, checks the messages.

There is a message from Michael: "Meet me at the Westbrook Park Trail. East entrance. The red diamond trail. Come alone."

Toller punches in a phone number. Mary answers.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Mary, this is Reverend Toller. Is Michael there?

MARY

No.

TOLLER

Do you know where he is?

MARY  
He's out.

TOLLER  
Did he come home last night?

MARY  
Yes. He left without saying  
anything this morning.  
(beat)  
Reverend?

TOLLER  
Yes.

MARY  
He was up during the night.

**CUT TO:**

**THE RED DIAMOND TRAIL**

44 EXT. WESTBROOK PARK - DAY

44

Toller exits his Toyota in the parking area by the ice covered pond. Michael's car is parked nearby. Geese scatter as he checks the trail map. He locates the red diamond trail, heads that direction.

45 EXT. TRAIL - DAY

45

Walking up the wooded path, Toller is soon surrounded by trees and greenery. He might as well be in the wilderness.

He proceeds along the trail with increasing foreboding.

TOLLER  
Michael?

Ahead, he sees what he fears: two work boots emerge from the underbrush. A shotgun lies nearby.

Toller walks beside Michael's body. He looks to recognize him but realizes the body has no head. It has been completely blown off. Just a massive red stain.

Stepping further he locates the remains of Michael's skull.

He takes out his phone and dials 911.

46 EXT. WESTBROOK PARKING AREA - DAY

46

An EMS truck and two police cars sit in the parking area, their lights flashing.

47 EXT. WESTBROOK PARK TRAIL - DAY

47

The area around Michael's body has been cordoned off with crime scene tape. Two EMS workers lug a stretcher up the hill as a crime scene photographer takes pictures.

Toller stands beside the local SHERIFF. The Sheriff, holding Michael Mensana's wallet, looks at the phone text message Toller shows him.

TOLLER

He had been fighting depression. We were supposed to meet again today. I knew he was in trouble, but I didn't foresee this.

SHERIFF

Were you in touch with the immediate family?

TOLLER

His wife Mary asked me to meet with him.

SHERIFF

Did she know about your text?

TOLLER

No. But she was concerned. We both were concerned.

SHERIFF

Have you notified her?

TOLLER

No.

SHERIFF

I guess that's where I'm headed.

TOLLER

Can I come along?

SHERIFF  
(nods)  
I knew his father.

TOLLER  
What was he like?

SHERIFF  
A businessman. Morbid son of a  
bitch. I guess it runs in the  
blood.

The Crime Scene Examiner indicates he's finished, waves  
forward the stretcher bearers.

**CUT TO:**

**MICHAEL'S LAST WISHES**

48 EXT. MENSANA PORCH - DAY 48

Toller and the Sheriff stand on the porch speaking with Mary.  
Toller holds her as she sobs.

After a few more moments the Sheriff excuses himself and  
walks to his patrol car. Drives off.

Toller and Mary step inside.

49 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 49

**Toller looks around, takes a seat.**

She returns with his tea, takes a seat.

MARY  
Have you told anyone?

TOLLER  
(shakes head)  
If you find any more...similiar  
things, just discard them if it's  
safe. Bury them, burn them. Michael  
was troubled but his cause was  
just. There's no reason to bring  
disrepute on that cause.  
(beat)  
Are you an activist as well?

MARY

I share Michael's beliefs. But I want to live. I want to be a mother. I want to have this child.

TOLLER

Do you have family nearby?

MARY

My sister. She's in Buffalo.

TOLLER

Have you spoken with your doctor? I'm not sure what medications are permissible during pregnancy but I'm sure he can give you something to relax you, help you sleep.

She nods.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

He'd been in the garage?

MARY

Yes.

TOLLER

And said nothing?

MARY

No.

TOLLER

This is cut and dried from the police point of view, but it might be good to straighten up his office. Remove his laptop.

She stands.

MARY

He left a message for you.

She walks in Michael's office, returns with a sealed letter envelope, hands it to him. It's labeled: "For Reverend Toller"

Toller hesitates, then unseals the envelope. The letter reads:

MICHAEL MENSANA

Last Will and Testament  
Instructions for My Internment

Toller winces.

MARY

I knew.

TOLLER

What?

MARY

He was absent. **He was becoming someone I didn't know. Even before I was pregnant. He was so full of anger.**

TOLLER (V.O.)

I stayed while she called her sister. Her sister was going to drive down. Her parents would come for the final rights.

**CUT TO:**

**THAT NIGHT**

50

INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

50

Toller writes in his journal.

TOLLER (V.O.)

A terrible night. No sooner than I shut my eyes desolation came upon me. What is one's last thought as you pull the trigger? "There goes my head" or "Jesus watch over me?" Or neither? I'm going to tear these pages out. This journal brings me no peace. It's self-pity, nothing more.

Toller, at his computer, researches "Hanstown, NY." Michael Will and Testament lies open beside him. "Hanstown Paint Works and Storage." He brings up images. A red triangular pollution warning sign stands next a **rusting ship**. "Groundwater around the site was later found contaminated with arsenic, lead, PCBs."

TOLLER (V.O.)

I awoke at three with a cry. It has been five months since I sensed the first warning signs.



51 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - NIGHT

51

Toller walks the dark path from the Parsonage to the Church.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
I went into the church and fell  
asleep on a bench.

52 INT. FIRST REFORMED - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

52

He goes into the SANCTUARY, curls up on a pew bench.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
How easily they talk about prayer  
those who have never really prayed.

**CUT TO:**

**OLD ROCKIN' CROSS**

53 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - DAY

53

Plexiglas sign: "**February** 6, 250th Anniversary and  
Reconsecration Service."

**CUT TO:**

54 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY

54

John Elder plays the newly repaired pipe organ, starting with  
the opening cords of "Old Rugged Cross." A smile spreads  
across his face: "So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, Till  
my trophies at last I lay down..."

ELDER  
This sounds great. I'm going to  
have to sharpen my chops for the  
reconsecration. Do you know what  
they want to play?

TOLLER

Not a clue. Abundant Life is handling the invites and seating. Basically I'm going to introduce Joel, he'll give a little spiel, introduce the Governor, maybe Ed Balq.

ELDER

Why him?

TOLLER

It's sort of his deal, I guess. He's underwriting everything. He paid for the organ. There's another music thing I want to talk about.

Elder ups the tempo of "Old Rugged Cross." Soon it's moving at a be-bopping clip ("Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree"). Toller waves him off with a laugh.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Actually, it's a sad bit of business. The Michael Mensana memorial. The scattering of his ashes. He asked me to arrange it.

ELDER

He *asked* you?

TOLLER

He left a letter. He had some requests.

**CUT TO:**

**YOUTH MINISTRY**

55 EXT. A.L. CHURCH - DAY

55

The Abundant Life Church in Christ and Christian Fellowship.

