

A Sacred Connection

The child arrives on the planet and a new daddy shouts, and the grandparents weep with joy, but the mother is the first to see her child deeply. Children are born and you don't have to teach a mother or child how to feel love. They bring their love with them.

She sees her baby and realizes that the old saying is true- babies come through us but not from us. And God whispers the words He always whispers following another stroke of wonder: "It is good." He created the child and He created the relationship. There is a sacred connection between mother and child.

And the journey begins on that first day of life and the journey is filled with a vast collection of memories:

The first birthday cake

Mud pies

First steps

Bike rides on Christmas mornings

Lines on the door frame celebrating growth

Time out in the corner of a kitchen

A sudden illness followed by floods of concern

Healing and overwhelming relief

T-ball games

Goldfish funerals

Messy rooms

Adolescent brooding

Consoling heartbreaks

Failures and successes

ACTs And SATs and waiting nervously for results

Unexpected tears upon the realization that the journey into adulthood would soon be over.

The mother and the child

Their connection constantly changing and shifting over 17 years.

And as they back out of the driveway, boxes and memories stuffed away in the trunk, one last time they are off. This time not to camp, or a game, or a weekend but rather to a world of adventure that mothers and father release them to experience. They'll be back again and again- but the journey has begun. Their daily presence is gone.

But not the love.

A mother's love lasts, from birth, to childhood, through the teen years and beyond...

Endlessly unfolding...

The love never changes.

It is held in the mighty hands of Jesus.

Sometimes It's Hard to Sing

Every now and then, pain steals something so important to us. External forces or internal conflicts arise and over time, we discover that we have lost our song. How is it possible to sing when our hearts are heavy and our hope wanes?

You lose a friend to cancer. You are unjustly attacked. A child turns his back on you. Your heart is broken by the one person who promised to be with you until death. You lose a job, a dream or a destiny.

If that's where you've been or where you are, allow me to share a little blues from an old songbook called Psalms:

"By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. There we hung up our lyres on the poplar trees... how can we sing in a faraway land."

Psalms 137:1-2 & 4

It happens.

Our song is gone.

Psalms 137 is a snapshot in the story of God's people. We see life knocking the wind out of their lungs and now they enter into bondage on the wrong side of Babylon's rivers. The songwriter asks a question we ask ourselves: "How can you sing in the middle of defeat and loss?"

In the seams of this songbook called Psalms, we hear deep guttural cries of the brokenhearted. We've all been there. Maybe it's a friend, maybe it's a family member, an accountability partner or a maybe it's you. We have all experienced a time when we turn off the music because darkness flooded into the cracks of our souls. The Bible is filled with these dark moments. They are not censored out and hidden

obscurely. They are front and center. Why? *Maybe* it's because God wants us to know that in our darkest times, we enter into the fellowship of strugglers. We are not alone. We've never been alone. There's one thing for sure in this life: none of us gets a pass on adversity.

There is nothing more healing during a time of pain and sorrow than to connect with someone you love and hear the words "Me too." It's so simple! To find someone who's willing to admit that they struggle just as you struggle becomes an amazing healing agent. It takes the sting from the pain we face. We often find that our dirges become anthems of grace.

If you've lost your song I want to invite you:

- Sing your way out of it, even if it means singing the blues. (Psalm 30:11)
- Thank God for what you do have and don't focus on scarcity. (Philippians 4:6)
- As much as you'd prefer to climb under a rock, connect with someone who can support you. (Ecclesiastes 4:10-12)
- Don't look for the blame. It's a fool's errand. (Genesis 3:12)
- Rejoice in knowing that this event or circumstance will strengthen your character.
- Trust God's work in you. (Philippians 1:6)
- Do not internalize. Let yourself off the hook. (Romans 1:8)
- Be mindful of your body. Rest, nourish, and breathe deep. (Psalm 46:10)
- Don't just pray for escape, pray for God's glory to be revealed in the midst of it all. (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- Don't get paranoid. There isn't a target on your back. Really. (Romans 8:31)

Finally, I want to challenge all of us on the struggle bus to pray honestly. God hates a fake smile as much as anyone. Speak the truth. Make it plain. Don't hold back. God is not shaken

by your anger or emotions. He's a God who wrestles.

"One bold message in the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your disappointment—he can absorb them all." Phillip Yancey

In despair, look for a friend and be a friend. A friend who can enter into the sacred space without breathing a word of advice or analysis. Aah... That is a friend to keep and to be. Chances are you know what to do. You just need someone to walk alongside you as you search for your song.

