

Giving thanks in hard times: With Jesus in the way of the cross

John 11:41



If you have your Bible, turn with me to the book of John, chapter 11, verse 41.

Our theme for today is (read title). Voices of Hope. Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship.

Last fall, Pastor Mike encouraged us to reflect on thanksgiving regularly over the course of this year. Palm Sunday is coming up soon, and after that Easter Sunday. It seems particularly appropriate to think about thanksgiving as we approach the Passion week, the week when many Christians around the world commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What do we learn from Jesus about giving thanks in hard times, as he approached the cross?

Giving thanks in hard times: With Jesus in the way of the cross

*So they took away the stone.
Then Jesus looked up and said,
'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'
(John 11:41)*

For we find Jesus giving thanks in John 11:41: (Read).

This is a prayer we can always pray. If we don't know how to pray, no matter what the circumstance in our lives, it's always appropriate to thank God that he hears us.

The setting for this prayer is the story of Lazarus, whom Jesus was about to raise from the dead. But he hadn't raised Lazarus yet when he prayed this thanksgiving prayer.

We'll save much about this story for when we get to it in Discipleship class, as we work our way through the gospel of John.

Today let's look at 6 points related to how it is that in this circumstance Jesus prays with thanksgiving to his Father, as an affirmation of relationship. We'll jump around in chapter 11 according to these 6 points, rather than working our way through the story verse by verse.

1. Jesus waited.

We wait in hard times when God seems hidden.

As we begin the story, we discover that Jesus waited. We wait in hard times when God seems hidden from us.

1. Jesus waited.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha... So the sisters sent word to Jesus... When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory..." So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

(John 11:1–7)

(READ) When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, what did he do? He waited. He deliberately did not come. God's glory is often hidden from our view. God's providence is a mystery to us. In this mystery, we find ourselves in hard times. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were faced with the mystery of the hiddenness of God. Do you know how that feels?

The Shack

- Great sadness
- Mystery of the hiddenness of God
- Place of healing



It's been a year since The Shack movie came out. In both the book and the movie, the Shack building stands for three things at once: a Great sadness that has overcome Mack, the mystery of the hiddenness of God, and, surprisingly, the very place of healing, for we end up meeting God right in the middle of our Shack. Consider watching The Shack, or reading the book, again this Lenten season, before we enter in a few weeks into remembering the Passion of Christ. So when Jesus waited and did not come, Mary and Martha were in their own Shack, so to speak, to say nothing of Lazarus himself, as he lay dying.

1. When Jesus waits... we wait upon him.

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"
(Psalm 42:1-3)

When God seems hidden, what will we do? What can we do? We will wait upon the Lord. It is a mystery why we must wait for him, but while waiting, we will wait upon him. • The Psalms are our prayerbook for waiting upon the Lord. READ.

1. When Jesus waits... we wait upon him.

I waited patiently for the Lord...

(Psalm 40:1)

In my time of waiting, I waited upon the Lord.

(READ). • Francis Schaeffer translated this verse as: “In my time of waiting, I waited upon the Lord.” There are many different ways to wait. For us who believe, we not only wait, we wait upon God. A dog may appear to be lying down, while actually waiting alertly upon its master, ready to arise at the first signal. In the same way, we wait not passively, but actively upon the Lord. In their time of waiting, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus. They waited upon him, turning themselves in full attention to him.

1. Jesus waited.

We wait in hard times when God seems hidden.

So that's #1. Jesus waited. There's nothing wrong with us when we have to wait. We will wait upon God, even when he seems hidden.

2. Jesus loved him.

Nothing about waiting in hard times makes sense unless we know that Jesus loves us.

