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A BENEDICTION

Tyler Rogness —

We are created in the image of a Creator, and His imagination echoes through ours. Every act of creativity performed in this knowledge can also be an act of gratitude. We approach the formless clay, the canvas, the empty page, and our hearts whisper a prayer that we can make something beautiful. Something meaningful. Something resonant. We hone our craft, taking our gifts and working them in such a way as to be a gift in return — an act of worship in itself — to the divine Giver.

More than that, we persevere through the chaos and the pain and the loss and the suffering in this world in gratitude, thankful for the beauty around us that stirs our hearts to longing for the coming kingdom: the kingdom we can begin to recognize even now. We approach the formless clay, the canvas, the empty page in faith — and in gratitude. We create so that we might bring more beauty into the darkness in our world.

We hope you are blessed by the work of our community we've collected here.

BEAUTIFUL THINGS

– Mark Orluck –



AN ADOPTION STORY

Tsosiab Heavenly, age 7 —

Once upon a time, I had two moms. One was named Kha and one was named Janie. Then my other mom (Janie) gave me to Kha, because she did too many drugs. Because Auntie-Mommie Janie loved me, that's why she gave me to Mommie Kha. And Mommie Kha loved me.

LANGUAGE

Tyler Rogness –

A language stirs the surface of the lake;

A word 's what rustles birch upon the shore.

A whispered breath is all the twilight takes

To thence begin our hunger to restore.

A language dances down the slanted way

Between the boughs and branches of the green;

The juniper and cedar berries sway,

Surrendering to language most serene.

The mind — it wants an ancient word, and old,

A language to invade the hardened crust.

This heart would be translated from the mold

To beat a truer rhythm that it lost.

Oh, eldest language, word first breathed of old
That brought the infant sun into the day,
I'll rest for but a quick within your fold
And thence content to carry on my way.

Artist Reflection

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins looked out at the world around him and noted that "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things". I've tried to name that dear freshness, and in this poem look at it through the lens of a personal fascination: language. My grandpa was raised speaking German, which has largely inspired my own endeavors into Germanic linguistics. Ironically, my grandpa has forgotten much of the language he grew up with, having spent most of his life now where it is not spoken.

We eventually lose the things in our lives that fall out of practice. Amazingly, even something so close as our mother tongue — the language we first learned to speak as we toddled across our kitchen floors — can dwindle if not given the space and time to be what it wants to be; or what it can. At the very heart of things there is a language, and a "word first breathed of old". But can we still recall it to mind? Do its rhythms still move us, or has it fallen out of our use like a human language left behind for another?

Our rhythms are fast, and ever faster in this Western world. I am easily caught up in the raging river of it; easily tired of it; easily sick of it. But it is the reality I find myself in, and I cannot just walk away from it. It's not quite so simple as that. Every age has its downfalls, and I must learn to cope with those of mine.

But thank God for moments of clarity and peace, and for a beautiful world to remind us of the deeper language that brought it all into existence, and to whisper it to the ears of those who would still hear it. Thank God for distant echoes of this language that renew our hunger for something more than the stale lives we might otherwise lead without them.

My hope and my prayer is that I am able to remain content with — and grateful — for those echoes. The more I am, the more I hear. And they come in many forms. My life may always be a hurry, but may it be a rich one, full of oases where I step willingly out of that raging river of busyness to hear the whispers of that ancient language calling to me out of the deep past; out of the present and beautiful moments of my days; out of our future home beyond this life.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

— Psalm 19:1-4

TOO GREAT FOR WORDS

Anonymous

Too great for words what you did what you completed God abandoned by God Adam finally trusting and committing himself into God's hands What wisdom what beauty Had anybody known they would not have crucified You disarmed and broke all the powers of darkness took in all the world's suffering became sin God himself drank the cup to break sin's power to redeem to pay to love

WILD RIVER

Stephanie Herington



MNI SOTA MAKOCE LAND WHERE WATER REFLECTS THE CLOUDS

- Stephanie Herington -



PEYTO

Stephanie Herington



Artist Reflection

These bring about immense gratitude in me for Gods gifts of the Earth and Nature. I feel most whole and in connection with the Creator when I'm in these environments.

