



COUNT IT ALL

VOLUME 1 / ISSUE 1



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Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

JAMES 1: 2–4

Dearest Reader,

How often do we find ourselves trying to put God in a box? We sing praises when our lives go the way we think they ought to and send up cries for help when our plans go awry.

The idea to collect and document God’s work in a collaborative publication like this came to me after spending some reflective time flipping through an old journal. In this present season of slowing down, I was finding myself questioning whether God was really working in my life. I felt that I had been “benched” in my own life after years of powering through each day at full steam. Not that there isn’t anything for me to do. There is everything to do. But there was also the distinct call in my life: to watch and see what God could do, even when I was not doing it all myself.

The intent of this publication is to bring you joy and to remind you that God is at work, even if you are not in a position to see His hand in your own life. My hope is that you will be encouraged to keep pressing forward in your relationship with the Lord. And maybe even be inspired to document the work He is doing in your life to share with others.

With hope and hugs,

Emily Coats



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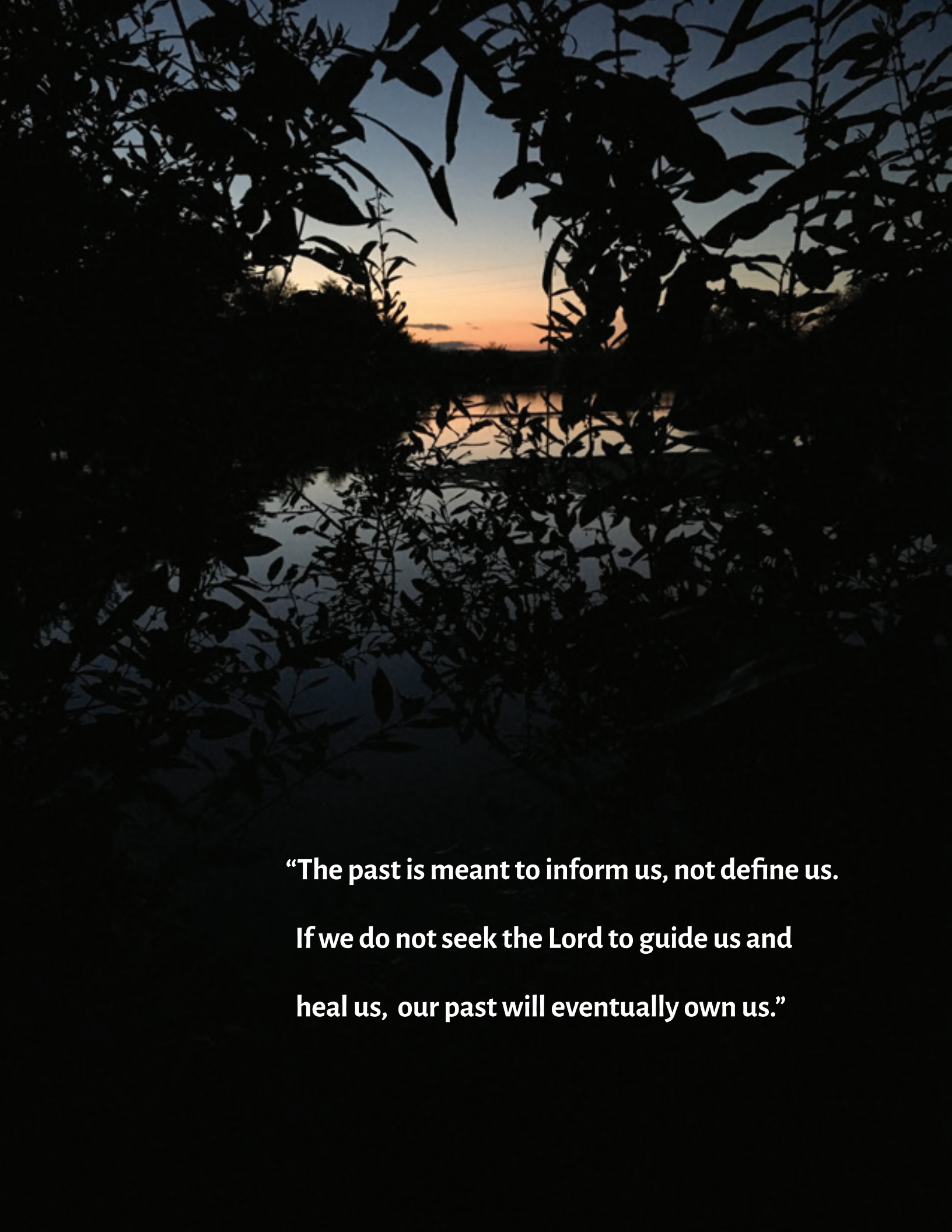
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“The past is meant to inform us, not define us.

**If we do not seek the Lord to guide us and
heal us, our past will eventually own us.”**

FREEDOM IN THE PRESENT

Written by Dave Miller

Photography by Maria Vander Meulen

Our lives are the sum total of our experiences which bring us to this very moment in which we are reading this article. If we were fortunate to have mostly good happen to us, whether it be through our family or our experiences, then we are part of a small fellowship that can lay claim to this experience. Most of those whom I know -as well as myself personally- have had experiences pockmarked with individuals and events that brought us harm and trauma. Often this leaves us responding and reacting to others in the present based upon those past injuries.