2. Jesus loved him.

(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, **the one you love** is sick.” (vs. 2-3)

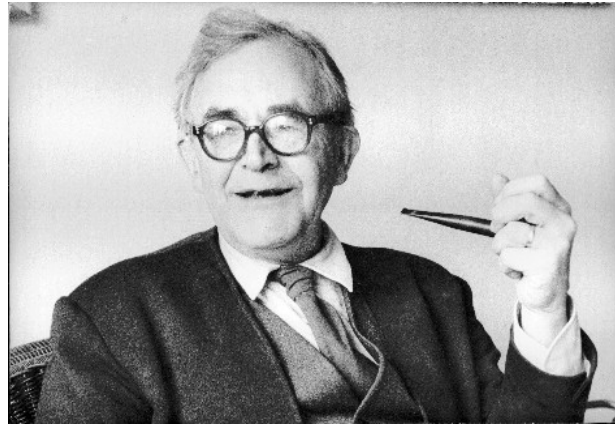
Now **Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus**. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days...” (vs. 5-6)

Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “**See how he loved him!**” (vs. 35-36)

READ. Unless we too, like Mary and Martha and the onlookers, know how deeply Jesus loved Lazarus, nothing about this story makes sense. The mystery is that it is because Jesus loved them, that is the reason he waited! This was a mystery to them, but it was true. He loved them, so he waited. Because of this trial, they will receive the privilege of participating in the revelation of the glory of Jesus and the coming of many Jewish friends to know that Jesus is the Christ. And because of this trial, their own faith will be greatly strengthened. But all this and more lies in the future, hidden from them now.

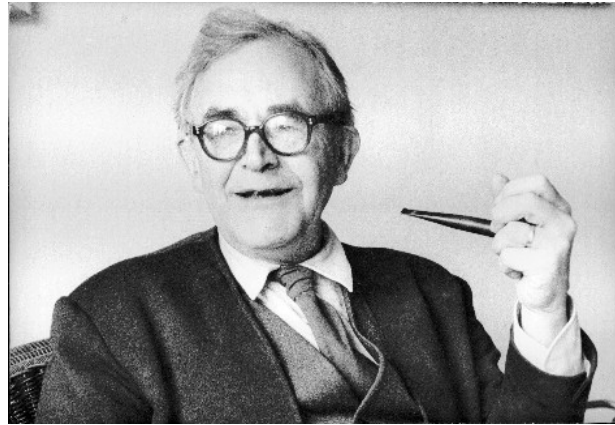
Unless we believe that Jesus loves Mary, Martha and Lazarus with all of his heart, nothing about this story will make any sense. Only if we believe and know that Jesus loves us thoroughly, can we wait with thanksgiving in the hard times, before his glory is revealed. Jesus loves you with all of his heart, and he has always loved you, before you ever made any response to him.

2. Jesus loved him... Jesus loves me.



It would take many years to read all of the books written by Karl Barth, one of the most notable theologians in the entire history of the Church. Yet late in life, someone asked Barth what he had discovered through all that study.

2. Jesus loved him... Jesus loves me.



"Jesus loves me,
this I know,
for the Bible
tells me so."
Karl Barth

Barth answered: (say it with me)

“Learning to
live loved”



Similarly, Paul Young summarized the meaning of the Shack as learning to live life loved. Given the hiddenness of God in his life, Mack, the main character, is astonished to learn that Papa and Jesus and Sarayu all are especially fond of him. Reading the book or watching the movie is a great way to let the fact seep into your soul that God actually, really, unconditionally loves you, no matter how remote from you he may seem to be.

2. Jesus loved him.

Nothing about waiting in hard times makes sense unless we know that Jesus loves us.

So...

3. God hears us.

Nothing about waiting in hard times makes sense unless we know that God hears us.

Next, #3: God hears us. But “If God loves us, and hears us, then why doesn’t he rescue us?” Unless we know that God loves us, and that he hears us, the waiting makes no sense. Thanksgiving in the way of the cross is possible only when we know: **God hears us when we cry, knows us intimately and loves us thoroughly.** Nothing about waiting in hard times makes sense unless we know that God hears us.

3. God hears us.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here...” (vs. 21)

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here...” (vs. 32)

READ. Mary and Martha both had faith, if only Jesus had been there. If only he hadn't waited. This thought must have preoccupied their minds in the preceding days. But even when God appears hidden from us, he actually hears and knows. Out of this experience of the hiddenness of God, the faith of Mary and Martha will grow, into a deeper understanding of his love.

3. God hears us.



One of my favorite images from The Shack is Sarayu's tear jar. Do you remember it? The mystery is that while God may seem hidden from us, we are not hidden from him. God loves us, hears us, knows our tears. He feels and collects every one.

