

PREACHERS

Worked in the steel mills, black men
from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia,
studying the way God whispered
in the hot air of the coke oven, how
the saints waved the smoke rising
up over Baltimore harbor, a pastiche
announcing the hope of generations.

Slow strides up the aisle to pulpits,
steps learned between rows of peanuts,
corn, tobacco, cotton, rows crossed
over in blood from the thousands sold
down under, raised like sweet calves,
flesh harvested, made righteous by
what fails a people, by what promises.

They built cities on Psalm 139,
calling on the last testing of hearts
of believers so they can lay stones,
one on the other, hand over hand.