Everyday Thanksgiving

In wanderlust of eternity,
I travel streets of grace

I know the power of illusion.

But I find truth upon Your Face

(illusions crumble)

the b/ro/ke/nness have weakened bones and feeble flesh.

I trust in the Musician’s strings,
The One who makes the nation’s sing.
You are good
it’s understood
as days lead on……. to Day.

So
I
trust
in
You.

I long for bliss.

I send resounding praise.
You have *always* (in every single moment of my life) placed Your Hand upon me and I could not escape it.

I could not escape the love and the joy that had brought me even in the midst of dark hours in crooked roads.
You hem me in with mercy.
You have laid my sorrows upon the banks of Your glory.

Your glory, outshines them all.
Your holiness compels me in the arena of your steady sure activity

even in times of c h a o s you speak (a sensible soft Voice)
like a faithful father, Your Hand
on
my
shoulder.

I will be guided and I will be kept.

in flesh and blood,
gold and glory,
eyes of fire,
You tell the story.

Is Revenge Really Sweet?

There is a pernicious seed that is programed into the heart of almost every man. We see it in movies, books and even short 30 second commercial storylines. It’s revenge. There’s no telling how much money we’ve all shelled out at the box office to see the hero stick it to the man. We all love to see the evil genius outsmarted by the victimized underdog. The music swells, the truth is revealed, and the good guy rides off into the sunset making the world right for all the good guys and damsels previously in distress. And the villain lies vanquished in the mire of his own failed, wicked plans. Revenge triumphs! Most myths and legends proclaim the thesis that revenge is sweet.

The only problem with this fantasy is that **revenge doesn’t work**. Maybe in Hollywood, but there’s no “particular set of skills developed over a long career” that makes revenge satisfying in the long run. Our culture seems to run on revenge fuel. There’s a wide variety of revenge tactics such as angry tweets, public “gotcha” questions, and

straightforward verbal (or even physical) combat. Paul reminds us that the only one worthy of vengeance is God. Any path toward revenge is futile and terribly unsatisfying. Revenge fuel will gunk up the soul and lead down a perilous rabbit hole of dissatisfaction. The next time you find yourself marinating in a pool of vengeful scheme, turn your eyes upon the one righteous person who had every right to seek revenge as he suffered on the cross, offering forgiveness to his torturers while never compromising His values and identity. Embrace that vision and we will all understand the nature of godly manhood.

I love you. I must be going.

You can measure one's faith by their ability to move on. Jesus encountered many people who fawned and queried Him, looking to work out some kind of bargain, complete with caveats and clauses. He presents each follower with a moment. These moments connect us to a point of decision. When that moment comes, you'd better grab it because it's singular in transcendence.It transports you into both adventure and holy consequence. In Luke 9, we see three symbolic responses to the Jesus call. Each representing different ways

During times of hardships

The first declaring voice makes an enormous claim. The would-be follower meets Jesus on the road and says, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

So often I have longed for a 10 year plan. I've dreamed of putting down roots and knowing exactly where I will find

myself at the end of every day. I hate surprises and Uncle Murphy who shows up when everything that *can* go wrong *does*. He enters the arena of my personal world in force and fanfare. I don't like it. I hate it. I hate surprises. And I HATE MOVING BOXES. What will happen next? Only God knows and He won't tell. Sometimes life is void of parachutes, exit plans, and emergency funds. Sometimes we exit the scene of the fire, smelling like soot and hopping in the car of a loved one with little explanation, because life is *just* that unpredictable. Don't feel abandoned because you lack the certainty of addresses and schedules. He's there. He's just silent.

When we anticipate grief

Some of us see grief just around the corner instead of 10 years down the road. We catastrophize tomorrow and we say like Jesus' next potential follower, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." The context is probably not a hospice situation. Burying your father in that culture is committing to be there to the very end for your earthly community. This person's father could have been in perfect health and 40 years old. Jesus' response would seem terse and unsympathetic if the dad was presently at death's door but probably that was not the case. Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

We love to be tidy, even obligatory in life. But with Jesus, we don't loiter in the obituaries of our mind. We hug their necks, bid farewell and trust God. No one has funerals on their calendar months in advance. Life goes on and Jesus calls us into life which, at its core, can't be tethered to future sackcloths.

When we have to leave home

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service

in the kingdom of God.”