3. God hears us.

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God **heard** their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites – and God **knew**.

(Exodus 2:23–25)

READ. God hears the cries of our hearts, and knows the groanings too deep for words.

What is it like when God hears us? Psalm 18

The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he **heard** my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

(Psalm 18:4–6)

What is it like when God hears us? (READ)

What is it like when God hears us? Psalm 18

Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains
trembled and quaked, because he was angry.
Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.

(Psalm 18:7-10)

Nostrils— like a war horse, snorting with anger

What is it like when God hears us? Psalm 18

He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water.
Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.
(Psalm 18:10-12)

What is it like when God hears us? Psalm 18

The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice,
hailstones and coals of fire.

And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.

Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare
at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

(Psalm 18:13-15)

Nostrils — anger — like a war horse

What is it like when God hears us? Psalm 18

He sent from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of many waters.
He rescued me from my strong enemy
and from those who hated me,
for they were too mighty for me.
They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
but the LORD was my support.
He brought me out into a broad place;
he rescued me, because he delighted in me.

(Psalm 18:16-19)

The day of my calamity is not the end of the story. There is rescue in the end, by the Lord, who hears us.

3. God hears us.

Jesus... came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "**Father, I thank you that you have heard me.** I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

(John 11:38–43)

(READ) Jesus knew that his Father would hear him. Jesus called out to his father before he called out to Lazarus, to show us that he and his Father work together. They have the same heart.

Mr Rogers: When there is a tragedy, don't look just at the suffering. Look for the helpers. And that's where we will see God. God is in it, helping. Look to Jesus, and give thanks to the Father that he always hears what the Son is saying.

3. God hears us.

Nothing about waiting in hard times makes sense unless we know that God hears us.

READ. God hears us when we cry, knows us intimately and loves us thoroughly. In the end, he will part the heavens and come down. In the end, he will call to us, come forth!

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

Thanksgiving only makes sense as a response to the God who loves us and hears us.

Now point #4: (READ) Thanksgiving is not an emotion; Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship, regardless of the array of emotions we are caught up in.

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

(John 11:31–37)

(READ)

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(John 11:31–37)

Does Mary’s weeping show a lack of faith? No. The word for weeping means a loud wailing — as is customary in other cultures, not so much in America. Despite the comfort of knowing our future destiny, of life in the resurrection, a faith shared by her sister Martha, it is important to weep at the loss of a loved one. Weep with those who weep. Mary speaks confidently of Jesus because she knows the depth of his love for Lazarus. But it is a time for weeping together, weeping with Jesus. Weeping does not deny the hope that is in Jesus. Thanksgiving is not an emotion.

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(John 11:31–37)

Who else was weeping? Jewish friends. Sorrow perhaps prepared them for belief in Jesus, for many believe in Jesus at the end of the story.

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(John 11:31–38)

What emotions did Jesus feel in this passage? Sorrow. Grief. Anger. Jesus wept with them, and he didn’t have a lack of faith. This is a different word than Mary’s weeping, but it’s not to be underestimated, for his love was obvious to the Jews because of his tears. True depth of sorrow. Unless we too, like Mary and Martha and the Jewish friends, know how deeply Jesus loved Lazarus, nothing about this story makes sense. Jesus weeps with us: a man of sorrows, who shares our grief. Where is God? He is in the middle of the mess; he is not aloof, watching us from a distance. If we could see him, He is in there weeping with us. Jesus’ humanity is real; he has taken upon himself all of our suffering, our griefs, our pain, and our righteous anger at the destruction and harm to his good world. Thanksgiving only makes sense as a response to the God who loves us and hears us and is with us in the midst of the sorrow and pain. Thanksgiving can occur alongside any emotion. Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship, regardless of the array of emotions we are caught up in.

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ... Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

(John 11:31–38)

The word translated “Deeply moved” is the same word used for the Nostrils — snorting with anger — of a war horse (as in Psalm 18). It could be translated “Fury.” Occurs twice for emphasis. Why was Jesus furious, and what was his anger directed toward? Anger at all the brokenness and destruction in our world. It’s the anger of love, determined to destroy death itself. Jesus knows our world of death and sorrow; he does not hold himself back, but plunges into it to be “God with us” right where we are.