ROSES

- Tsosiab Heavenly, age 7 -

Roses are red.
Violets are blue.
The sky is wonderful,
And so are you!

DAWN

Lizz M.S. Paulson —

Morning has broken.

I relish the silence
of golden-limbed sunlight.

Early morning rays and trills of dawn beckon me
And I start again
On a new note
of Hope.

– Peggy Kulhanek –



THE SON: FLOWERS FOR FOOTPRINTS

Jordan Disch



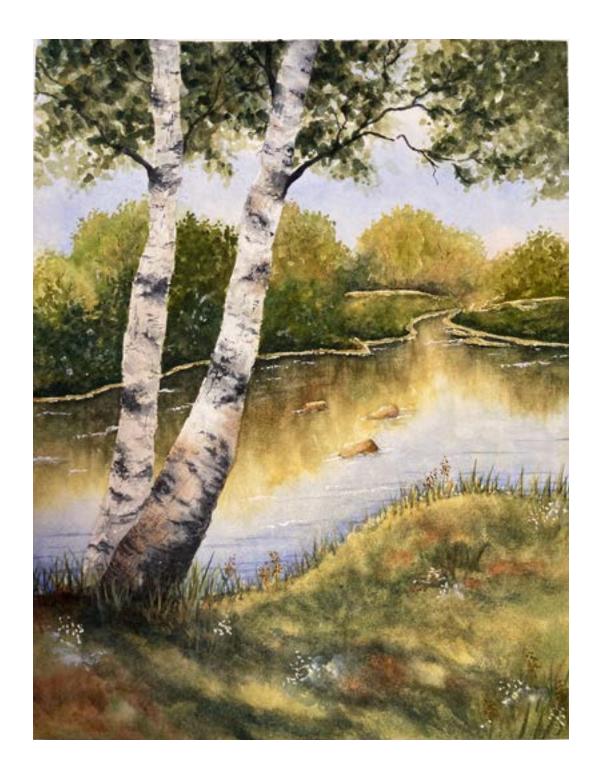
Artist Reflection

"The Son: Flowers for Footprints" was inspired by Emily Morrision's sermon from July of this year. The song is played along with a video slideshow of images from John Hendrix's book "Miracle Man," which Emily spoke about in her sermon. (I received permission from John to use the images before posting the video online.)

The video and song can be found here:

https://youtu.be/Y2rc2TWJ9T0

Peggy Kulhanek



Anne Craigmyle –



EVERYTHING IS THREES

- Darrell Rohling -

1. Creation

I am something out there among the unknown, an image, a prospect,

a possibility leading nowhere outside your garden; left to a paradise presenting silver platter of promises I seem always to hunger for.

2. Sin

The unknown out there is something I am, a shadow, that prospect

leading nowhere possibilities beyond paradise, outside presenting your garden

I hunger for, silver promises upon your platter, empty.

3. Redemption

Unknown something out there is the I AM, a light, turned Prospector

of somewhere possibilities leading paradise beyond your garden presenting

hunger; promising no empty platter—where silver in me becomes gold.

BURNING ORCHARD

- Darrell Rohling -

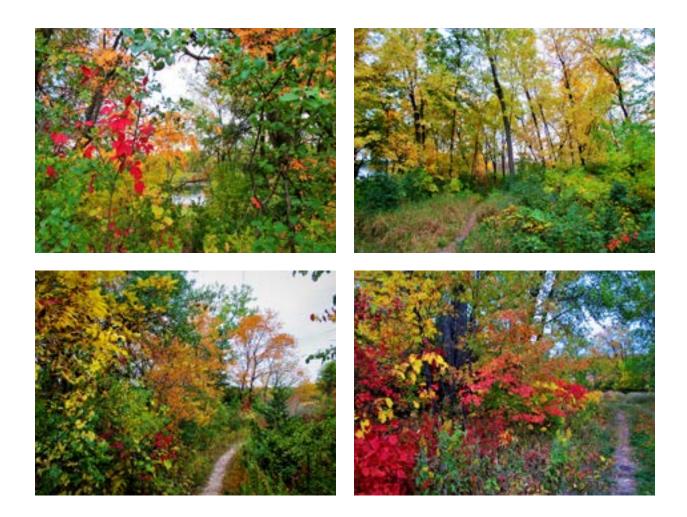


Artist Reflection

Cumulating with our Thanksgiving holiday is the end of the gloriously colorful Autumn season. A 'beautiful dying' let's call it. And where there's death, birth is usually not far behind. I've paired Everything Is Threes with Burning Orchard with the hope of capturing, in word and image, the culmination of our humanity symbolized by a garden rife with fiery divinity but also with redemption. (Where gratitude is implied!)