**CUT TO:**

56 INT. A.L. BOOKSTORE - DAY

56

Toller wanders through the expansive Abundant Life bookstore and gift shop. One wall displays Abundant Life publications. Pastor Joel Jeffers smiling face beams from a wide assortment of books, CDs and DVDs. Elsewhere clothes racks are hung with Abundant Life hoodies, T-shirts and polos.

He steps over to the counter which displays pen sets, wristbands and lanyards. The YOUNG FEMALE CLERK notices him:

CLERK

Reverend Toller, can I help you?

TOLLER

I've been meaning to come in. We've run out of First Reformed T-shirts. We have some small sizes, but not the others.

57

INT. A.L. MEETING ROOM - DAY

57

Toller sits with ROGER, 27, a muscled youth minister, and a group of young people in a CHURCH MEETING ROOM. Roger, in a black T shirt, has Bible texts tattooed along his bare arms.

JASON, 18, offers testimony:

JASON

...Since I made my commitment I have felt the Lord moving in my life. If happiness came in pill size it would have "JC" stamped on it. Continuous release size. I wake up feeling better. My relationships are better. I got a raise last week. I find myself in prayer without even thinking about it.

Toller doesn't know quite how to react. Jason is so clearly spouting what he thinks he is supposed to say it's hard to know where the truth begins.

ROGER

Thank you, Jason. That's very inspiring. Praise Jesus. My every breath is a prayer. Thoughts, reactions?

After a moment, CYNTHIA, 17, half raises her hand.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Yes, Cynthia?

CYNTHIA

Three months ago my father got laid off. He can't find any work. Nobody loves the Lord more than my father. He's always testifying, he volunteers. Did he do something wrong?

ROGER

Reverend Toller from First Reformed is sitting in with us today. How do you answer that, Reverend?

TOLLER

There are some church people, good Christians, who make a connection between godliness and wealth, but that's not what Jesus teaches. That's not what He lived. There was no dollar sign on His pulpit. There's no American flag either. No, Cynthia, your father--

JAKE, an arrogant kid, interjects:

JAKE

Christians shouldn't succeed, that's what he means. Christianity is for losers.

ROGER

(reprimands)

Jake.

JAKE

I get tired of "turn the other cheek." Jesus didn't turn the other cheek. Why stand for anything? Take prayer out of the schools, give money to people too lazy to work-- and whatever you do, don't offend the Muslims.

Toller sips tea with Joel Jeffers in the near empty room. Lunch hour is past.

TOLLER

What is it? Honest, Joel. I bring up the poor and the next thing a teenager acts like you just shit on the American flag. Forgive my language.

JEFFERS

Roger told me.

TOLLER

He's a good man.

JEFFERS

He said you kept your cool. He admired you for doing that.

TOLLER

Everything is so extreme. There's no middle ground. Us versus them. We're right, they're wrong let's go to war.

JEFFERS

It's the times. These are frightening times. These kids grow up in a world we can hardly imagine. A sea of pornography from the time they're ten years old, hyper violent video games, a world without privacy, each kid isolated, communicating through media. A world without hope. Raised on a diet of terrorism, nuclear threats and global warming. You don't know what it's like to raise a kid in this--

TOLLER

I did raise a kid.

JEFFERS

I didn't mean it that way. They're frightened. They want certainty. Don't think, follow. They fall prey to extremism. Jihadism is everywhere.

(gestures)

Even here.

TOLLER

That's not the church that called me.

JEFFERS

Nor me. Our mission is to be inclusive. We are a union of believers. That's why we have the architecture we do. We must listen, guide, encourage young members to express themselves and not judge them. We must lead by example.

(beat)

We must be patient.

CUT TO:

**SOUP KITCHEN**

59 EXT. INNER CITY - DAY (OMIT) 59

60 INT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY 60

Reverend Toller, wearing a clerical collar, white apron and a white paper hat, stands next to another volunteer dishing out hot lunches to a line of men and women on society's margin. A sign reads, "The Free Meal Center. Volunteers and Donations Support out Efforts."

Esther also works as a volunteer. She's here because Toller is. She glances at him. He looks away.

While doing so, he TIPS a lunch tray into the hands of a PARAPLEGIC WAR VET in a wheel chair. Soup and pork and bean spill on the Vet's lap and onto the floor.

The Vet, unkept, bearded, wears military patches on his army jacket. A tiny American flag is fixed to the back of his wheel chair.

Toller apologetically kneels down, attempting to right his mistake. Esther joins bearing a roll of paper towels.

CUT TO:

**TILL MY TROPHIES I LAY DOWN**

61 EXT. HANSTOWN KILLS - DAY 61

A line of cars are parked along a two lane road beside the brackish **Kills**. A makeshift platform has been erected beside the polluted greenish stream. The Hanstown paint factory, dilapidated, deserted, stands in the distance. A red triangular sign pictures a gas mask above the word "Pollution."

Twenty mourners have assembled for the memorial. For the most part they are Michael's friends and fellow activists. Mary is there with her parents, her sister and brother-in-law and their young child. As is Esther with her a capella choir group.

A MOURNER records with a digital camera, panning from Toller to Mary's nephew who reacts to the foul smelling creek.

John Elder stands at his keyboard. Toller reads from his worn Bible:

TOLLER

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Who marked off its dimensions? Who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"...

TIMECUT. Mary stands beside Toller holding a plain urn bearing Michael's ashes.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

These surroundings were chosen by Michael as the repository for his physical remains. I say physical because Michael's spirit and memories live on with us. As does his mission. Michael cared about this world. Perhaps too much. Suffering does not hold. Is not the last word. Resurrection has sway. He's gone but not his mission. It lives on within us. Mary will lead family and friends in the spreading of Michael's ashes as the Abundant Life Youth a capella Choir sings a song chosen by Michael.

Esther escorts the four person Youth Choir up the steps onto the platform. They wear matching khaki pants and blue polos. They arrange themselves, look at Esther. She blows her register whistle, cues them to begin.

The Youth Choir performs an a capella version of Neil Young's "Who will stand up?".

Mary followed by immediate family and friends walks to the polluted creek carrying the urn. They take turns distributing the ashes into the foul waters.

Beginning with the second version John Elder underscores the Youth Choir. The mix of the music, harsh lyrics, barren landscape and solemn occasion creates a surreal tableau.

**CUT TO:**

**MEET EDWARD BALQ**

62 EXT. MILLIE'S PANCAKE HOUSE - DAY

62

An 80's restaurant in a strip mall complex.

A black SUV pulls in front. The DRIVER gets out to open the rear door but the door opens before he reaches it. EDWARD BALQ, 65, steps out wearing an off the rack suit and holding a large envelope. Balq checks his watch, speaks to the driver, holds up his phone. The driver nods, gets back in the SUV as Balq enters the restaurant.