This is the final episode in the gospel of John before his passion week. With this raising of Lazarus, Jesus is provoking the response by the religious leaders that will lead to his own death. His anger at the death of Lazarus displays his resolve to defeat death once for all in the week ahead. He is going to really do something about it — not here at the tomb of Lazarus, which is just a sign, but on Calvary, and triumphing by rising from his own tomb. Raising Lazarus will cost him his life. By choosing to raise Lazarus, he is committing himself to the course ahead, the way of the Cross. From here there is no turning back. Again, when Jesus gave thanks, it was in the context of sorrow, grief and anger. Thanksgiving is not an emotion; Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship, regardless of the emotions.

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

(Job 1:20-21)

We see something of that kind of affirmation of relationship in hard times with Job, who responded to God with praise. READ.
So we sing: “In a land that is plentiful... blessed be your name... And blessed be Your name On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering Blessed be Your name...”

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

Johann Kepler,
*Harmony of the
Universe* (1619)



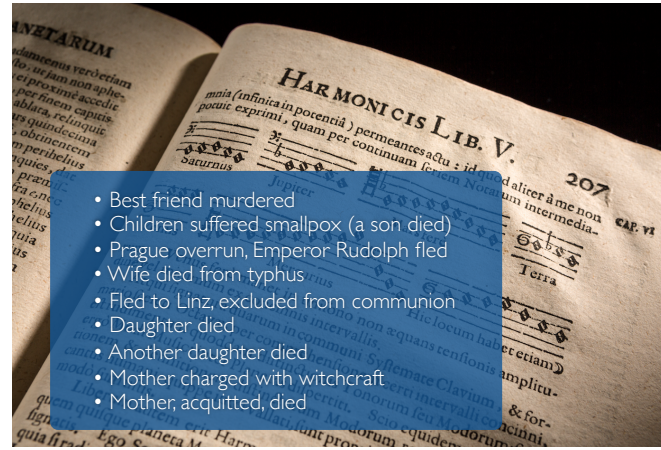
Johann Kepler is another person whose giving thanks in hard times inspires me.

In this book, he presented for the first time all three of the laws of the motions of the heavens that he is famous for. They are still used today. He presented them in the form of musical notation, but they still guide NASA spacecraft to distant planets, and explain how galaxies revolve in a majestic ballet around other galaxies.

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

"Holy Father, keep us safe in the communion of our love for one another, that we may be one just as Thou art with Thy Son, Our Lord, and with the Holy Spirit, and just as through the sweetest bonds of harmonies Thou hast made all Thy works one..."

I give you thanks, Creator and God, that you have given me this joy in thy creation, and I rejoice in the works of your hands." (Kepler)



- Best friend murdered
- Children suffered smallpox (a son died)
- Prague overrun, Emperor Rudolph fled
- Wife died from typhus
- Fled to Linz, excluded from communion
- Daughter died
- Another daughter died
- Mother charged with witchcraft
- Mother, acquitted, died

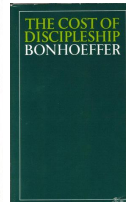
Kepler's vision truly was cosmic, of a cosmic hope and consolation amidst earthly sorrow. During the writing of this treatise, -- his best friend was murdered; --his children contracted smallpox (which killed his son); --Prague was overrun with violence and his employer, emperor Rudolph, forced to abdicate; --and his wife died from typhus (all of these 1611). --In 1612 at Linz, the Lutheran pastor excluded him from communion because of his sympathy for Calvinists, a prohibition which was enforced in spite of Kepler's repeated appeals. --In 1617 and --1618 two daughters died, --Kepler defended his mother against charges of witchcraft and threats of torture (she had enjoyed cooking suspicious mushrooms and spiking friends' drinks with hallucinogens; --though finally acquitted, she died six months later). Yet God sustained his faith: • (prayer).

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.



Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving,
even to the dregs of pain, at Thy command,
we will not falter, thankfully receiving
all that is given by Thy loving hand.