THE BEAUTY OF CHANGE

Pam Taylor —

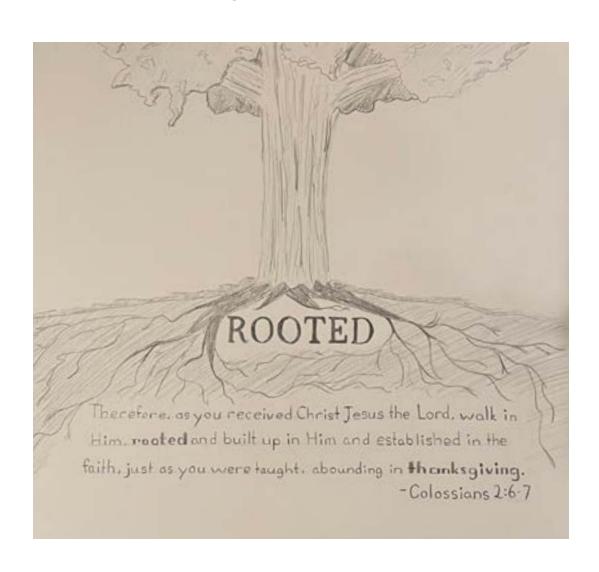


Artist Reflection

These Autumn pics all show paths through beautiful, colorful foliage. The foliage is changing color and they and the paths through them represent the paths we take through the changes in our lives. Change is often difficult but can lead to beautiful outcomes and even the journey can be beautiful. We can be thankful that God is with us on our journeys through life's changes, making the whole process one of beauty and growth.

ROOTED

Sophia Anderson



NUDGING THE SPROUTS

- Dan Kent -

we've got this lousy patch
of unkempt lawn along the west
side of our drive

B planted wildflowers there along with several giant sunflowers

we go out every day to check for growth but it's mostly still unwanted weeds

dandelion and crab grass and other nutrient robbing pests unworthy of names

we're out there today bent over zooming in on what might be blooming

with her finger she nudges a sprout the size of a paperclip "I think this is one" I nudge one too though don't really know what nudging will do "what about this one?"

she comes over and touches it
"I think that's just a weed but
it might be a flower"

frogs are singing down at the pond a passing car flicks headlights on a neighbor closes his garage

I jump to my feet and look over at B standing by the St Francis statue and she says with alarm "what is it?"

I look to the north and then to the east twirl around as I look to the sky and reply "I thought I felt a nudge"

Jeff Knutson







Anne Craigmyle –



MEETING HER

Chip Burkitt

Back when I was mad at God,
I rattled around the gloomy, tattered world
Dry as an old crust and
Dangerous as a dropped pin.
I ate alone
I slept alone
I stole brief pleasures alone.
Strange, unnamed animals came to me,
And I named them all alone.

I kept waiting for Him to slip up again
Or maybe I was expecting to catch it
For accusing Him
(Though, really, it was all His fault.
Who does He think He is?
I was perfectly willing to forgive Him
If He would just admit it
And say He was sorry.)

I slept and had unnatural dreams.

I dreamed of a dark chasm into which one could fall and never reach bottom forever and ever, world without end, amen.

She came when I awoke, a little stiff on one side.

In her hair were sunlight and laughter.

Her merriment unfurrowed my brow.

I desired her pixie ears, her strong chin, her lithe limbs, her supple skin I desired her infectious joy.

I desired her.

We fell into step.
The day got brighter.
The road got straighter.
The air got lighter,
And I gingerly began to trust Him again.