Sooner or later you'll find your jam.

The First Words of The Resurrected Jesus

The seven last words of Jesus have been lauded in songs and art. But when we consider the first words of Jesus after the resurrection, we discover what this new reality and commission looks like for believers.

Let's take a look at seven of the first sayings of Jesus. All of them are found in John 20.

1. **"Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"** (John 20:15)

These two questions are ones we should ask ourselves every day. What are the source of our tears? What exactly are we seeking?

Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next." Frederick Buechner

Obviously I'm commandeering these questions as metaphors. There's truth there, though. We have many definitions for insanity but I would propose another: Insanity is not knowing what you are feeling and not knowing where you are going. That would be a start.

As believers, we call this mindfulness.

2. "Mary" (John 20:16)

May we be reminded that Jesus knows us, not only as the church, his bride, the mass of followers that began thousands of years ago. He knows our names. Each one of us. Jesus didn't lose his personal connection with Mary. He knows us by name as well. "Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine." Isaiah 43:1

As believers, we call this identity.

3. "Go to my brothers and tell them." (John 20:17)

He challenges us to do the same. As believers we should be constantly reminding each other that this resurrection life isn't some kind of brief, cryptic illusion. We must remind each other that this life is real and transforming. Throughout the walking of our days may we remind each other of the news we celebrated

on Easter Sunday: "He's not there. He is alive!"

"The message of Easter is that God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and that you're now invited to belong to it." – N.T. Wright

As believers, we call this mission.

4. "Peace be with you." (John 20:19&21)

Isn't it awesome to know that Jesus greetings to us all after the resurrection is "Peace be with you"? When all was said and done, the denying betraying and doubting... Peace was still in the cards of the disciples and peace is pronounced over us, as well. When it comes to peace, He's the prince of it. Don't miss the blessing of Shalom.

As believers, we call this blessing.

5. "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:21)

If we want to be faithful to Jesus, we have to do what He says. We must receive the Holy Spirit. This means that we must move from confession to possession. We must be possessed by the Holy Spirit who will give us the power to do what we could not do before.

As believers, we call this anointing.

6. "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they are not forgiven." John 20:23

The first sermon of the Resurrected Christ is forgiveness. It's always first on the agenda. Forgiveness is the opus, motif, rising action, grand finale and denouement of grace. It should be our foremost quest in all our relationships. We *must*

forgive.

As believers, we call this grace.

7. **“Stop doubting and believe.” John 20:29**

Just as He challenges Thomas, Jesus dares us to believe to trust him a little more, to love him a little more, to take one more step out of the boat and into the blue oceans.

“Every mental act is composed of doubt and belief, but it is belief that is the positive, it is belief that sustains thought and holds the world together.” – Søren Kierkegaard

As believers we call this faith.

These sayings should get us on our way in the post-resurrection maze of discipleship: identity, mindfulness, mission, blessing, anointing, grace, faith...

It's Sunday!

It's Sunday.

And Jesus is with us!

His obituary is in the paper and, for *goodness sake*s alive, He is sitting at our breakfast table!

He is supposed to be behind a stone, flanked by Rome's finest. Dead, dead, dead...

But instead He's hungry and wants fish this morning!

And where has He been since the crack of dawn?
Did He go looking for better followers?
Did He go looking for a new set of men who would actually
stick around in tough times?

No!

He went back to that ragtag bunch of deniers, doubters and
deserters.

Think about that! The King of kings and Lord of lords is
chasing after an unfaithful, deeply flawed family.

Jesus is with them. And He's with us too.

I don't know about tomorrow but I do know He'll be there.
Today, He made short work of the whole "death is the end"
theory.

The sting is gone.

Wonder is forever upon us.

May we live with an eye toward that wonder.

May we refuse to be cynical about life or people.

Instead, today, may we experience the newness of everything as
if it were our first day.

From today forward may we walk, sing, eat, work, play and
write as if it were our first chance to get to do any of them.

And may we do everything with deep gratitude, expectation and
dumbfounded surprise.

Today we get to begin again... because Jesus is with us.

It's Saturday

It's Saturday.

The tomb is sealed.

The guards are in position.

The sheep are scattered.

The light is gone.

There is nothing more than silence on the other end. These are the times when we look back and replay all our errors and missed opportunities. The words we should have said... The swords we should or should not have drawn. The flood of memories that we created. The feasts we should have savored at the time but were consumed by petty thoughts and motives that, on Saturday, seem so obtuse.