63 INT. PANCAKE HOUSE - DAY

63

Balq is greeted with smiles and hellos. The OWNER shakes his hand as he leads Balq to his regular table in the rear.

Reverend Toller and Pastor Jeffers, seated together, look up as Balq walks over, shakes Joel's hand.

BALQ  
Sorry I'm late. Got held up.

JEFFERS  
You know Reverend Toller.

BALQ  
Just by sight. Ed Balq. Good to meet you.

Toller greets him as Ed sits.



BALQ (CONT'D)

(to owner)

Bring me a coffee. And the apple pie.

(to Toller and Jeffers)

The apple pie--I know it's a cliché. Organic. They make it right here. Local.

(beat)

I've got a surprise for you.

Balq sets his phone on the table top, opens the manila envelope. He extracts two 8x11 softbound books, passes them over:

BALQ (CONT'D)

I stopped at the printer on the way over.

The cover of the booklet features a 18th Century drawing of First Reformed with the title: "First Reformed Church, 1765-2015, 250 Years of Faith and Service."

JEFFERS

They did a great job.

Toller and Jeffers page through the handsome booklet. There are photos from colonial times, the fire of 1837, a lake side church picnic, a funeral in the churchyard. On the back cover is a picture of Abundant Life and insert photo of Pastor Jeffers.

BALQ

All the guests at the reconsecration will get a copy. There'll also be a mailing. And of course it will be available in the bookstore. How are the plans coming?

JEFFERS

The organ's been repaired?

TOLLER

It sounds better than ever before.

JEFFERS

We've drawn up a seating chart.

Jeffers passes the seating chart to Balq who gives it a quick once over as a WAITRESS brings his coffee and pie.

JEFFERS (CONT'D)

Mayor Wilson and the Governor will be there. Head of National Association of Evangelicals, representatives from NCC, the Office of the Chaplain. Then of course the people from the business community, the financial community...

Toller, paging through the book, comes upon a two page spread picturing all the ministers of First Reformed from colonial times to present and their dates of service.

TOLLER (V.O.)

All those mighty men of God, servants of the cross. Years of service--baptisms, confessions, funerals, sermons. The hours in prayer, the afflictions suffered. Did God give them strength? Did He hear them?

Balq's phone chimes. He looks at the message, ignores it.

JEFFERS

...Reverend Toller will introduce me, I'll introduce the Governor. There will be a song selection. The main choir will perform at Abundant Life--

BALQ

There won't be anything political will there?

JEFFERS

No, why would there be?

Balq picks up a fork, turns to them:

BALQ

Do you mind?

(they demur)

I ask because this was brought to my attention.

(unfolds a sheet of paper)

It's a print-out from a website.

He shows them a page from the Environmental Action website. It shows a photo of Toller in his clerical robe on the Hanstown Creek platform as Esther leads the Youth Choir. The headline reads: "Solemn Memorial for Michael Mensana."

BALQ (CONT'D)  
Both First Reformed and  
Abundant Life are mentioned by  
name.

(Pause for effect)  
This was a political event.  
**Neil Young?**

Jeffers looks to Toller.

TOLLER  
I was respecting the wishes of the  
deceased and the widow. These were  
their instructions for the memorial  
service.

BALQ  
At a toxic waste site with the  
press in attendance?

TOLLER  
The press was not notified. These  
are Mensana's friends.

BALQ  
It was a political act. You and the  
choir represented the Abundant Life  
Church. The Hanstown **Kills** site, by  
the way, is not even polluted. It  
was cleaned up with EPA superfunds.

JEFFERS  
Hanstown was not--?

BALQ  
Of course not, but give me some  
credit. I'm in the energy business.  
It's my business to stay informed.

JEFFERS  
Sorry. Reverend Toller didn't  
understand the implications.

They turn to Toller for a response.

TOLLER  
Mind if I ask a question?

BALQ  
Go ahead.

TOLLER  
Will God forgive us?  
(Balq is confused)  
Will God forgive us for what we are  
doing to his creation?  
(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)

That was the question Michael Mensana asked me when I visited him.

BALQ

There's a lot of loose talk about environmental change.

TOLLER

There is a scientific consensus. Ninety-seven percent of the scientific community. The "other" side consists of lobbyists and paid deniers.

TOLLER (V.O.)

The man who says nothing always seems more intelligent. Why couldn't I just keep silent?

BALQ

It's a complicated subject.

TOLLER

What is the benefit? Cui bono? Setting aside the Biblical call to stewardship, who profits when we soil our own nest? What is to gain?

BALQ

Could we just agree to keep politics out of the reconsecration service?

TOLLER

What God wants--

BALQ

You know the mind of God? He spoke to you personally, told you His plans for earth?

(shifts tone)

Look, I understand you're upset. You found the body, correct?

Toller nods.

JEFFERS

How?

TOLLER

We were supposed to meet. He texted me the location.

BALQ  
And you counseled him, Reverend?

TOLLER  
Yes.

BALQ  
You counseled him. Then he shot  
himself.

TOLLER  
Yes.  
His point is made.

BALQ  
I think you need to step back,  
Reverend. Look at your own life  
before you criticize others.

**CUT TO:**

**IDYLLIC RESPITE**

64 EXT. BIKE TRAIL - DAY

64

Reverend Toller and Mary, bundled up, bicycle along an  
idyllic rail trail converted for jogging and cycling.

She smiles. Toller downshifts, relaxes. For the moment they  
seem to have left their cares behind.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
Mary and I rode the rail line  
trail. I had not ridden a bicycle I  
think in twenty years. I was afraid  
I would fall. It is amazing the  
simple curative power of exercise.  
It's God given.

They ride down the crest of a hill and around a turn.

**Toller smiles for the first time.**

**CUT TO:**

65 EXT. MENSANA HOUSE - GARAGE - DAY

65

Mary watches Toller lift an aluminum bike, place it on the wall rack in the GARAGE.

MARY

Thank you again. Michael and I used to cycle twice a week. I missed it so much.

TOLLER

It's been a long time. I enjoyed it. But it was under protest.

MARY

Because?  
(indicates her stomach)  
I asked my doctor.

TOLLER

Just the same.

MARY

Can I ask another favor?

TOLLER

What?

MARY

Would you box up Michael's clothes?  
Or find someone to do it?

TOLLER

Are you sure you want to give them away so quickly?

MARY

Not give it away. Just box them up.  
It just so difficult to be surrounded by all those smells.  
Memories.

TOLLER

I can do it.

He looks at where the vest was hidden as he closes the garage door. They walk to the house.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

Have you decided?

MARY

The rent is paid for two months so there's no hurry. I'll move in with my sister and brother-in-law until the baby is born.

TOLLER  
You'll relocate there?

MARY  
I don't know. She's already  
contacted an obstetrician.

TOLLER  
A boy or a girl?

MARY  
My next visit I'll find out.

66 INT. MENSANA HOUSE - DAY

66

They step inside the living room.