Artist Reflection

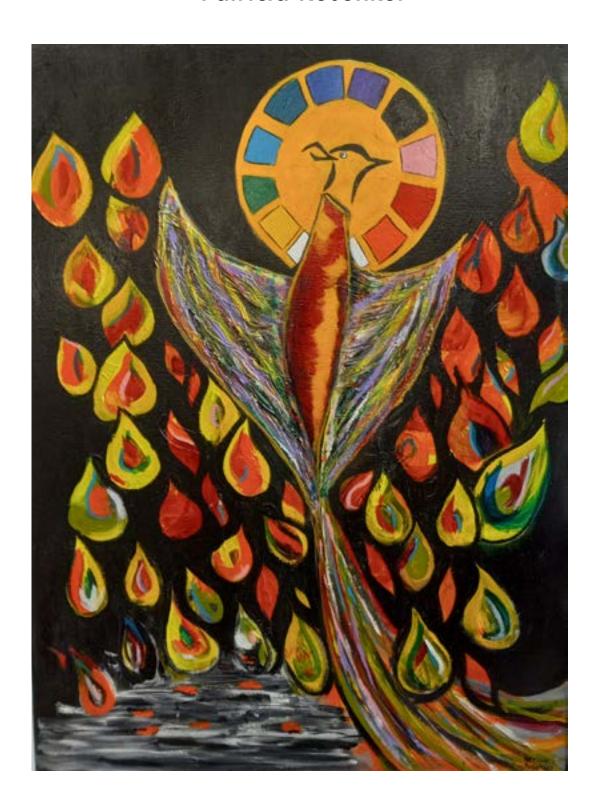
After high school, my greatest ambition was to marry and start a family. By my late 20s, I had failed to find anyone suitable (or even willing). I blamed God. He seemed to want me single, so I gave up on marriage. Then I met a girl who was so full of life and vivacity that I could not help orbiting her. It turned out that the gravitational attraction was mutual.

We married and started a family. Over time I came to see not only how patient and wise God had been in risking my good opinion of him to obtain what was actually best for me, but also what an obnoxious jerk I had been in my pursuit of young women who were not interested in me. Now I am filled with gratitude to him for his many gifts and abundant grace and especially for my wife of 38 years.

Patricia Rosenker –



Patricia Rosenker –



Patricia Rosenker –



Artist Reflection

Gratitude erases negativity. Each painting has its story.

The Phoenix symbolize resurrection, life after death. Rebirth, renewal, transformation much like our Lord Jesus. Ashes to flames, worthy of spiritual respect and the unshakable gratitude we have for Christ in his time of death. Grateful for his teachings and his time on earth. Grateful for his love for us.

The 3 girls symbolize a relaunch of her changes to stand on her own. She is forever Grateful those who have helped her begin a new life.

BECOMING LOVE TOGETHER

Lizz M.S. Paulson —

Love Comes softly,
clothed in linen white,
stained red with the blood
of birth,
His, mine, ours.
Our freedom born,
in Love,
this Redemption Morn
When His Love became a man.

ESSENCE OF LOVE

- Luke Newman -

Miss Lady Rain

Your faith is a light that alleviates my pain

So few people know the Lord, let alone love Him enough to broadcast His Name

How can I return the favor?

I have many gifts, and I am unique in every way

From an isolated life, I've learned how to write from the heart and fervently pray

So I began to pray for you and write something that might make your day

I didn't know what to call you, but it wasn't hard to figure out

Lady Rain fits you in more ways than you know about

Every night, as if borne from dry land, I absorb the rain
Though not in vain, for I bear within me a seed of light
Oh, if I were able
To bless the rain
To shed some light on the nature of her bane

I would surely display a celestial array

Should she ever get tired of her ever-cloudy day

You see,

Light is to rain as rain is to light

In that both bring consolation in each other's night

I say to myself,

I wonder if she knows the grace with which she moves
Blown upon by the Spirit, the same within me was He blown
Though I didn't see it, until she made Him known
Piercing through me like light rupturing darkness
Love effusing from the selfish veil regardless

