The Least Bittern

On a spring day on Galveston Island in 2017
Birding with Jim Stevenson and friends,
I experienced God - not the harsh God
With whom I was raised,
But rather the gentle one I call
My higher power,
A warm light on a dark, cold day,
A gentle breeze on a still, hot day,
The manifestation of the ethereal.

The east wind pushes the tide inland,
Piling it into the marshes and sand flats,
Forcing the shy birds of the marsh to the edges
Where we find the least bittern in a roadside ditch,
Hunkered down, yellow bill and yellow eyes
Motionless,
The brown streaked body camouflaged
Amongst the brown stems and browner mud,
A living thing making do, trying to adapt
In this time of the changing climate.

What a wonderful gift to encounter,
To perceive, to know the ether that is
Life-being-lived by all living things,
A pulsing collective, a spirit,
An energy connecting me all the way back
To the beginning, to my source
And I am calmed by that knowledge,
By that experience, and I am grateful
That I saw the least bittern today.
A prayer of thankfulness inspired
By church services on Galveston Island
During a very high tide event.
Marbled Godwit 2

In the marsh north of West Bay after being chased
From the water by a fierce east wind.

The wing beats of a hundred birds catch my eye,
All waders, all brown and grey against the grey water,
Willetts, dowitchers, sandpipers and sanderlings,
All probing the shallows with their beaks,
Then seeing four larger ones behind the marsh sprigs,
Marbled godwits - long straight beaks distinguishing them
From the curlews and whimbrels that they resemble.

I came to the coast today to renew my soul –
To find the spirit that I had misplaced within myself, lost,
Unfound until I felt the wind howling across the water,
Crashing under the railroad trestle, covering the shoreline,
Sending me to the marsh where there was little respite
But an abundance of bird life and a service of Earth Church,
The Godwit signaling me to take a deep breath,
To breathe in life – good ole Texas marsh-life
Being lived amidst the howling wind and
The muddy flat alive with peeps, with living things.

Driving back to Houston, calm and relaxed,
Spirit reclaimed and restored, smiling,
Thinking about the Godwit and the play
On words for God has a wit, a sense of humor,
Smiling as I found my church when hope waned,
The howling wind driving me not away from my church
But to it, to the muddy cove, to the celebration,
To the service at which my sins were purged
And I was made well, rejuvenated, ready again.

And as I enter the hell that is driving in Houston
At 5:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon,
I greet the devil with Godwit in my psyche,
Peace in my heart and a smile on my face.