TOLLER  
Something I've been meaning to ask,  
if it isn't too painful.  
(she nods)  
Do you think he would have really  
harmed someone?

MARY  
He'd been involved in non violent  
protests, we both had, he'd been  
put in jail. He could lose his  
temper, start yelling at the  
police. But no, I don't think he  
was violent.

TOLLER  
I just wonder if I should have done  
something differently.

MARY  
**He did not want to live.**  
(Toller nods)  
He was not a religious man, you  
know. He didn't care for the  
church. That was me. I was the one  
who asked him to come. I was raised  
in the church and I've never been  
able to quite let it go. When I'm  
in a strange city I'll just go in a  
church and sit down. I was the  
spiritual one.

He nods.

W

MARY (CONT'D)

Thanks.

TOLLER

I'll get some boxes. Come back later to take care of the clothes.

MARY

Before you go, would you pray with me?

He appears uncertain.

MARY (CONT'D)

I find it difficult to do alone. The words don't come. Are you uncomfortable with me asking that?

TOLLER

No. Of course not.

He clasps his hands, lowers his head. She follows suit.

**CUT TO:**

**MICHAEL'S FILES**

67

INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

67

Toller writes in his journal:

TOLLER (V.O.)

I spoke and the words came out of my mouth. "By thy words you shall be justified and by thy words you shall be condemned."

TIMECUT. Toller goes through the boxes brought back from Michael's garage. The explosive vest is in a box to the side. He looks through the file boxes. Michael's framed photo of José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and Maria do Espírito Santo rests on the counter.

Toller sips a drink of scotch, grimaces. He removes a series of paperbacks with dire titles: "Our Once and Future Planet," "Plants at the Margin," "Earth under Fire."

TIMECUT. Toller boots up Michael's laptop. A series of icons and documents appear on screen. He examines the files: This Fragile Planet. Top 100 Polluters.



Environmental Deregulation. Timelines. Bhopal. Marcal River. Arctic Melt. Ghana. Security Precautions. UN Resolutions. Scientific Associations. An encyclopedic reservoir of research.

Toller clicks the "Top 100 Polluters" file. A number list appears: Monsanto. Shell. Kohle. Conoco. Balq.

He opens the folder. The first document is a Balq Industries Quarterly Report. He opens it. A smiling photo of Edward Balq accompanies a welcoming message.

A menu appears on screen under the title "BALQ" with subcategories: "Domestic Divisions, International Partners, Shell Companies, Political Contributions (est), Political Action Groups, Charitable Contributions, Litigations, EPA & IEC reports."

Toller takes another drink.

TOLLER (V.O.)

I can no longer ignore my health. I have postponed my checkup too often. Yesterday I literally could barely stand.

He clicks through the entries. It's a chilling progression. Balq Energy, through its partners and shell companies, is under investigation on four continents. Balq is an equal opportunity polluter.

TOLLER (V.O.)

No. I have not lost my faith.

He clicks on the Balq sub category "Charitable Contributions." There it is, between the ballet and the nature conservancy, the Abundant Life Church in Christ and Christian Fellowship.

**CUT TO:**

**MEDICAL EXAM**

68

EXT. FIRST REFORMED - MORNING

68

Toller kneels by the new Plexiglas church sign beside a box of plastic letters.

He places the black letters one by one on the rack, spelling out the message:

WILL GOD FORGIVE US?

69 EXT. PARSONAGE - MORNING

69

In the rear of the parsonage, John Elder goes through the trash, separating the glass, plastic and metal recyclables. He cannot help but notice as he drops bottles into the bin. One empty bottle of scotch after another. Followed by an empty bourbon bottle.

70 EXT./INT. TOLLER'S CAR - INNER CITY - DAY (**OMIT**)

70

71 EXT. MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY

71

He pulls his Toyota pulls into the parking structure.

72 INT. MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - **NIGHT**

72

MONTAGE of shots from a physical examination:

--a scale is adjusted to record Toller's weight

--a **DOCTOR** takes his temperature

--blood pressure taken

--**The Doctor** taps his back

--urine collected

--blood drawn

--chest x-ray

**CUT TO:**

**PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN**

73 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - MORNING

73

Sunday morning. Tableaus of FIRST REFORMED. "Will God Forgive Us?" The sound of the organ comes from within.

Ten worshipers are assembled in the SANCTUARY. Mary, wearing a smart coat, sits alone.

Reverend Toller, sitting in the first pew, takes an antacid from his pocket, slips it in his mouth.

TIMECUT. Toller, at the pulpit, reads from the lectern Bible.

TOLLER

"...and he said I will pull down my barns, and build greater and I will say to my soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment."

TIMECUT. John Elder speaks with Esther as they straighten the Psalters.

ELDER

He was out most of Friday.

ESTHER

He went to Albany? **For his checkup?**

ELDER

I kind of asked him but he didn't volunteer anything. You know how he is.

ESTHER

Perhaps I can check.

ELDER

Esther.

ESTHER

It's just that...

ELDER

I know.

They reach the front of the church. The door outside is open. Through the door Esther sees Toller speaking with Mary. He is smiling. She is stung by jealousy.

**CUT TO:**

**DIAGNOSIS**

75 EXT. MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY 75

A grey morning.

76 INT. MEDICAL OFFICE - DAY 76

Toller sits opposite a white coated DOCTOR. Toller's x-rays are on a computer screen.

DOCTOR

We like to do a gastroscopic exam. We lower a fiber optic camera down the throat and esophagus and take a look around. It's an outpatient procedure with local anesthetic. You should be able to leave by mid afternoon.

TOLLER

That doesn't sound good.

DOCTOR

We want to check for evidence of malignancy.

TOLLER

Cancer.

DOCTOR

It's a possibility. Cancer is not the fearsome medical foe it once was.

TOLLER

What is the treatment?

DOCTOR

It depends on how advanced the tumor is. You stated that you have been experiencing discomfort?

(checks records)

Six months?

(Toller nods)

Diet, medication, chemo, even surgery. We have a variety of diagnostic tools. Have you had bloody stools?

TOLLER

Yes.

DOCTOR

How recently?

(no response)

I would like to schedule the gastroscopy as soon as possible. We have an open slot the week after next. What is your diet?

TOLLER

I get hungry, I eat.

DOCTOR

Do you smoke?

(Toller shakes head)

Drink?

TOLLER

In moderation.

DOCTOR

That needs to end. I'm writing a prescription that will help with the stomach pain. I want you to take nutritional supplements. You should put on a little weight. Nutrihelp is a good over the counter supplement. Drink a bottle morning and night. Are you in pain now?

TOLLER

No. Actually, I feel quite good.

**CUT TO:**

**PRAYER CHAPEL**

A snow plow maneuvers through parked cars.

State of the art communications hub. Sign on the wall: "Balq Media Center." Media center employees sit at high tech work stations.

