



Krissi Carson

In the summer of 2011, I moved back to the Northwest after receiving my master of divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky. While some day I hope to work with college students, this year I am working through AmeriCorps at a Title I elementary school in Oregon. I tutor children in math and reading, run after-school clubs, recruit and oversee volunteers, participate in parent outreach, and generally have a blast. I expect it to be the best year of my life to date.

BIBLE READING: Isaiah 44:21-28

Redemption is the story of coming home and remembering where we are rooted. By making us a new person, redemption does not necessarily make us a wholly other creation but rather the true person we were always created to be. It brings forth our true self. Jesus invites Paul not to abandon his zeal, but instead to redirect it from persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ to advancing the good news of salvation. God redeems a royal disaster with the runt of Jesse's litter; David may be an unlikely choice, but God knows he has the right skills and heart to be sharpened by God.

The story of the Bible is the narrative of each of us. It is the tale of coming to Jesus, falling to our own devices and wants, seeking yet again for Jesus, succumbing to the sirens' call, plummeting into misery, and then discovering the unbreakable faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is the story of grace and the history of redemption.

The words of Isaiah 44 are a balm and a guiding light during a time of painful and well-deserved exile for the Israelites. God reminds Israel that they are not forgotten. In the darkest moments, God's love and desire for the Israelite people never wanes: "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you" (NRSV). It is no different for each of us.

SONG: I Could Sing of Your Love Forever

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Sit in the truth of God's unconditional love and simply enjoy it.

—*Krissi Carson*

BIBLE READING: Psalm 8

I began a new job at the end of this past summer that, until I moved, required me to catch a bus by 5:40 a.m. It took me over the Columbia River, through Portland, and eventually landed me five towns away. Four a.m. is not a welcome wake-up call for me, and leaving the house while it was still dark did not bring joy to my heart. But I discovered that even early in the morning, God can breathe beauty and life into the unexpected.

The value of being up at that time, I came to realize, was the gift of seeing the sun rise over the city every day. One morning I decided to chronicle my trip through photographs. I'm not sure I would have otherwise noted the wonder of the glowing sun rising over east Portland, silhouetting the solid Steel Bridge as I crossed over the Willamette River into downtown. Those sunrises reminded me of David's words: "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (NRSV). Sometimes it even made up for having to be out so early.

The reality of God's love comes often in small, everyday moments—our little redemptions throughout the day. My responsibility is simply to make sure I don't miss them.

SONG: For the Beauty of the Earth

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Open my eyes to your beauty and wonders today, Holy Spirit.

—*Krissi Carson*

BIBLE READING: Luke 1:5-25, 39-44, 56-58

Did the surrounding community speculate on just what sin lingered in Elizabeth's past to keep her womb empty and her life childless? In Israel, there was little worse than failing over and over to have a child. You had failed to continue the family line and failed to ensure a provider for the women of the family after the husband was gone.

The belief of the day was that barren couples had brought on this disgrace through sin, with the brunt of the blame often landing on the woman. And so it is purposeful when Luke remarks on their righteousness and blameless faith. In the midst of such faithfulness on her part, did Elizabeth feel betrayed at the lack of reciprocation on God's part? Her own sense of womanhood must have felt foggy and intangible. In the darkest moments of night, perhaps she cried herself into a pounding headache.

And then at the best possible time and in the best possible way, God answered her cry of despair—God gave her a child. Elizabeth's place in society was redeemed, not just with the community, but with her own sense of self. She experienced a redemption of her entire existence—a redemption of her spirit. And in that new life and new sense of self, she was also able to fully embrace her cousin, in need of compassion and safety, full of the greatest life of all.

SONG: For You Are Good

PRAYER SUGGESTION: What unfulfilled dreams and longings grieve you? Hand these over to Jesus Christ.

—*Krissi Carson*

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 26:69-75;
John 20:1-3; 21:15-19*

Peter is my favorite of the twelve disciples. His zealousness gets him into all kinds of predicaments. He reacts before thinking, says some really dumb things, and has the most visible loyalty and vulnerability of all the apostles. Peter is often chastised for not having enough faith to walk on water, but he is the only one who gets out of the boat to even try to get to Jesus. And his initial embarrassment and then over-eagerness when Jesus washes his feet is almost childlike. Peter wears his heart on his sleeve.