You see,

Love glistens where life thrives
And where there is water, light shines
With every motion, she reflects the light
And multiplies it unto quite a sight
But in all her splendor there is nothing quite like the rain
For so meekly she falls to multiply again
All that the light would have shined upon in vain

I say to myself,
I wonder if she knows the efficacy of her essence
And the beauty with which she has shone
Oh, if I were able
From the earthly rainbows to each galaxy of the heavens
I would light up everything to make it known

So this have I asked of the Lord for you
Namely, a light rain to shower your night
Yes, a night rain of glistening light
Not too heavy
But just enough to help you sleep tight
Sort of like a night light
Whose golden hue so lovingly awakens you
To the vestibular soft beat of the mist to the light rain
Not too bright
But just enough to keep your mind right
And remind you of your name

Truth be told, my name means light

And I can rain on you like constellations canopy the night

Yes, configurations of the heart can truly burn this bright

How can it be the night?

Love must reign

Let it rain, stars, let it rain

Artist Reflection

And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit. — 2 Cor 3:18

Essence of Love is a man's recounting of his transformation into the image of Christ, catalyzed by a heart of gratitude toward all that gave him aid as he emerges from that state of doubt and isolation to one of faith and creation. A woman, without whom the image is incomplete, is the subject of his affection, out of which faith in the divine purpose of making God known is ignited within him. God is known by His presence, a.k.a. the Name, and it is this presence within the woman that awakens him to the love of the Spirit of God within himself that empowers and compels him to overcome all things without any regard for the self-image. God's presence, manifested by the gifts of the spirit, results in the flourishing of life on this planet (an Edenic vision), and so I have chosen to represent the man and the woman as light and water.

This union is not only to be understood as the conjoining of a singular man and woman, with a restored creation on the horizon, but also as the Lord's union with His bride (the church). I am not implying you could substitute Christ in for the man for the entirety or any part of the poem, as if Christ is the speaker. Rather, inasmuch as the man has been transformed into His image, I am presenting a window into Christ's love for the church. The poem becomes more meaningful through this lens. The rain represents the faithful community, and the light is the man's unique impartation and influence of his gifts. She reveals the light in a way that you would not have otherwise known, like the dispersion of sunlight in the rain.

The light rain is the panoply of all the beautiful emanations of His Spirit through those of us who have the required faith and selflessness to birth them. These are gifts forged from within the love of God to provide comfort and rest in the darkest of nights for His people and revelations of truth to awaken us to who we really are. As each of us reaches into who we are with fervent prayer and out into the world with an iron will, what was once a mist will become a rain, ushering us into the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Metaphorically speaking we are the stars of a new heavens laying the groundwork for a new earth, and we are configured within the heart of God, i.e., known by God, as he authors and completes our faith. I am grateful for all the gifts that God has bestowed on His children to help one another grow. No matter how dark it gets I will not lose hope, because I see.

LOVED

Tania Frankie –

Loved before, loved behind, loved from head to toe. Loved inside out, and outside in. Loved, completely loved.

> Loved when hiding, fleeing, failing. Loved: relentless, never ceasing.

Loved when good, same loved when bad. Loved: resolute, steadfast, sure.

Loved when crabby, demanding and mad. Loved: tender, warm, caring and glad.

Loved when thoughtless, miserly and wary. Loved: generous, outrageous, stupendous and grand.

Loved when wallowing in brooding and mooding. Loved: overflowing, babbling and brooking.

Loved: before, behind, from head to toe.

Loved: inside out and outside in.

Loved: relentless, never ceasing.

Loved: resolute, steadfast, sure.

Loved: tender, warm, caring, and glad.

Loved: generous, outrageous, stupendous, and grand.

Loved: overflowing, babbling and brooking.

Loved: complete, continual, never ending.

Loved: God's love, forever ours.

Loved: our True identity ours to receive.

Loved: Jesus with us every moment of every day.

Loved: transforming our lives, we learn to give what we receive. Loved: Our hearts sing praise, thank You Lord, thank You Lord!