A global Plexiglas map with sparkling lights and lines illustrates the worldwide evangelical partners of the Abundant Life Church.

Joel Jeffers, dressed casually, addresses the camera in a SMALL STUDIO. A CAMERA ASSISTANT claps an electronic clapboard saying:

CAMERA ASSISTANT  
Joel Jeffers, Daily Devotion number  
174, take 2.

Pastor Jeffers reads from the Teleprompter:

JEFFERS  
"Refrain from anger and turn from  
wrath; do not fret--it only leads  
to evil. Psalm 37:8. We tend to  
think that a little anxiety and  
worry are simply an indication of  
how wise we are yet it's a much  
better indication of how wicked we  
are. Fretting arises from our  
determination to have our own way.  
Our Lord never worried and was  
never anxious, because His purpose  
was never to accomplish his own  
plans but to fulfill God's  
plans..."

Esther looks out door, notices Toller walking down the corridor. She says to Mixer:

ESTHER  
I'll be back in a bit.

She rises from her seat, walks out.

79 INT. A.L. SOUND STUDIO - DAY (OMIT)

79

80 INT. A.L. CORRIDOR - DAY

80

Esther catches up with him.

ESTHER  
Reverend.

TOLLER  
Hello, Esther.

ESTHER  
I didn't know you were coming.

TOLLER  
Joel's office wanted to go over the  
reconsecration program. **Has he  
discussed it with you?**

ESTHER  
(nods)  
I'll be at First Reformed. Stanley  
will be with the full choir here.  
The acoustics will be wonderful. I  
mean, wonderful. Did you hear from  
Albany?

TOLLER  
(wary)  
Yeah.

ESTHER  
What did they say?

TOLLER  
Nothing much. More tests.

ESTHER  
A gastroscopy.

How does she know this?

TOLLER  
And you know this how?

ESTHER  
(gives it up)  
I called.  
(explains)  
I'm worried about you.

Toller opens the door to the Prayer Chapel, motions for her to follow. They step into the darkened austere room.

81 INT. PRAYER CHAPEL - DAY

81

He closes the door. He takes her shoulders:

TOLLER  
Leave me alone.

ESTHER  
I just want--

TOLLER  
I know what you want. I cannot bear your concern, you constant hovering. Your neediness. It's a constant reminder of my failings and inadequacies. You want something that never was and never will be.

She starts to cry. She seeks comfort. He doesn't offer it.

ESTHER  
Don't make me do this.

TOLLER  
Don't you see yourself?

ESTHER  
You don't take care of yourself.

TOLLER  
I despise you. I despise what you bring out in me. Your concerns are petty. You are a stumbling block.

**CUT TO:**

**FEELING BETTER**



Toller writes in his journal:

TOLLER (V.O)

I suddenly feel much better. I  
awoke early, clear-headed and  
immediately set about my daily  
tasks.

After brushing his teeth, Toller stops to examine his face in the mirror. He has lost weight. His skin seems a bit on the yellow side.

TIMECUT. NIGHT. Toller, in thought, walks around the parsonage. He goes to the **closet, removes** box where Michael's EXPLOSIVE VEST has been placed.

He removes the vest, examines the disconnected detonator wires. It's a fearsome sight.

TIMECUT. He researches types and characteristics of suicide vests and belts. Some of the literature is in English, some in Arabic.

There are five types of vests, some utilizing dynamite, others Semtex, others C4. They vary in design and detonation features.

Toller locates the vest before him: "Semtex Blocks #2. Hamas Style." Foil wrapped 2500 gram vertical rectangles of Semtex attached to a Velcro belt with bungee cord and connected by wires to a push button detonator.

He examines the vest. It's beautiful and simple in design, power and intent.

Web images show **GIF of a** suicide bomber attacks.

TIMECUT. He writes in his journal. Next to him rests a half filled glass of scotch. He pours Pepto Bismol into the whiskey glass. Pink viscous fluid diffuses through clear amber. He takes a sip.

TIMECUT. Toller lifts the vest, slips his arms into the straps, connects the Velcro tabs, looks at himself in the mirror. Adjusts the vests. Clerical. In a way.

85 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

85

Late night. He sleeps in bed atop the blanket. Still dressed, **he wears the vest.**

TOLLER (V.O.)  
"Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."

**CUT TO:**

**THE SNAKE AND THE SQUIRREL**

85A EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

85A

TOLLER, walking the barbed wire **which shakes through the hedgerow perimeter**, stops when he notices something.

A dead squirrel has gotten caught in drooping barbed wire.

Toller uses his scratched bleeding hands to loosen the squirrel from the wire. He pulls at the wire compulsively, wrapping into a roll.

**THE WOULD BE THIEF**

86 EXT. PARSONAGE - DAY (OMIT)

86

87 EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (OMIT)

87

88 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY (OMIT)

88

**CUT TO:**

**RESEARCH**

89 INT. TOLLER'S CAR - DAY 89

Toller is on the move in his Toyota. Driving here, driving there. America outside his car windows. Beautiful, sad, violated, polluted.

90 EXT. BALQ PAPER INDUSTRIES - DAY 90

A sprawling industrial complex.

91 INT. PAPER FACTORY - DAY 91

Toller walks behind a school group touring the Balq paper mill. They watch as massive machines transform pulp into paper.

TOUR GUIDE

Balg Home Products, makers of paper goods, fertilizers, everyday items for the household, was among the first companies to realize the need to address environmental concerns. Balg is green...

92 INT. BALQ BUILDING - DAY 92

Toller drives past the four story dark glass corporate headquarters: Balq Industries.

**CUT TO:**

93 INT. UPSCALE JAPANESE RESTAURANT - DAY 93

TOLLER (V.O.)

Today I stopped. I had Miso and fish. When was the last time? Such simple pleasures. Why do we deny ourselves?

Toller, at the bar, sips sake as Ed Balq dines with top tier business companions at an overpriced restaurant.

**CUT TO:**

94

INT. TOLLER'S CAR - SUBURBS - AFTERNOON

94

LUXURIOUS SUBURB. Toller drives the battered Toyota past manicured megahomes. Very much out of place, he checks the rear view mirror. A SECURITY SUV is following him.

INSERT OF JOURNAL: Several pages torn out followed by the words:

TOLLER (V.O.)

I've removed the previous pages.  
They were written in a delirium.  
But I am determined to continue.  
It's hard to struggle against  
torpor. I must set pen to paper.

In the gated suburb, Toller slows down as if checking a house number. The Security SUV pulls up behind him, FLASHES its lights.

Toller pulls to the curb. The SECURITY OFFICER gets out, walks over to him. The Officer gives him a suspicious once over. Toller's sweater is dirty, he needs a haircut, a shave...

SECURITY OFFICER

May I be of some assistance?

TOLLER

I...I think I must have the wrong  
address.