Sometimes our exits are protracted. We don’t know how to hang up the phone or walk out the door. We do postmortems where we look at our past and wonder if we could have left later. We burden ourselves with feeling of guilt for not being with the same people in the same town, facing the same problems. We have to stop rubbernecking our history and move forward. Sometimes you have to cry the tears, hug the necks, and pack it in- **all on the same day**. We don’t have time to worry about what will happen in our wake.

There has never been a time when I left a ministry, job or town that everything suddenly fell apart because I left. I can’t think that much of me. None of us are indispensable. You’ll be missed but the people you have to leave will be fine. Don’t idolize your importance to an organization or a community. To do so limits your perspective on the sovereignty of God.

So when you are faced with a sad, yet mandatory farewell and you find your beloved friends questioning, speculating and bargaining regarding your departure, here’s a good response: “I love you. I must be going.”

Our trust in God’s plan should be:

- **Unconditional**
- **Unwavering**
- **Undaunted**
- **Undeniable**

- **Unadulterated**

It means giving God a blank check.

Who am I?

I've asked myself this question for years now and I still see through a glass darkly. I am guided and shaped in the midst of my own perplexities. One fact counters the next, but this list is true. Everything else is still on the table.

I am loved by Christ . . .
often wrong
rarely strong
seduced by grace
fixed in place
soaked in tears
racked in fears
a mix of duality
I long for centrality
homesick
heaven bent
wounded, limping
yet surprisingly steady and quite unrelenting
rebel some days
deceived by the haze
this maddening, saddening, dazzling maze.
sick and then healed
with mercy revealed
faithful, bold, and perfectly formed
wandering, timid, disfigured and scorned
enigma, riddle, mystery, clue
firm, unchanging, promised, and true.

I put my hand over my mouth

It’s something in the core of most people: a desire to find out what or who causes messes. And no one likes to get the blame for a mess. As children we blamed our brother or sister for the broken vase and when we’re older we blame our self-sworn enemies for the broken world. And it is broken. The world is a mess and many just can’t do mess.

Cal Jarrett, the father in the 1981 movie, “Ordinary People” said to his emotionally distant wife:

“We would have been alright, if there hadn’t been any mess. But you can’t handle mess. You need everything neat and easy. I don’t know. Maybe you can’t love anybody. It was so much Buck. When Buck died, it was as if you buried all your love with him, and I don’t understand that, I just don’t know, I don’t… maybe it wasn’t even Buck; maybe it was just you. Maybe, finally, it was the best of you that you buried. But, whatever it was… I don’t know who you are.”

I’ve heard many explanations at the graveside, where people tried to explain or theologize accidents, cancer, or covid. These philosophical expeditions are fool’s errands. Others don’t blame, they just disconnect.

We’ve lived through a season of blame. Some blame the mandates, immune systems, fake news, Facebook, critical race theory, politicians, presidents, doctors, the masked, the unmasked, antifa, news outlets, millennials, boomers, China, political parties, and mandates. Blaming is what we do to make ourselves feel better. We feel more in control when we have an enemy we can attach to the post office walls of our souls. But that feeling becomes eventually void, brief and ephemeral. We

dig into our own feeble logic and construct belief systems that tie neat little bows over our limited and inadequate world view. Our nature is to forward blame to others so that we can feel better about ourselves and rationalize the root of anger that grows beyond the borders of our personal lives. This is Springsteen's darkness on the edge of town. We live in the shadows and snipe at our enemies from Twitter accounts and snarky memes.

One thing is certain: Blame keeps us in safe little bubbles where we don't have to engage. It works until we realize that the bubble is an eternally dangerous place to be. That bubble of isolation and stagnation leads to an insidious rot of the soul.

I've witnessed the birthing process. It's messy. There's pain, blood, sweat, snot, cries, and danger. I've also experienced graveyards. There's organization, specific dates, symmetry, and nice, tidy rows. But, I'd rather be in the labor room. You learn so much more.

Throughout the book of Job, we see men doing postmortems of tragedies that come in bunches. We've all had cascades of crises which appear together out of nowhere. The baby is sick, the car blows up and we get passed over for the promotion- all in one day. It's easy to ask the wrong questions when life gets dark and messy. The default is often, "Why?" "What did I do?" Or, perhaps, an even more insidious question, "Why is God doing this to me?" More often than not, these questions are pointless.

The meaning of the book of Job is found late in the fourth quarter after all the armchair quarterbacking is completed. God finally speaks. A lot. Finally. God asks him 46 answerless questions about the mysteries of His purpose. 46! How would you like ***that*** divine interrogation? I can relate to Job's response: "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth."