New Year's 1945
Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Just a few weeks before his execution, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned this poem in a Nazi concentration camp:
READ.

4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.

Thanksgiving only makes sense as a response to the God who loves us and hears us.

So giving thanks and hard times go together. Thanksgiving is not an emotion. Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship. Yet for Job, Kepler, and Bonhoeffer, thanksgiving was not a heroic reliance upon their own resources; rather, thanksgiving only makes sense as a response to the God whom we know loves us and hears us. Even for Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, determined to press on in the way of the Cross, giving thanks was not a ritual act but a spontaneous expression of an intimate relationship with the Father. Thanksgiving is an affirmation of relationship.

5. Jesus prays for us.

Our feeble praying in hard times only makes sense if Jesus himself prays for us.

I don't know about you, but I don't always respond like Job, Kepler, or Bonhoeffer. I don't meet hard times with thanksgiving. So what about when circumstances just knock us back on our heels, and we have no resources within ourselves to pray like that?

Point #5: (READ)

5. Jesus prays for us.

Then Jesus looked up and said, “**Father, I thank you that you have heard me.**

I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

(John 11:41-42)

We already saw in vs. 41-42 that Jesus prayed not only for himself, but for others, and by implication, for us. “I said this for the benefit of the people here, that they may believe...”

5. Jesus prays for us.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

(Luke 22:31–32)

We see on another occasion that he prayed for Peter. READ. Even Peter did not stand or fall by his own resources, but by the intercession of Jesus.

5. Jesus prays for us.

Lazarus, come forth!

(John 11:43)

READ. Look at the faith of Lazarus. Although in life Lazarus believed in Jesus, now at 4 days in the tomb, Lazarus did not summon up enough resources to pray and cry out to God in hope that God would hear him. Lazarus was not raised by his faith, but by the call of Jesus. I'm more like Lazarus, dead in my faith, than like Bonhoeffer or Job. But just as he called forth Lazarus from the grave, so Jesus prays for us.

5. Jesus prays for us.

Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, for **he always lives to intercede for them.** Such a high priest meets our need... (Hebrews 7:23-26)

We do have such a High Priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven... (Hebrews 8:1)

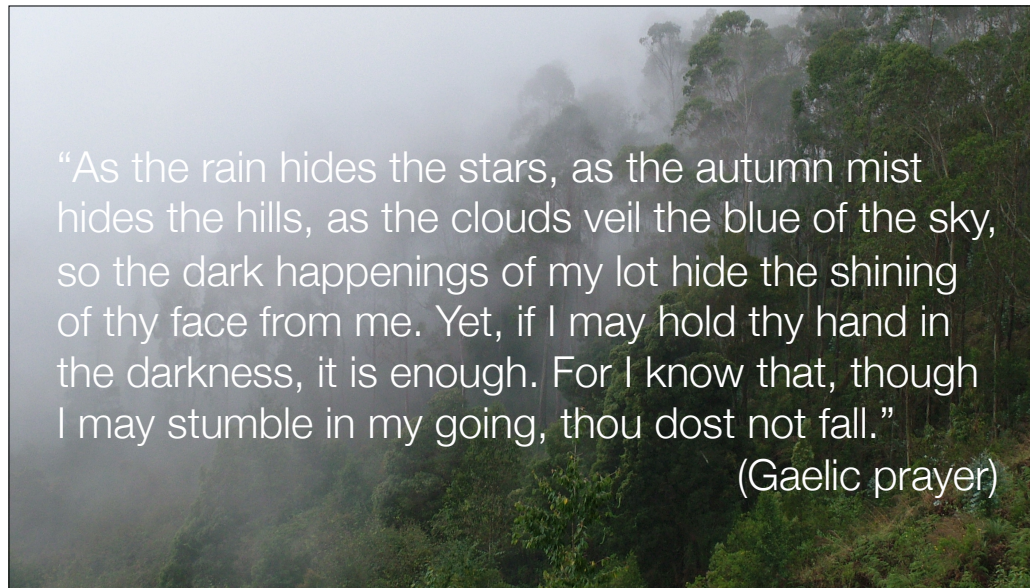
Jesus is our high priest. (READ) When we can't bring ourselves to believe God hears us, when God seems hidden behind a veil, we can ask Jesus to make his prayer our own. Jesus prays on our behalf and in our place. He always lives to intercede for us. He offers thanksgiving and intercession in our place.