The explosive vest rests in a partially zipped bag on the rear seat.

SECURITY OFFICER

This is a private community. Did  
you receive clearance at the  
security kiosk?

TOLLER

Kiosk? I didn't see any kiosk.

The Officer notices on clerical designation on the windshield:

SECURITY OFFICER  
Would you please follow me,  
Reverend? I will escort you back  
to the highway.

TOLLER  
Thank you.

**CUT TO:**

**MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR**

95

INT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

95

Late night. Toller at his desk, writing, drinking.

He hears something, stops to listen. **The doorbell rings.** He sips a drink. **Hides the bottle.**

**Toller coughs as he crosses through the main room, exits toward the front door. We hear the sound of Toller opening the door.**

TOLLER (O.S.)  
Mary.

MARY (O.S.)  
Can I come in?

TOLLER (O.S.)  
Of course.

**They re-enter. He takes her coat.**

TOLLER (CONT'D)  
What's going on? Are you all right?

MARY  
No.

**She sits on the only chair. Toller sets down the coat, turns toward her.**

MARY (CONT'D)  
I'm frightened. I'm frightened of everything.  
(beat)  
I woke up. My heart was pounding. I thought the ceiling was going to fall in. I had to get out. I drove around.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

(beat)

I didn't put on any makeup.

TOLLER

I'm glad you came. You need anything, water, tea?

**He sits on the floor opposite Mary.**

MARY

(Shakes ad)

Without any reason. It's like a dark curtain just...fell. Everything scares me. The news on TV, a conversation, the weather.

TOLLER

Have you seen your doctor?

MARY

He prescribed antidepressants. He said they were safe. Well, he said it was highly unlikely it would hurt Michael.

TOLLER

Michael?

MARY

The baby. It's a boy. I didn't tell you?

TOLLER

No.

MARY

But I don't want to take anything which may affect the baby.

TOLLER

You were right to come.

MARY

I can't stop my thoughts. They just go on and on and repeat and repeat.

TOLLER

Did you have these fears before Michael's death?

MARY

A little. But not like this. Michael seemed so strong.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

I read online that they used to believe pregnancy made you happy but now they feel it just makes your feelings more extreme.

TOLLER

How did Michael help you?

MARY

You mean before?

TOLLER

Before he became absent.

MARY

He listened. He was kind. We did something we called the Magical Mystery Tour. It sounds silly. We'd share a joint then we would lie on top of each other fully clothed. Try to get as much body to body contact as possible. He also called it the 80% Solution. Hands out, look each right into the eyes. Then move our eyes in unison, right, left, right, left. And breathe in rhythm.

Beat.

TOLLER

And you want me to do this?

MARY

No, I didn't mean it that way.  
(shamefaced)  
Well. Yes. I guess I did.

TOLLER

Okay. Show me.

MARY

But without the marihuana.

TOLLER

The baby?  
(she nods)  
How do we do this?

MARY

Lie on your back with your arms and legs stretched out.

TOLLER

You need music?

MARY

No, just listen to the breaths.

Toller gets on the carpet, stretches out. Mary stands, removes her coat, then carefully lowers herself atop him. Forehead to forehead, finger to finger, thigh and leg to thigh and leg. Her baby against his belly.

She stares deep into his eyes. He breathes slowly. He paces his breaths to match hers.

She moves her eyes left to right. He syncs his eye movement with hers. She looks right to left, he looks right to left.

They slip into a meditative trance. Breathe in, breathe out. A single organism.

Slowly, they LEVITATE. They float horizontally three feet above the floor.

Then they ROTATE 360 degrees, not moving a fraction. Side by side, Toller uppermost, side by side, Mary on top again.

Then the PARSONAGE FALLS AWAY and they are in flight across the face of the earth.

They FLOAT across the wonders on earth, the peaks of the Himalayas, the Ignacu Falls, the fertile jungles of Amazonia and Australian outback.

And the hideous spoilage man has wreaked: the waste dumps of India, the choking smog of China, the toxic rivers of Indonesia, the oil coated birds and fish of the Gulf Coast.

**CUT TO:**

95A EXT. HANSTOWN **KILLS** - DAWN

95A

Which gives way to **Michael** standing beside the polluted **Kills**.

**CUT TO:**

**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**

96 INT. FIRST REFORMED SANCTUARY - DAY

96



A class of FIRST GRADERS on a school trip, full of infectious life and chatter, are ushered into the sanctuary by SURIYA, their young teacher. The mixed race students wear matching colored vests.

SURIYA  
Benny, stop that.

BENNY  
He started it.

SURIYA  
Quiet. Listen.

Toller watches as Suriya lines the little ones at attention. A boy gives him googlie eyes. Toller responds in kind, looks at Suriya. He is in good spirits.

Suriya holds up the Scholastic illustrated book, "The Patchwork Path."

SURIYA (CONT'D)  
This week we read "The Patchwork Path," about the Underground Railroad which was not a railroad but--what was it?

Several First Graders raise their hands.

SURIYA (CONT'D)  
Rosa?

ROSA  
It was a slave trail.

SURIYA  
It was an escape route from the South to the North and this church, First Reformed, was part of the route. Reverend Toller.

TOLLER  
Slaves fleeing north to Canada were helped, fed and hidden at churches and homes along the route. Calvin Verlander, the dominee, minister, of First Reformed was active in the Abolitionist movement. He arranged...follow me. Look at this. Miss Suriya, could you give me a hand?

The students watch wide eyed as Toller and Suriya lift a wooden pew a few inches off the floor, move it.

TOLLER (CONT'D)  
Who can help me? Benny?

Benny, the class clown, fills up with pride.

TOLLER (CONT'D)  
Look, what do you see?  
(Benny doesn't see anything)  
Do you see a metal hook? There.  
(Benny nods)  
What would happen if we pulled it?  
Can you grab it?

The First Graders are mesmerized. Benny extracts the hook from the floorboard. Toller takes the hook from Benny and, putting his back into it, lifts up a large wooden trapdoor. Benny, proud of himself, watches.

A dark space is revealed under the floorboards. Toller reaches down, flips a switch. A single incandescent bulb lights the dark cavity below.

97 INT. HIDDEN BASEMENT - DAY

97

TOLLER  
Slaves would hide here. Sometimes whole families. Can you imagine that? In the darkness. The air hot, shaking with fear. Hearing the horses of the slave hunters outside? On their knees, holding each other's hands, praying to God to save them?

**CUT TO:**

**ANOTHER FORM OF PRAYER**

98 EXT. PARSONAGE - NIGHT

98

**Late at night.**

99 INT. PARSONAGE BATHROOM - NIGHT (OMIT)

99

100 INT. PARSONAGE BEDROOM - NIGHT

100

He sews a handmade patch onto the vest. It pictures José Cláudio Ribeiro da Silva and Maria do Espírito Santo, martyrs of the Amazon.

