

## Old Church/New Church

My old church perches at ghetto's edge,  
commanding a lovely view.

Bottles and rats, killers, tires,  
fires, homeless, hopeless;  
Who's your daddy?

Say it right, boy, who yo' daddy?  
What's a daddy?

Lightnin' Hopkins slept here, played the joints,  
gettin' drunk, gettin' sad,

Stayin' sad, hoping a little  
but not believing.

So little to believe in you gotta have faith  
. . . . or a .45.

Ageless babes in the church's halls,  
hard as chocolate cherries.

Sweet 16 and never been dissed,  
so they would have you believe.

Lacquered eyes like one-way mirrors,  
You think you know me, man?  
You don' know me.

Eyes tell tales, daddy be gone,  
Mama so far away  
in the next room.

Bottles and rats, needles,  
Old Navy, cell phones, nice kicks:  
a today kind of ghetto.

Their presence screams their strangled cry,  
Save me! Save me!

World can't do it, tried that. You the church.  
Ain't you in the savin' bidness?  
Yeah, part-time.

What a lovely mission field,  
a field so black for harvest.

Whitey, he come in from the burbs,  
he say, I love you.

Thass what he say,  
You think he do?

Preacher, he black, live in the burbs.  
With Whitey. Man, it be confusin.'

Save me! Save me!  
What a lovely mission field.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet . . ."  
You know it? Got to know it.

Overhead gone, like last week.  
Squawk, squawk, squeal.

Sound system messed up  
like next week.

John 17, so this is it.  
So, is this it?

Lord, Lord, tell me, please.  
Lawdy, Lawdy, is this it?

Is this how the world will know you, Lord?  
For we are one. And more.

At my table my dear one and I  
and three more.

The others gone, now these three,  
one black, two white.

The Third Ward girl sober 10 months;  
well, no crack.

A drink is jus' a drink,  
that crack'll do you dirty.

Two white girls from the shelter,  
two years clean.

Wanting to help so sweetly:  
You go, girl!

Reaching across the divide  
and grabbing a handful of terror.

My new church not far away  
as the Word flies.

My new church so far away,  
its world not of the Other.

So full of somethings,  
30-somethings tripping over 20-somethings.

More volunteers for the nursery!  
No, lots more volunteers for the nursery!

Blond, bronzed, straightened,  
flossed, scented . . .

A well-scrubbed ghetto  
of smiles and good mornings

And don't forget that name tag  
so we can love you in a personal way.

We'll send a few bucks to that other ghetto,  
and the junior high kids for one whole week.

Organ soars, violin sings,  
trump sounds, piano praises,

A symphony of worship, right in time,  
a velvet cloak that wraps,  
a welcome embrace.

A grandeur of symmetry,  
a beauty that haunts,

Drawing me in, closing out the world,  
alone with Him.

Pinching myself. Am I a new creation,  
an Episcopalian?

Her beauty, however, doesn't end there.  
Prick her skin and she doesn't flinch.

Her teachers teach the Holy Writ,  
not a fallen creature's take on it.

Singers hang back, leading so meekly  
so as to say, but One is the Star.

Headlines, footlights, everything shines  
on One who is holy, Christ the King.

I pine for my old church,  
revel in the new.

Lord, oh Lord, both do love You.  
But tell me, Lord, grant me this favor,

Might e'er there be,  
this side of heaven,  
a church for all that is for One?