Artist Reflection

Frequently, when I take time to ponder the Lord and the incredible loving relationship He invites us to experience with Him every day, I'm filled with wonder, awe, and gratitude. We are infinitely loved! We're pursued every day by Love – no less on our worst days, and no more on our best days! There is nothing we can do or neglect to do that will ever disqualify us from His love. And even when we forget this and convince ourselves we are utterly unlovable and unloved, the Truth remains the same: we are infinitely loved!

I didn't always know this (and I sometimes still forget it). For most of my life I believed in a terrifying, angry, cruel god who specialized in hurling lightning bolts, smiting, and keeping his distance because I could never live up to his exacting standards. So, I am SO GRATEFUL to God for teaching me, as I journey with Him, who He really is. And my journey continues, I'm still learning and growing. For me, this poem serves as a reminder of who He is in the midst of who I am, of how He defines me, and of who I'm becoming as I walk with Him. It's a poem of gratitude to my God who's with me every moment of every day, and who loves me more than I can ever say.

THINK HAPPY THOUGHTS

Heather Jacobson

Artist Reflection

This piece of art was created to help myself and others remember the things that God has given us to be grateful for. I was struggling with negative self thoughts and while I looked up scriptures to combat that I decided to make this art work as a reminder of things in this world I can be grateful for and things that might help to remind me and others to redirect negative thoughts when life gets overwhelming.





A CLOSE SHAVE

- Dan Kent -

from the waist up
I was naked
driving fast
a small battery powered razor
in my hand
pressed firm
to my cheek
vibrating and grinding
tough stubble

I was real excited
about a new job
at this Italian cafe
I couldn't be late
but the problem was
I overslept
and had to shave
and get all dressed
in the car
on the way

traffic was light
my hair was a mess
my shirt on the seat
to my right
then my shaver battery
grew weak

(and this is the crisis of the tale)
but I kept pushing it
all over my face
(what else could I do?)
as the gears
I could hear
ground slower
and slower

and

slowe r

and pulled on my hairs
until finally it died
in the heart of its grind
on the dense heavy stubble
of my chin

the blades wouldn't move froze-up in mid chew and clamped to the hairs an inch or two beneath my low lip

it hurt when I pulled

and I couldn't let go without terrible pain so my hand was stuck up on my face too

I stopped at a store
with this machine on my face
and stood in a line
and the patrons all stared
but I looked straight ahead
like it was nothing and life
was just fine
but the manager saw me
and pointed to a sign
on the door

I had neither shirt
nor shoes on my feet
but I showed her my chin
and implored her
to help
and she did

and everyone watched
my battery act
as I did the whole thing
all with one hand—
paid for the pack opened
them up
ejected the dead
inserted the fresh
then went out the door
to finish my shave

and free the machine from off of my face

I burst into to work tucking my shirt assembling my tie with just enough time to swallow a breadstick or two in life there's a line it's firm yet it's fine between keeping your life whole and secure and in your control or being taken apart by chaos and chance and each of us learn to walk that fine line and some of us occasionally dance.

ECCE HOMO

Anonymous

No longer judgement, no longer anger You not went from that manger to the cross and grave You lived the life of that kind for us you always had in mind Only one was there to say it right of all people it was Pilate not grasping what at all he said Ecce Homo ... just like me But you Are my Lord saviour friend and God I long to surrender all to submit to your will to all you have in mind to the life of that kind you long to live

through us here now and forever

in me

Artist Reflection

Quoting the guys from the Bible Project podcast, the Bible really is, among other characteristics, meditation literature. At least for me when chewing on the Gospel it is sometimes so overwhelming to see (and sometimes in my imagination;-) what God, what Jesus has done for us, and is still doing. These are moments of awe and gratitude. These moments also remind me that there still is a way to go to becoming thankful in all, in any situation: No pressure let alone competition! We all are on this road, and perhaps others may share in this experience of awe and gratitude when meditating on what our Lord Jesus Christ has done and give up — for us around the globe and his creation. Be and remain blessed lavishly on this road!