Then he betrays Jesus. He abandons him in the time of his greatest need. Even worse, Jesus knew it would happen and Peter refused to believe him. Peter does the unthinkable; in the most perilous moment, Peter's fear grips him and his faith falters. Upon remembering the words of Jesus, he weeps bitterly.

But then an amazing thing happens. Peter does not feel it necessary to run away, to hide and drown in his betrayal. Resurrection morning we find Peter again with all the disciples, and then he's one of only two who risk going outside to the tomb after Mary's testimony. Later, on the shore of the sea, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter responds in kind with an adamant, "Yes." And Peter's redemption comes in two simple but profound words: "Follow me."

SONG: Love Lifted Me

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, in the midst of my sinfulness and brokenness, show me how to see your faithfulness and forgiving spirit.

—*Krissi Carson*

BIBLE READING: John 20:24-29

Sometimes, I think Thomas gets the short end of the stick on the disciples' scale of most faithful. Faith without proof is beautiful and necessary; but a comforting thing about God is that there is room within faith for questions and doubt. Questions can expose hidden beauties and deep truths we may not otherwise have discovered. Thomas did not understand the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so he wanted to see for himself.

Jesus knew Thomas' personality when he chose him as a disciple—his need for proof was not a surprise. And it was both a strength and a weakness. One of the most important theological statements by Jesus was drawn out because Thomas wanted to figure out something he didn't understand. "How can we know the way?" he asked Jesus, and Jesus responded, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:5-6).

Through physical touch, Jesus redeemed Thomas' unbelief. He gave a special blessing to all who believe without seeing, but did not condemn Thomas for asking for proof. Though Thomas needed to see to believe, that sight carried him all the way through the rest of his life.

SONG: Blessed Be Your Name

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: At what times do you struggle to see or trust God? Ask the Holy Spirit for good questions and lift up the prayer of the desperate father in Mark 9:24—"I believe; help my unbelief!"

—*Krissi Carson*

BIBLE READING: John 8:1-11

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” These are the first words Jesus speaks to the woman caught in the act of adultery. It must have been a paralyzing humiliation for her to be dragged out into the public eye and used as the punching bag for a group of self-righteous holy men. Add to that the great injustice and blatant breaking of Mosaic law as the man was not dragged out with her.

There is no place Jesus went where he was not redeeming somebody. But more notably, Jesus doesn’t just redeem individual people: Jesus redeemed whole people groups. He made the invisible seen. He gave a voice to women. He even gave a prostitute status above a Pharisee when she graciously greeted Jesus with the appropriate customs (and maybe even some scandalous ones) after Simon the Pharisee refused (Luke 7:36-48).

In the story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus recognizes her humiliation and chooses to speak to her only when the crowd has left, when he is able to speak candidly and personally with her. Her actions, as the Pharisees see it, are worthy of death; yet Jesus does not agree, and in these private moments, does not even give her a lecture. He gives her grace and redeems her life. And he gives her a voice—his voice.

SONG: Who Am I?

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, redeem those moments in my life where I have been silenced. I need your voice.

—*Krissi Carson*

BIBLE READING: Jonah 4:1-11

The story of Jonah is a curious one. It's hard not to be intrigued by Jonah's odd turn of events that begins in running and ends with being swallowed by a big fish, surviving, and getting spit back out a few days later. But it turns out that the book of Jonah is not really a story about Jonah. It's a story about God and God's relationship with all of creation.

The Ninevites, a powerful member of the Assyrian empire, played a painful role in Israel's history. Jonah's resistance and anger is not unfounded. But this story remarks that all creation is the work and responsibility and love of God. Even the animals matter. Jonah's opinion of who deserves love is worthy of rebuke. After Jonah's anger over a silly bush, God responds, "You are concerned about the bush for which you did not labor and you did not grow.... Should I not be concerned about Nineveh...?" (NRSV).

God has every responsibility and right to save anyone. This story shows us God not only wanted to save Nineveh, but also wanted Jonah (and the Jewish people) to see the depth of God's love for humanity and the truth that no one falls outside of God's ability to redeem.

SONG: There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, whom have I deemed unlovable or treated as unworthy of your redemption? In what ways have I believed I was not worth redeeming?

—*Krissi Carson*