On Saturday we don't have answers. On Saturday we feel lost and duped. On Saturday we wonder if the loaves and fish were some sort of slight of hand and that lepers were not lepers after all.

But most of all, on Saturday, we just miss him. We wish we could see him laughing, telling stories, loving us unconditionally. On Saturday we pull out his clothes just for a last scent of the Divine.

On Saturday, we don't want to be around people that remind us of Him. On Saturday we long for one more embrace, one more story, even one more rebuke. Saturday— the day of emptiness, anger, and questions.

It's Saturday.

It's Thursday Evening

It's Thursday evening. Darkness falls on a Middle Eastern city and a group of men gather around a table. Some men want answers, others want power, others conceal their furtive motives and plans, and still others resign to die.

Tonight is different. In the past, their times of feasting were filled with so much laughter and celebration that some had accused them of irreverence and drunkenness.

But not tonight.

The brutal events and encounters of a tumultuous week birthed weary hearts and uncertain minds. Even now the weight of man's rebellion settles on the back of the Son. He broke the bread, poured the wine and washed the feet of these first believers. How were they to know the import of this table? How could these twelve conceive that they would be the first to partake of this new and strangely anomalous feast?

This is my body...

This is my blood...

Remember this moment.

And I reply,

"I remember You, Lord Jesus Christ Son of God. I remember your constant longing for me to see You for who You really are. I remember the times when I had absolutely no one and You remained. You remained despite all the shameful wanderings that I created in the barrenness of my finite mind. You remained, even though I failed to rise above the waves of discontent that made a restful place in my heart. You remained, and the memories of every disappointing failure now are crushed under the weight of Your relentless love."

We hear the strange and unthinkable declaration: *“One will betray me.”*

And in so many ways we all have.

The perimeter of conspiracy around these men grows smaller.

The unseen war of angels and demons is thick, visceral and taut.

This night and the day to come will amass the climax of redemption.

The fate of generations, hence and to come, hangs on every move.

As the meal ends, the disciples sing.

The last supper, the last song...

The labor of grace begins.

It's Thursday evening.

It's Wednesday

It's Wednesday. Jesus remains in Bethany among friends. He is cloistered, away from the opinions of the multitude. There is peace in Bethany.

(May we all have a Bethany.)

This day is silent, until a worshipper enters carrying a

year's salary in the form of a rare and exquisite ointment ornately encased. The assembly watches in disbelief. The vessel is broken and the aroma of worship fills the room. She has become weary of logic, caution, safety, investments and prudence. This is not the time for such things.

This is a time for

over-the-top,

reckless,

radical

unstoppable,

extreme,

extravagant

WORSHIP

Her only desire is Jesus. Her desire is fulfilled. This moment in history leads her to squander her riches on the head and feet of the soon-scarred Savior. Her hands drip with the oil of adoration. In one moment, one woman worships Him more than most will in a lifetime.

This is not a tithe, as the Pharisee would desire.

This is not a special missions offering, as the disciples would desire.

This is not retribution, as the legalists would demand for her sin.

This is overwhelming.

This is abandon.

This is worship.

This is bliss.

This is EVERYTHING she had.

This is Wednesday.

It's Tuesday Evening

It's Tuesday evening...

Jesus returns to Bethany after a day of long and difficult conversations with friends and those who sought to destroy Him. He speaks of whitewashed tombs, of a darkened moon, of sudden separations, of a wedding and of a return. It's all in there—prophetic signs, passionate pleas, stern rebukes and mysterious parables. Today, His words and actions seem frenetic and unyielding. Like a dying king, He has much to say and little time.

The triumphant voices of two days ago has disappeared. The dissonance of ambiguity and conflict has taken on a life of its own.

The storms of opposition are organizing. Some would call it doom. Others, fate. But Jesus knows the story. This is divine consequence for the sake of us all.

*Tuesday speaks of destiny
Hidden today, soon all will see
Feet that walk toward the cross*

*with purpose counting not the loss.
I see him, hope of all my need
This week- the center of our creed.*

As the sun sets, one disciple walks into the shadows... into the company of nefarious saboteurs. The wheels of betrayal begin to move. There is no turning back for any of them. Passover approaches once again . . . a remembrance of doors marked with lamb's blood. The table is set. For another day. It's Tuesday evening.

25 Collateral Lessons of Holy Week

This season we observe one complete, enormous truth: Jesus sacrificed His life for us. As the Bride of Christ observes the practice of Lent and Holy Week, we find other collateral truths hidden in the text that carry us throughout our lives. Here are 25 truths we can celebrate and remember through the coming days.

