POETRY AND MEDICINE

Considering the Isenheim Altarpiece at Dialysis

Will Wellman

...and every fleisch schal se the heelthe of God.
Luke 3:6, Wycliffe Bible

Death done, we await birth.
It's always John we come to first—the anachronistic, already-beheaded Baptist—an exaggerated digit extending through space and time to slow us down and remind illum oporet crescare me autem minui before we settle, finally, upon the crucified.

In an Isenheim monastery, the sickly charges of Antonine brothers first saw this empathetic sufferer pointed to as release. Imagine the plagued ones' eyes arriving on the sickly gray Christ, his body pockmarked with the same sores they bared across their frames, the fire of St. Anthony unleashed by rotten rye.

In nine years of nephrotic failure I've yet to find the dialysis Christ, the messiah nailed with 15-gauge needles, tethered to the cleansing machine. What wonders I have known, yet I settled on signs giving myself to their empty terminus and not the possibility the horizon provides.