When God speaks all I can do is put my hand over my mouth.

When God speaks I get tired of my own opinions.

When God speaks I realize that maybe I should shut up about my theories for once.

When God speaks I realize that I'll never understand the world on this side of eternity.

I say like Job: I have spoken once, but I have no answer—twice, but I have nothing to add."

It brings Job to a majestic response: *Only God knows. His plans are much higher than my mind can fathom.*

There's a joy in not having to explain God, and simply trusting Him when troubles come in bunches. There's serenity when you hand the gavel over to the Almighty Judge of the universe. You don't understand? Well, guess what. You aren't God. How can I add anything to what God has already decreed and ordered in the timeline of His sovereign grace? I ask about injustice and He replies, "Go look at the elephant. I made that." I worry about the future, and He tells me to look at the birds.

I give up.

I put my hand over my mouth.

We're All a Mess

Years ago, our accountability group had a guy that hadn't quite made it to the "work-in-progress" level. He was wreck in progress! He's on his third marriage, second bankruptcy and

his first accountability partner. The thing about him was that he's just out there. Having him in our group made me feel like Billy Graham for about three seconds. Three seconds pass and then I remember that he's got nothing on me when it comes to spiritual wreckage. Some messes are just out there for the world to see. Other messes, more insidious issues, hide underneath the surface of our glossy exterior. These hidden issues are especially dangerous because they can slide under the radar; things like greed, resentment, ungodly ambition, and other secret saboteurs of the soul.

Psalm 130 underscores this ugly truth. We are all a wreck in a thousand different ways. We are wrecks, standing in the need of prayer, a day away from disaster. But the good news is found in the conjunctive sentence that follows: "But with You, there is forgiveness." (Ps 130:4a) I'm so glad that this is the next line in the song. I'm relieved that it wasn't something like: "With You I will hide in fear and hope that you don't see me." When we can't stand in our own righteousness, which is basically all the time, we have a Father who invites us to run to him for mercy and forgiveness. That's what is so powerful about confessing our struggles. All secrets lose their power in the light of their revealing. We are all on level ground in the presence of the Father. That's why we say that the Jesus way is gospel—good news of GREAT joy.

Father Forgive Them

This is the first episode of seven on "A Scattered Feast" Season three.

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I fell headlong into the chasm of my willful atrocities.
Some subtle and slight. Under the surface. Others are so visible I must tremble.
The level of my careless rebellion is undeniable.
Without a word of recompence I have stood, not knowing the grief I impose on almighty God.

But then

My soul is transported through time to thorn-crowned head of the dawn creator.
He remains
I hear his voice from the hill of mankind’s transgression
His voice reverberates through the centuries

Through wars, idolatry, conspiracy, and flesh borne insurrection.
Like the deep voice of a billion sorrows crystalized in that one moment of suffering
Father, the voice cries above the unseen hoards of demons and all too visible tormentors
Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.
Bludgeoned, beaten, challenged, ridiculed
His power unparalleled
Yet he remains
Yet not only remains. He calls for amnesty in the midst of annihilation

Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.
We hear Jesus uttering this prayer while enduring unthinkable agony
It’s personal. It’s unimaginable. But most of all, it’s mercy.
Mercy of the greatest kind.
And when I think of God his son not sparing sent him to die, I scare can take it in.
Father forgive them.
Father forgive the dogs that surrounded him
Father forgive the religious bigots who spewed malicious venom

and mocking rebukes
Father forgive Thomas who doubted
Peter who denied him.
And disciples who deserted him
Father forgive them.
And as he scanned the ions of centuries to come
He gazed through history.
He saw me and he saw you
Father forgive them.
They know not what they do.

Forgiveness is More about You Than Them

All was well in the Amish community in Lancaster Pennsylvania until a deranged man mercilessly shot 10 Amish girls and then turned the gun on himself in 2006. How did they respond to this shocking loss? Amazingly, the Amish community didn't blame. Instead, they reached out with grace and compassion toward the killer's family. They understood the importance of forgiveness, not for the killer's sake. He was dead. But for themselves. Why? Because living in unforgiveness is debilitating.

Most of us will not have to endure that depth of offense. Most bitter people didn't become a bitter person through the act of a single dagger. Most bitter people are dying from a thousand paper-cuts. The girl that rejected him… The backroom deal in the company that cost him a promotion… The humiliation experienced years ago from a father's rage… Whether we can reconcile the relationship or not, we must forgive.

