

2019 Lenten Music and the Word
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Glimpses: Stories of Wonder and Grace

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NRSV)

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

The two shortest verses in the Bible are John 11:35, “Jesus wept” and 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Rejoice always.”

These two verses sum up well how we live simultaneously in two overlapping worlds, of:

Crucifixion and resurrection.
The already and the not yet
The passing world and the world yet to come.

We are citizens of heaven, yet earthlings—sons of Adam and daughters of Eve.

The Kingdom of God on earth has been likened to the waves that wash upon the shore. Waves that wash up and then recede back to the sea, only to return again.

In the same way, God’s wonder and grace wash upon us, receding and returning, returning and receding. We rejoice and we weep. We give thanks and we lament. We pray and we keep silence. God is present with us through it all.

These earthly glimpses of glory and traces of grace ebb and flow, but will one day be transformed to heavenly billows of glory that will wash over us forever and ever.



Scripture: Romans 5:1-2 (NRSV)

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

After forty years of faithful service to the Lord as a missionary to Africa, Henry Morrison and his wife were returning to New York to retire. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. As the ship neared the dock, Henry said to his wife, "Look at that crowd. They haven't forgotten about us". However, unknown to Henry, the ship also carried President Teddy Roosevelt, returning from a big game hunting trip in Africa. Roosevelt stepped from the boat, with great fanfare. The people were cheering, flags were waving, bands were playing, and reporters waiting for his comment. But Henry and his wife slowly walked away unnoticed. They hailed a cab, which took them to the one-bedroom apartment which had been provided by the mission board.

Over the next few weeks, Henry tried, but failed to put the incident behind him. His wife urged him to take his disappointment to God in prayer.

Henry Morrison went to his bedroom, got down on his knees and began pouring out his hurt to the Lord.

After about ten minutes of wrestling with God, Henry returned to the living room with a peaceful look on his face. His wife said "It looks like you've resolved the matter. What happened?"

Henry replied, "The Lord settled it for me. I told Him how bitter I was that the President received this tremendous homecoming, but no one even met us as we returned home.

When I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and simply said,

'But Henry, you're not home yet!'"



Scripture: John 10: 1-3, 10-11 (NRSV)

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

The Palestinian shepherd has some basic equipment.

A **sling** to shoot stones at wolves or animals of prey or to get the sheep's attention.

A **staff** for moments of threat when the shepherd would put himself between the vulnerable sheep and the wolves.

A **rod** to catch and pull back sheep from danger. At the end of the day, when the sheep went back into the pen, they would have to pass under the shepherd's rod as he counted them.

The Palestinian Shepherd had a special relationship with his sheep. The sheep were kept more for their wool than their meat—so they were in this together for the long-haul.

The Shepherd had names for each of the sheep—like our pets that we love and care for today: Black Leg, Brown Ear, Long Ears, White Nose.

Shepherds could communicate with their sheep in special ways—almost in the way that we can train dogs to sit or roll over.

It was not uncommon for two shepherd flocks to get intermingled during the middle of the night. To get their sheep back, one of the shepherds went into the distance and made his unique call. All of his sheep came out of the other flock and followed their shepherd's voice in the dark safely home.

The Lord is my shepherd and we are the sheep of his pasture and he calls us each by name and we follow.



Scripture: Matthew 28:1-7 (NRSV)

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

Jesus brought about the death of death by his death.

The abundant life of Christ is just too much for death.

And so we are a resurrection people because we are in Christ—the crucified and risen Christ.

But—and there always seems to be a "but"—there are some who could not see the glimpse of wonder and grace revealed in the resurrection story. They said it wasn't true!

They made up lies and tried to ruin it for everybody.

Yes, it seems like something, or someone, always has to spoil things for us.

Like a fly in the ointment —



Psalm 8:1 (NRSV)

“O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.”

The heavens are showing and telling the glory of God.

When we see the heavens, the work of God’s hands—

The mystery of the Chiricahua Mountains or the majesty of Havasupai Falls, the moon and the stars, and the Arizona sunsets, all we can say and sing is, “How Great Thou Art!”

Yet at the same time, we know these majesties and mysteries are only scratching the surface. This side of heaven, we’re still gazing through a dark glass into the great and glorious unknown that awaits us.

There’s more than this. The best is yet to come.

Amen.



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