

**Perry Epes, Lincoln**

**The Strength of the Hills**

The strength of the hills is God's, who made them,  
but feeling as old and worn as they,  
I daily I try measure  
what it takes for me to climb the crest  
of our far field over the road  
where our neighbor shepherd grazes his ewes  
till moving them to the lambing barn  
in late winter. Then the field is open for us,  
the people of his pasture,  
and our dog can run free where his herders worked.

Early mornings, walking our untrained retriever  
through the yard to the edge of the road,  
I lift up mine eyes to that crest  
and ask myself, "Where will the strength come from  
to climb it again and again  
with anemia barely held at bay  
by iron infusions  
and nausea yielding so slowly, grudgingly  
to costly anti-viral medication.

When I'm done complaining that docs can't fix me faster,  
I can thank God for waiting with me, and within,  
the strength of the hills is mine also

to take more measured steps each day, keep climbing  
and wearing down my sloped path a mite farther,  
at one with the sheep to make rough places plain  
in old Virginia's Piedmont. Further,  
I'll gladly spend my later breaths  
singing the Word in my heart  
that any valley of dry bones  
may be exalted.