1. Our enemies are often tools for God's ultimate providence. Just as the Romans and Pharisees ultimately brought forth glory, the enemies we face God can be used to shape our story.
2. Jesus is faithful to act on our behalf even when we run away in fear.
3. The Old Testament prophecies are as mysterious as they are miraculous.

4. Jesus showed us how to rely on scripture in times of deepest adversity.
5. Often women remain at the foot of the cross as men hide.
6. The Jewish Passover was (and is today) a lesson about the mission of the Messiah.
7. Jesus entered into the suffering of our world and showed us how to overcome it.
8. We don't have to understand Jesus to be a follower. *"They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."*
John 16:18
9. On the day of atonement, the High Priest laid his hand on a scapegoat, sprinkled with blood, after washing his hands, the scapegoat is taken outside of the walls of Jerusalem to die. The priests and Roman government laid their hands upon Jesus, sprinkled in blood and after washing their hands, Jesus is taken outside the walls of Jerusalem to die.
10. Everything good thing that dies on a Friday eventually leads to a Sunday. *(Leviticus 16)*
11. Evil plots are often fuel for the providence of God. *"So from that day on they plotted to take his life."*
John 11:53
12. Love is being brave enough to watch their beloved die.
13. When we feel forsaken, we can shout to God. *(Psalm 22:1)*
14. Jesus stands before the Governor of Judea and says, "I was born for this." *(John 18:37)* Blessed be the one who rises above the pain to apprehend His purpose.
15. Hand your tombs to God and they will soon be empty.
16. Jesus was interceding for us over 2000 years before we were born.
17. When you hear a whisper deep in your soul saying, "The Lord has need of it," *(Luke 19:31)* Act immediately or you may be left out of the glorious story.
18. The severed ear of Malchus reminds us that Jesus doesn't need anything- no time, no technique, no tools, to restore the severed parts of your life. He just does it.

It's simply what He does. And often He does it before you even ask. (*Luke 22:51*)

19. As Jesus knitted the life of his mother to John, He is also concerned that you have the relationships you need in your darkest hours. (*John 19:26*)
20. You don't have to respond to the words of your critics or those that question you. (*Matthew 26:63*)
21. God turned the most profane and ugly symbol of death (the cross) into the most universal icon the world has ever known.
22. When it comes to your sin, the score has already been settled. *It is finished.*
23. If you choose to waste your treasures, waste them at the feet of Jesus.
24. *But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" John 19:15*—Be careful when you call for anyone's head, it might be the head of your Savior.
25. We are still so fixated with garments that we don't even realize the glory. (*John 19:24*)

I'd love to hear what Jesus is teaching you.

May God continue to pour out his mercy and grace upon us all.

Holy Rags and Water

On the night of His betrayal, we enter a room of remembrance.

The age-old ceremonial question from the Pesach Haggadah—"Why is this night different from all other nights?" would never be as relevant as it is tonight.

We see Jesus as host and caregiver. He would feed. He would gather. He would reassure. and he would wash. A maternal

glimpse into the eternal Savior... The Master of the feast became the Servant. We see Him with water, basin and towel, baptizing the feet of His friends including a betrayer, a denier, and a skeptic. Yes, they are there too.

When we see Jesus stooping before the dusty feet of these men, we see Him as rabbi and deliverer of a helpless newborn infant called "The Church."

As I witness this seminal gesture of grace, I look into his eyes and I see a host of friends; brothers and sisters.

I see the mother of an autistic son who gives daily to one unable to return love.

I see a family gathering around the bed of their dying matriarch singing "How Great Thou Art" as she silently mouths the words until her breath is no more.

I see the son, whose father is seized by the cruelty of dementia. The father doesn't recognize him and flies into rage without a clue of cause. Still the son returns to ease His pain and day after day hoping for at least one good day this week.

I see the wife whose world has been shattered by her husband's five month affair. Even with unimaginable wounds, she chooses to forgive and is welcoming him back, for better or for worse, until death do they part.

I see the minister at the homeless shelter praying with an man fighting for his sobriety. It's been five days— with no food, bath, or shelter— only whiskey. But the minister is there to offer him hope.

I see the volunteer in the hospice, feeding ice chips to ease the suffering of a woman whose family is too broken to attend to her.

I've witnessed all these people and when I do I hear the sound

of holy rags and water, dusty feet. And I see the eyes of my King.

What an honor to personally know all these people. They remind me that the glorious incarnation is all around us.