YOUR PATIENCE

Sage Boatman

CAPO 2 (Key of E) [Instrumental] [Instrumental] (x2) BGAB BGAD BGAB BGAD [Verse 1] [Verse 2] I sit on this swing and I ask you And finally, when I am broken What it is you want of me When you guide my heart to you In this life I've tried to be good When I am at the end of my rope But I find in it just misery I'll see your light shining through Your commandments I try to keep For you are a patient father And the right thing I usually do You're a compassionate friend Even when I have tried everything else My heart doesn't change with my actions You still take me back in the end And so I do cry here to you [Chorus] (x2) [Chorus] [Instrumental] (x2) BGAB Α BGADAnd always I go to you last When all of my efforts run dry Only when I am about to collapse Do I give our bond a try

The video and song can be found here: https://youtu.be/QVUS93zL3Kk

WHEN I CAN'T, HE CAN

- Melissa Hardy -



"Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light." — Matthew 11:28-30

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

— James 1:5

"Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life."

- Psalm 54:4

I AM NEVER IN THIS ALONE

Melissa Hardy



"And the Lord is the one who is going ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not desert you or abandon you. Do not fear and do not be dismayed." — Deuteronomy 31:8

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." — Matthew 18:20

"But as for me, I will be on the watch for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me." — Deuteronomy 4:31

I AM PROTECTED

Melissa Hardy



"But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." -2 Thessalonians 3:3

"One who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will lodge in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!' For it is He who rescues you from the net of the trapper and from the deadly plague. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may take refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and wall." — Psalm 91:1-4

Artist Reflection

This collection was originally made to help remind me of God's promises, but they can also represent things to be thankful for. I hope God/Jesus/Holy Spirit will use these to reach people, help people, share more of Himself/Themselves with people, and deepen relationships.

JIREH – ENOUGH

Bethany Rogness

I have been pressed, fashioned into the richness of wine. I have hated the time it often requires — my soul it tires in seasons of trial. Often fighting it by way of denial. Wishing growth came without pain as if this life was meant to be lived tame.

Well...

This is a token, of my unspoken gratitude — forgive me God for my attitude in seasons of trial. I consider the mile I walked with bitterness in my thoughts, forgetting all of the talks we had when seasons were sunny. Isn't it funny how clouds roll in and our eyes so quickly grow dim, forgetting the light that comes from within.

Regardless, unshaken by our sin you love us unending, never bending because of our false perception of the kingdom of heaven. Even when my highest priority is to live in superiority to suffering. Forgetting it's offering of such richness. Consider it pure joy those words resound as my heart remains bound by fear. Meanwhile, under your wing I will choose to sing as you are catching every tear.

For far too long I have been towed along on a journey of unquenchable thirst. Thirst for consistency. Thirst for safety. Thirst for stagnant peace that could never come from a beast. A beast wearing the collar of consumption. This beast named with the assumption that satisfaction would be a guarantee if only I bent my knee to dependency on the unending need for more. This beast spewing lies, diverting my eyes as it speaks, "Continue to open that next door and you'll soon find, just behind, what you have always been looking for."

Jireh was not my lived reality, shackled by a scarcity mentality. But this is my spoken gratitude for a change in more than just my attitude — you raised my latitude, leading me by waters made for your sons and daughters. shepherding my heart: you heard me in my dark. And with nothing but a spark of hope you reignited a flame, untamed by this world's practicality. Showing me true reality. You lifted my gaze from the haze of self-reflection, shifting my direction to none other than the SON. You are enough, better than all the stuff the world sells.

I come and drink from HIS well. I don't care what anyone tells me. I have victory. He gives me all I need. No longer do I need to plead because he made the decision to bleed on my behalf, sent to be slaughtered like a calf for a wedding day feast. He returned instead having slain the beast. In this world I will have suffering, but my heart holds fast to his offering. The son who won the world. My Jireh.

Yes...I have been pressed and fashioned into the richness of wine. Grateful for the time transpired and his refining fire.

ABUNDANT THANKS

"The movement of grace toward gratitude brings us from the package of self-obsessed madness to a spiritual awakening.

Gratitude is peace." — Anne Lamott, Help Thanks Wow

Dear reader,

We hope that in experiencing these pieces, your own gratitude will be sparked and that you will be prompted to celebrate all the goodness around you.

Dear artist,

Thank you for using your gifts to invite our community into the practice of gratitude. May you continue to be transformed by gratitude in your own life.