5. Jesus prays for us.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

(Romans 8:26)

READ. The Spirit also, takes up our groanings, like the groanings of the Hebrew slaves we mentioned earlier. Although God may seem hidden from us in hard times, The Father, Son and Spirit are not remote from us, but closer to us than our griefs and sorrows.



“As the rain hides the stars, as the autumn mist
hides the hills, as the clouds veil the blue of the sky,
so the dark happenings of my lot hide the shining
of thy face from me. Yet, if I may hold thy hand in
the darkness, it is enough. For I know that, though
I may stumble in my going, thou dost not fall.”

(Gaelic prayer)

READ. The emphasis is not on our faith, but on the faithfulness of Christ. It's not our grip on Jesus that counts so much as his grip on us.

<http://7art-screensavers.com/free-clipart/mountain-mist-trees.shtml>

5. Jesus prays for us.

Our feeble praying in hard times only makes sense if Jesus himself prays for us.

READ. We are too weak to pray. Yet Jesus makes his prayer of thanksgiving our own.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

*Lazarus' story was a sign of **who Jesus is**
(and what he was about to do for all of us).*

Finally, point #6:

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life.** Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

(John 11:23–27)

READ. “Your brother will rise”; that’s the truth we’re waiting for. This comfort is for all of us when a loved one dies. Jesus is himself the answer; Truth has a name. Jesus is gently reminding them of what they already know. But in the mystery of waiting, God is helping them grow in belief. God reveals his glory all the more clearly because of the waiting. As the cross was drawing near, those close to him would need the boost of faith this sign would bring. The resurrection of Lazarus is a sign for us, also, that we might believe Jesus is our resurrection and life. “Do you believe this?”

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life.** Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that **you are the Christ, the Son of God**, who is coming into the world.”

(John 11:23–27)

How does Martha respond? (READ last sentence.) Martha’s confession: What a startling declaration of belief! She confesses who Jesus really is! (Even the twelve disciples had difficulty affirming this.)

And Martha’s faith will only grow deeper a few moments later when she will witness Lazarus coming forth from the tomb. Her faith is based not on what Jesus does, in raising Lazarus, but on Who Jesus is, the Messiah, the Son of the loving Father. The Who question is always the central thing. Who is Jesus? We can wait if we center on The Who, rather than dwell on the What, When or Why.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



"Corage, God mend al."
George MacDonald

George MacDonald was a 19th century writer who influenced C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Paul Young and many others. • This is his bookplate.

The lower half of MacDonald's bookplate illustrates the hope of an old man, with a walking stick, hunched over, going into a tomb.

The upper half shows the resurrection, as he emerges above the tomb as a new man, his hope realized, looking heavenward.

• Across the doorway of death, MacDonald inserted an anagram he created from his name. Courage, God mend all.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



“But if you believe that the Son of God died and rose again, your whole future is full of the dawn of an eternal morning, coming up beyond the hills of this life, and full of such hope as the highest imagination for the poet has not a glimmer of yet.”

George MacDonald

A quote from one of MacDonald’s sermons seems to describe the bookplate:

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table...

When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

(John 12:1-2, 9-11)

To me, the figure in MacDonald's bookplate recalls Lazarus. Lazarus got the worst of the deal; he had to die again. In fact, he must have suspected that his second death would come sooner rather than later. Perhaps he was called to be an early martyr for Jesus; the Jews called for his murder in very short order. (READ) Corage, God mend all. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were all united in hope that Jesus is our resurrection and life. For this whole affair had been a sign to them to help them grow in their faith, and a call to them inviting them to participate in the way of the Cross with Jesus.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”

(John 11:40)

READ. Scripture is not saying that seeing the glory of God is conditional on having enough faith. Mary, Martha and Lazarus already believed and trusted Jesus. But as with the disciples, the sign of Lazarus was given to help them GROW in their faith. They already believed in Jesus, and now he performs a miracle beyond their belief. He is leading them on the path of growing in their trust in him, from faith to faith. Read the verse with an “as” instead of an “if” (“as you believe you will see the glory of God”). Shift the emphasis away from achieving enough faith as a required precondition, to a journey, a process of growing in faith.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