He puts on a loose fitting dark work shirt over the vest. The vest is remarkably compact. He's become so thin that the vest is hardly noticeable.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
The stomach pains have returned.  
Yesterday I groveled on the floor,  
moaning like a sick beast. Will  
God's grace ever shine on me?

**CUT TO:**

101 INT. MEMORIAL HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

101

Toller wears his mended black sweater, but not the vest. He scans the room.

A LOW INCOME MOTHER tends to her DISABLED 8 year-old. The Son looks at Toller. He is crushed by empathy.

A NURSE steps out, calls his name:

NURSE  
Reverend Toller?

But he is gone.

**CUT TO:**

102 EXT./INT. TOLLER'S CAR - DAY

102

DAY AND NIGHT. Toller drives the streets in his Toyota. He wears the explosive vest under his dark work shirt. Past wealthy suburban homes, past inner city blight.

TOLLER (V.O.)  
If one is awake, can he become more  
awake?

**CUT TO:**

103 EXT. HANSTOWN **KILLS** - PRE DAWN

103

THE DARK OF PRE DAWN. Toller, wearing the vest, stands in the moonlight. On the horizon the first eminence of sunrise.

TOLLER (V.O.)

Every act of preservation is an act of creation. **Everything** preserved renews creation. It's how we participate in creation.

104 EXT. HANSTOWN **KILLS** - DAWN

104

The sun rises. Toller is at HANSTOWN **Kills**, the polluted stream where Michael's ashes were spread.

**CUT TO:**

105 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - DAY

105

John Elder, kneeling beside the Plexiglas sign ("Will God Forgive Us?"), removes the letters.

**CUT TO:**

106 INT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY

106

Toller stands with fellow volunteers dispensing hot lunches to the down and out. He wears a dark sweater.

The wheel chair Vet waits for a hot lunch in the line of down and outers.

The vest is under Toller's sweater. **A red wire pokes through the dark fabric.**

**CUT TO:**

**THE DARKEST HOUR**

107 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - MORNING

107

The church sign reads: "Next Sunday, 250th Reconsecration Service. Praise God."

**CUT TO:**

108 EXT. ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH - DAY

108

Toller's Toyota pulls into the parking lot.

**CUT TO:**

109 INT. JEFFERS' OFFICE - DAY

109

Toller enters Joel's inner office.

JEFFERS

Close the door. Take a seat.

Jeffers sips from a plastic water bottle, lifts it as if to say, "Want one?" Toller shakes his head. Jeffers sits.

JEFFERS (CONT'D)

We're concerned about you.

TOLLER

Who is?

JEFFERS

How's your health?

TOLLER

I need some more tests.

JEFFERS

You didn't get the results?

Toller shakes his head, eyeing Jeffers. Where is he getting his information?

JEFFERS (CONT'D)

How's your diet? To be honest, you don't look so good.

TOLLER

I've been having some stomach trouble.

JEFFERS

I hear you've been drinking.

TOLLER

Just a little wine with dinner.

JEFFERS

Wine? That's not advisable for a man with stomach problems.

TOLLER

I've got to take better care of myself.

JEFFERS

You're always in the Garden.

Toller: Huh?

JEFFERS (CONT'D)

Jesus wasn't always in the Garden, on his knees, sweating drops of blood. No, he was on the Mount, in the temple, in the marketplace. But you're always in the Garden. For you every hour is the Darkest Hour. Don't confuse Post Traumatic Stress with the Holy Agony.

TOLLER

I didn't know I had given offense.

JEFFERS

Jesus doesn't want our suffering. He suffered for us. He wants obedience and commitment.

TOLLER

But what of His creation? The Heavens declare the glory of God. He is everywhere present. In the plants, the rivers, in the smallest insect. The world is a manifestation of God's presence. This is an issue where we can lead. But what does the church say? Nothing. The U.S. congress deny climate change. Where were we when these people got elected?

(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)

We know who spoke for big business.  
Who spoke for God?

JEFFERS

"The creation waits in eager  
expectation of liberation from  
bondage. The whole creation  
groaneth and travaileth in pain  
together until now."

TOLLER

We should pollute so God can  
restore? We should sin so God can  
forgive? I don't think that's what  
the Apostle meant. We need to see  
through Jesus' eyes, see every  
living thing.

JEFFERS

You don't live in the real world.  
You're a minister in a tourist  
church that no one attends. Do you  
have any idea what goes into the  
work of God? What it takes to  
maintain a mission such as this?  
The daily cost, the staffing, the  
outreach? How many people we reach  
each day? Who's that priest you  
like so much? Thomas Merton? He  
didn't live in the real world  
either. He was a monk. He lived in  
a monastery in Kentucky and wrote  
books.

TOLLER

(pleading)

Somebody has to do something. The  
hour is late. Earth is in the  
balance.

JEFFERS

And what if this is His plan?  
What if we can't see it?

TOLLER

God would never destroy his  
creation.

JEFFERS

He did once. For forty days and  
forty nights.

That hangs in the air a moment. Jeffers changes tack, offers  
solicitude:

JEFFERS (CONT'D)

Abundant Life is with you. We care. This is a hard time for you. We can help. After the reconsecration service, you need to go to rehab or medical institution, we'll take care of that. Go to Nicaragua, preach the gospel, build houses. Do some good in the real world. If you're not up to the ceremony, I understand. You are expected but we can say you are sick--which is true--or indisposed.

TOLLER

It's not about the ceremony. I want to be there. It's two hundred and fifty years. It's my church. I want to be there. I want to introduce you.

JEFFERS

Ed Balq has decided he'd like to make a few comments. The Governor would introduce him. Is that a problem?

TOLLER

Not at all.

JEFFERS

Good. We'll get through this reconsecration--it's going to be special--then we can deal with these other issues.

**CUT TO:**

**HOLY GROUND**

110 EXT. MENSANA HOUSE - **GOLDEN HOUR** 110

Mary's house.

111 INT. MENSANA LIVING ROOM - EVENING 111



Toller and Mary stand surrounded by moving boxes.

MARY

You will come to Buffalo?

TOLLER

Of course. I want to see him. A new child is the most blessed thing in creation.

MARY

You have been a help to me.

TOLLER

Dark times will come again. But they will also go. My great grandfather, was an old parson. A Saint of God. There was a two story bank and the bank installed the very first elevator in town. My grandfather went with his boys on Monday, as he did every Monday, to deposit the church funds. He needed to see the manager. They stepped in the elevator. Between the first and second floor he had a heart attack. He wore a hat, he always had a hat. He took off his hat, turned to his sons and said, "Boys, take off my shoes. I'm standing on Holy Ground." And he died right there.

Pause.

TOLLER (CONT'D)

I believe Michael was on Holy Ground when he died.

She embraces him.

MARY

Thank you so much.

