ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

Words Jesus Spoke
James Vasquez
AuthorHouse
978-1-4520-7790-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

The poems in James Vasquez's poetry collection, *Words Jesus Spoke*, take some of Jesus' famous words, like his parables, and set them to traditional rhyming verse. Everything from the seven woes to the second coming and judgment are recounted in these poems. The more than fifty poems in this collection teach important lessons about humanity: honoring one's relationship with God and loved ones, the spirit of generosity, and the importance of prayer.

By means of rhyming, metered verse, the translation seeks to expand Jesus' ideas to reach more people. This method entails more than simply adding or subtracting a few words. Instead, this poet has to capture Jesus' words by carefully choosing how to frame the specific teachings. This is no easy task: purists may bristle. However, Vasquez manages the impossible task of a faithful translation while shaping subtle yet effective rhymes. The music in the poems allows the reader to access Jesus' words in a new and meaningful manner.

Vasquez is blessed with some serious writing chops: he is able to push the rhyme schemes in this piece by adding another layer of meaning to the poems. For example, rhyming "proceed" and "deed" in "Jesus' Prayer for His Followers" reiterates the lessons in a subtle manner. However, many of the poems in this collection have the same perfect or assonant rhymes—one syllable, based on the common vowels and sounds. More could have been done with such schemes—playing with syllables, playing more with the music within the line, as well as with multi-syllable word or rhyme play. Still, the faithful translation is straightforward and clear. The poems are accomplished enough to speak to both poetry experts and novices looking to experience Jesus' lessons and words.

A former pastor and retired professor, Vasquez has spent much of his life studying theology. The zest for this subject matter is clear in the straightforward translation of the Bible. Here, verse takes on a different shine. The lessons in this poetry collection will resonate with people of all backgrounds—religious and atheistic alike. After all, supporting mankind, practicing selflessness, and prescribing to do better are age-old lessons that have stood the test

of time. By the end, the reader understands that “Israel’s God / Had not forsaken all of his own.” Vasquez’s poems present the “destined fate” and “prophet’s words” on the silver plate of poetry so that all can see, hear, and understand Jesus’ lessons about forgiveness, faith, and love.

Lisa Bower