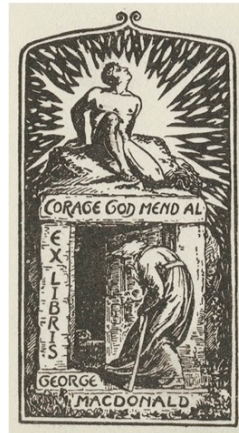


Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that as you believe you will see the glory of God? ...I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me."

(John 11:40-43)

READ last sentence. Even in hard times, as we wait for Jesus to come, our faith in him will grow as we begin to see that he loves us and God hears him. As we give thanks in hard times, others may believe that Jesus has come, and hears them, and understands the cries of their hearts as well.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him..."

(John 11:45-48)

READ. Unbelief is not for lack of signs. The Pharisees said they believed in the resurrection, so wouldn't they embrace the raising of Lazarus as a proof of their position? Jesus challenged them to believe in HIM, not in a doctrine, however true. Miracles by themselves do not persuade anyone. The raising of Lazarus was of no benefit, if their hearts were not already opened to Jesus, perhaps from witnessing Jesus' tears and his giving thanks to the Father. I suspect that the Jews who DID believe in him were the ones who wept with Mary and Martha; and who then marveled at how Jesus wept along with them. These were likely also the ones who heard Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and through that prayer began to understand his relationship with the Father. When we give thanks in hard times, when thanksgiving arises as a response to God, out of our sense that God loves us and hears us, as an affirmation of relationship rather than a religious duty, then it may open people's hearts and eyes to what God is doing in them and around them.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.



“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.” (Psalm 50:23)

Until we give thanks, we see only in black and white (left side). When we start to give thanks, we take off our greyscale glasses; and our eyes are opened to color vision (right side). Thanksgiving is a window to reality; our chief means of seeing who Jesus really is. It is an initial step we can take to affirm our relationship with God in hard times.

- (READ) By giving thanks, we shift our attention from our own view of the world to Who Jesus is, the resurrection and the life. We shift our attention to how he loves us, knows us, hears us, and has raised us to live by the Spirit in the power of his resurrected life. We begin to see what he is doing right in our midst, which we couldn't see before. How much do we miss in black and white! How much do we miss of Jesus hearing us, loving us, being in our midst, unless we give thanks! It's the WHO question that matters. Who is Jesus, not why did he wait.

6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

*Lazarus' story was a sign of **who Jesus is**
(and what he was about to do for all of us).*

So that's our last point: READ. Courage, God will mend all; for Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal.

Giving thanks in hard times:
With Jesus in the way of the cross

1. Jesus waited.
2. Jesus loved him.
3. God hears us.
4. Giving thanks and hard times go together.
5. Jesus prays for us.
6. Jesus is our resurrection and life.

So we've seen that: (read 6 points). Thanksgiving is a response to God's love for us, and hearing us. Thanksgiving is not an emotion, but an affirmation of relationship.

Giving thanks in hard times:
With Jesus in the way of the cross

'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'
(John 11:41)



“Father, I thank you that you have heard me.” No matter what our circumstance, what hard times we are facing, it’s always appropriate to offer this prayer of thanksgiving, along with our tears, our anger, and our sorrow, as we make intercession before God in prayer.

Giving thanks in hard times:
With Jesus in the way of the cross

'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.'
(John 11:41)

"O Lord, hear our prayer."



We'll close with intercessory prayer. Let's try something a little different this week. After any person makes a prayer request, let's all echo back an affirmation of that prayer by saying together, "O Lord, hear our prayer." OK? Thank you, Lord, that you have heard each of these prayers. Thank you for knowing completely the cries of our hearts, and for loving us intimately in the hard places. Thank you for knowing the groanings of our hearts that are too deep for words. Thank you for translating our prayers into your own intercessions on our behalf. Thank you for being our resurrection and our life. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank you for your faithful love and your life-giving presence in our midst. Amen.