**Heads toward door.**

TOLLER

We'll meet **in Buffalo.**

MARY

I'm going to stay for the reconsecration ceremony on Sunday.

TOLLER  
(darkens)  
There's no need for that.

MARY  
I want to.

TOLLER  
It's not necessary.

MARY  
You have been there for me. I want  
to be there for you.

TOLLER  
It's not worth the effort. Just a  
bunch a rich guys patting each  
other on the back.

MARY  
But you're going?

TOLLER  
I have to.

MARY  
Then I'll come.

TOLLER  
Please. I don't want you to. Don't  
come.  
(stern)  
Okay?

MARY  
(relents)  
Okay.

**CUT TO:**

**RECONSECRATION**

112 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - MORNING

112

Reconsecration Sunday.

A local TV media truck is parked at the curb. Uniformed  
valets park the guests cars.

Black suited security personnel wearing ear plugs and lapel pins watch from strategic positions.

A PUBLIC PERSONALITY steps out of a black SUV. He **poses** for photographs. **A videographer pans him inside the church.**

**CUT TO:**

113 INT. A.L CHURCH WORSHIP ARENA - MORNING 113

Inside the stadium like arena, hovering flat screens simulcast the arrivals **of a public personality** at First Reformed for a large audience. The Abundant Life Choir, accompanied by guitars and drums, sings.

**CUT TO:**

114 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - MORNING 114

More arrivals. Pastor Jeffers steps out of a SUV with his photogenic wife and children, poses for the cameras.

**CUT TO:**

115 INT. PARSONAGE BATHROOM - MORNING 115

Reverend Toller completes his ablutions.

Brushes his teeth. Shaves. Runs Vitalis through his hair.

116 INT. BEDROOM - MORNING 116

He straps the suicide vest on over his black T shirt. He has sewn two additional patches onto the vest. The embroidered image of his son PFC Joseph Toller and Michael Mensana.

TOLLER (V.O.)

I have found another form of  
prayer.

Toller places AAA batteries into the detonation slots. He connects the wires to the Semtex plastic jelly explosive tubes. If he presses the button, the vest will detonate.

Carefully lifts his black clerical cassock over the vest.

Examines himself in the mirror. Touches his hair. Prepares for the reconsecration ceremony.

117 INT. PARSONAGE DEN - MORNING (OMIT) 117

**CUT TO:**

118 INT. FIRST REFORMED SANCTUARY - MORNING 118

Esther enters, John Elder's organ music plays.

Pastor Jeffers with his wife and children. Well scrubbed Abundant Life ushers guide the guests to their seats.

Edward Balq, accompanied by his wife, grown son and daughter-in-law, arrive and are deferentially accompanied to the church entrance by Balq employees.

Toller watches. That seems about it. The guests are thinning out.

Mary, alone, arrives wearing her nice coat. *She is there.* She has come after all. She enters the church, looking for him.

**CUT TO:**

119 INT. PARSONAGE - DAY 119

Toller, watching from the PARSONAGE, freezes. He looks at the detonator button.

He cannot go forward with his plan. Cannot. Not with her in the sanctuary.

He paces around the living room.

He returns to his desk. He writes in his journal:

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

He crosses that out. Writes:

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Crosses that out. Writes:

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

Crosses that out.

120 INT. FIRST REFORMED SANCTUARY - DAY 120

The last invited guests and VIPs are escorted to their seats as John Elder plays. Each guest is handed a copy of the reconsecration booklet. Mary accepts hers.

Mary, uncertain, unmoored, looks around for Toller. She watches as Balq speaks with Jeffers several pews ahead.

121 INT. CHOIR LOFT - DAY (OMIT) 121

122 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY (OMIT) 122

123 EXT. FIRST REFORMED - DAY (**OMIT**) 123

124 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY 124

The Governor takes his seat in a place of privilege. He checks the program. All is ready.

Pastor Jeffers, uneasy, **approaches** John Elder **at the organ**:

JEFFERS  
Where is he?

ELDER  
I don't know.

**CUT TO:**

**EVERLASTING ARMS**

125 EXT. PARSONAGE - MORNING 125

Joel Jeffers exits the sanctuary, crosses the CHURCHYARD to the PARSONAGE. Jeffers RINGS the bell, KNOCKS on the door.

JEFFERS

Toller!

No response.

**CUT TO:**

126 INT. PARSONAGE - DAY 126

Toller, at his desk, listens in semi-darkness. "Toller!" Then silence. Jeffers has left.

Toller stands.

**CUT TO:**

127 INT. SANCTUARY - DAY 127

Joel Jeffers re-enters, smiles at the Governor, Balq and other assembled VIPs. He motions to Esther:

JEFFERS

Let's begin.

**CUT TO:**

128 INT. PARSONAGE - MORNING 128

Reverend Toller writes in his journal:

TOLLER (V.O.)

God, how I would have preferred a different death.

**CUT TO:**

129 INT. PARSONAGE KITCHEN - MORNING 129

Toller, in the kitchen, disconnects the detonator wires, strips off the explosive vest. Sets it on the table. He can no longer go forward with that plan. Not with Mary inside.

The vest, impotent, lies on the table.

He removes his black T shirt as well, revealing his pale torso. He steps out of the kitchen.

Sounds are heard as he fetches items off screen. Toller returns with a roll of BARBED WIRE and a can of Drano from the bathroom.

He unrolls the spiny barbed wire, then, looking into the mirror WRAPS it tighter and tighter around his bare torso. The metal barbs puncture his skin, brings drops of blood to the surface.

Toller walks to the Vestry closet, selects the alb, gingerly places it over his shoulders. He places a white stole around his neck, adjusts it into place.

Music is heard from within the sanctuary.

Toller steps into the kitchen, looks at himself in the mirror. Red drops of BLOOD seep through the white alb.

He sits at the kitchen table, unscrews the Drano cap.

**CUT TO:**

130

INT. SANCTUARY - DAY

130

Esther sings a solo an a capella rendition of "Everlasting Arms."

ESTHER

"What a fellowship, what a joy  
divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is  
mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
(Youth Choir joins in)  
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure  
from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the  
everlasting arms."

**CUT TO:**

At the table, he looks at the open can of Drano, prepares to drink. He raises the bottle to his lips. Prepares to chug it down.

The door RATTLES, then opens. He looks up.

Mary **enters**.

The Drano drops from his hand, spills across the floor.

MARY

Ernst?

He stands.

ESTHER (O.S.)

"What have I to dread, what have I  
to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms?  
I have blessed peace with my Lord  
so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms."

Mary approaches Toller. He steps forward, takes her in his arms.

The camera MOVES FOR THE FIRST TIME. It dollies forward and around, swimming with their embrace.

She GASPS and presses her open mouth in SLOW MOTION to his cheek.

Toller responds to her carnal embrace in kind, devouring her, as the camera turns and turns and until it suddenly stops.

The screen goes BLACK.

THE END

\*