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CHRISTIAN

Messages from Estillyen: A Novel of Redemption and Human Worth
William E. Jefferson
Claudia Volkman, editor
Port Estillyen Productions
978-0-9856621-0-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

William E. Jefferson's intelligent and heartfelt novel, *Messages from Estillyen*, stitches together several tales to reveal the transformative power of God's word. Hollie and Goodwin Macbreeze, a young couple seeking to make sense of life after Hollie is diagnosed with an incurable disease, travel to the mysterious Isle of Estillyen, "an ancient harbor in the present" where a community of monks offer "readings" that powerfully illuminate the words of the Bible for a modern audience. The monks' twelve biblical narratives express the author's theses: words matter, some words matter more than most, and the perfect union of medium and message can be found in Christ alone. Hollie and Goodwin also learn that every human life, whether long or short, has innate value.

The couple meet Orban Ironbout, a curmudgeonly, possibly dangerous, old man who lives as a recluse, grieving the loss of his wife and twin sons who died in childbirth forty years earlier. The couple's unflagging efforts to befriend Ironbout, and an accident that could have resulted in his death were it not for Goodwin, touch the old man's heart and reawaken his desire to live. As a result, a secret is revealed, a mystery is solved, and Estillyen, under threat from a corporation that would have destroyed its mission in the world, is saved.

The author weaves the threads of his story deftly and often poetically, shaping phrases with a lilting rhythm that evokes the cadences of storytellers of old and enhances the aura of mystery that surrounds Estillyen and its inhabitants.

While vivid and lively, the "readings" tend to be long, and the sections devoted to Satan's adversarial remarks could be tightened up with no ill effect. Very few grammatical or typographical errors mar Jefferson's work.

With a passion for learning about the ways in which words shape individuals, societies, and cultures, Jefferson spent his professional career advancing Scripture mission programs through diverse forms of media. He has worked in leadership positions with the American Bible

Society, the International Bible Society (Biblica), the United Bible Society, and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; he holds graduate degrees in theology, media, and communications.

Jefferson's belief in the power of words to shape hearts and minds and his healthy respect for mystery and miracle are in evidence throughout *Messages from Estillyen*. "Scripture, from beginning to end, is lacquered and layered with mystery," one of his characters says. "Pitching the miraculous out of Scripture, yet clinging to a few verses promising passport to heaven, is not compatible with wisdom."

With its colorful and appropriately mysterious cover art, pleasing design, complex plot, and expressive characters, Jefferson's first novel should be a success with thoughtful Christian readers; it is a compelling tale told by a gifted and inspired storyteller.

Kristine Morris