We get stuck. We fantasize about vindication. We look at relationships surrounding the offense with malice. We cling to bitterness as our beverage of choice. We talk about it to people who have no business hearing of it. We dream about going back, doing things differently, saying something more damaging, or avoiding the offense. For many, this becomes a lifestyle that poisons every relationship they enter. It's insidious.

Jesus is clear on this. In order to be forgiven, you must forgive. That's easy to say but hard to do. And yet this is a primary hallmark of Christian manhood. It's a heart issue. Who knows? Forgiveness might just save your life.

> *"He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass." — George Herbert*

The Unseen Place

i long for the Unseen Place
not just Heaven□
no.
a place on earth
as it is□
where You are King□
and love reigns□
in everything□
my source
my guide□
and friend□,
show me the secret
and glorious end

amen



The Art of Emptiness

In an era when we idolize “big,” God challenges us to live a lowercase life, putting others before ourselves, giving rather than taking, serving rather than demanding, and dying to self rather than living for self. And it all begins with the first word of the greatest sermon:

“Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Who celebrates poverty of spirit? It is rarely even pursued. Yet, this one singular striving for less, has enormous benefits for the one who seeks it. Always little.



Little – be always little! Be simple, poor, childlike. Preach the Gospel with your life – without compromise! Listen to the Spirit. He will lead you.. Do little things exceedingly well for love of Me. Love… love… love, never counting the cost Go into the marketplace and stay with Me. Pray, fast. Pray always, fast. Be hidden. Be a light to your neighbor's feet. Go without fear into the depth of men's hearts. I shall be with you. Pray always.
Catherine Doherty's Little Mandate

Entering his presence. At the feet of Jesus, you discover the beauty of emptiness and dynamic dependance on God. At His feet you discover that you really don't need anything but the power of holy communion with him and His mysterious church. At His feet, we discover a perspective that transforms our daily, normal existence into a transcendent celebration of God's grace. Even in the littleness of today, we discover broken bread and poured wine at a table where little ones are welcomed.

Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
Psalm 84:10

Melting our motives. When we recognize our spiritual poverty, we begin to understand the absurdity of our own dwarfed dreams. We rise above the clamor of ambition, wealth, and

shadowy motives. We begin to understand that we when we stray, we tend to cast ourselves in the leading role of life and leave the Hero in the wings.

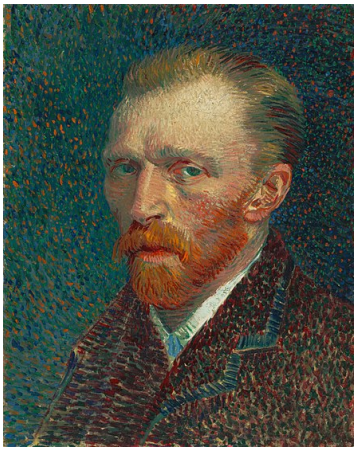
Purposing your heart. Carson McClures entitled her novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. She could have stopped with that one sentence. It says so much. Since the first day, our heart is hunting for love, purpose, safety, and belonging. One look into His eyes of Jesus, one glimpse of His glory, compels the heart to run to Him.

Trusting in his provision. The striving ends when we begin to trust the first truths in childlike wonder: *He's got the whole world in his hand.* We have the honor of observing God's work if we let go, and let Him do what he does best. He's been at this a long time. We can trust that he knows best.

Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee
And Thy beauty fills my soul
For by Thy transforming power
Thou hast made me whole
Oh, how great Thy loving kindness,
Vaster, broader than the sea
Oh, how marvelous Thy goodness
Lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved,
Know what wealth of grace is Thine
Know Thy certainty of promise
And have made it mine
Jesus, I am resting, resting
Jean Sophia Pigott

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:26

Yearning for his purpose. Once we are empty, God has room to work. He will carry us to our purpose which is, in truth, His purpose.



There may be a time in life when one is tired of everything and feels as if all one does is wrong, and there maybe some truth in it- do you think this is a feeling one must try to forget and to banish, or is it 'the longing for God,' which one must not fear, but cherish to see if it may bring us some good? Is it 'the longing for God' which leads us to make a choice which we never regret? Let us keep courage and try to be patient and gentle. And not mind being eccentric, and make distinction between good and evil.
Vincent Van Gogh