The problem I find is that, whether it be myself or others, I know so many that are stuck living the present through the way that the past affected them. Whereas the past is meant to inform us, not define us. If we do not seek the Lord to guide us and heal us, our past will eventually own us.

I often ask the rhetorical question “is anyone reading or paying attention to our history?” This comes from witnessing how individuals or society seems to repeat the sinful mistakes that we have made in our collective past, but which we apparently haven’t learned from or repented of. But even reflecting on or learning from our past has its limits. At some point our ability to move forward, as if walking, requires us to turn around and face forward so that we can actually walk in that direction.

The Devil would be glad if we fixated our attention on the harm done to us or the harm we have done to others in our past. Even focusing on the “good ol’ days” can be a form of distraction to us. Because of our finiteness, we can do nothing with our past, whether it be to avoid or to relive it. Time travel is reserved to science fiction and movies, but has no bearing on our present situation. So what can we do with trauma and shame?



Recalling our past, hopefully in an honest or accurate way is a starting point, but facts alone cannot heal us. The reciprocal is equally problematic. We can fixate ourselves on the future, where we want to be career wise, health wise, relationship wise, you get the point. Pretty soon we either become anxious or despairing that our self-made timeline is failing to actualize. And the same Devil is glad to have us fixate upon a period of time that we have little to no control of. So as creatures of the present, how do we avoid the trap of past and future in order to seek change in the present?

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own. **MATTHEW 6:34**

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." **JAMES 4:13-17**

In Christ we find our focus, forgiveness and healing, necessary to transform us into the people He made us to be. Because God is omnipresent He is present in every moment of our lives: past, present, and future. Our past needs to be interpreted through Him. The **events and individuals** that have hurt us, need to be handed to Him for our healing and for their healing. Our **identity** needs to be understood through His words. Our **logic and reasoning** need to be shaped by Him. We need to seek Him in prayer, in regards to our future, whether it be tomorrow or next year. Our **assignment or plans** need to be received from Him.

So the way we can live most free and open to the work and will of God, is to fix our eyes upon Him. Hearts courageously open to His transformation and a faith in Him is what gives us an unsinkable hope.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. **HEBREWS 12:1-2**

Forgetting what lies behind and looking forward to what lies ahead,

I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize

for which God, through Christ Jesus is calling us. **PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14.**

Forward isn't tomorrow. Forward is a direction, a motion that is made possible when we no longer put our faith in our feelings, or in a time we don't live in, but in the person, the perfecter, and the author of our faith: Jesus.

Be still. Be still, oh my soul, and sing.
You are loved today, tomorrow, and forever.
Come what may. Come what may.
Be still, oh my soul, and sing.

Tessa Compton (2017)



LIFE TOGETHER

Poem by Cassidie McCorkel

Photography by Emily Coats

It's messy kitchens, crowded halls
It's never being normal — not at all
It's nights together, holding up,
It's offering the needed cup
Some days just a simple, timely embrace
Or looking into a known, loved face.

We know what it's like to sit across
the table
From a brother or sister who does what they're able
To pick you up and carry you on,
When I'm the weak one, you'll be my strong

How deeply favored, above imagining
to live a life that gives and brings
Abundant gifts, and bountiful life,
serve alongside through joy and strife
So beautiful, together His bride,
You are always worth my staying by your side.

Face the future, hand in hand,
a joyful, jagged, journeying band.

Be the shelter, refuge each to all,
Humbly living out the call.



AN IMAGINARY CORRESPONDENCE

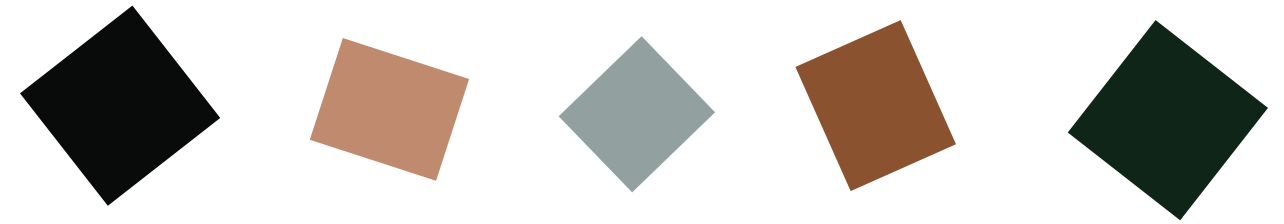
Written by Eric Coats

An Introduction

Every year our church holds a Celebration of the Faithful where we have several people present about the life of different faithful people from Christian history. We've learned this tradition from other faithful people in our lives, and have found it to be helpful in reminding us of the "great cloud of witnesses" the book of Hebrews speaks of. The stories of these faithful people show us the extent God can use normal people to advance His Kingdom.

I had the opportunity last year to present on Jan Hus (or John Hus for English-speakers). John Hus is known as a pre-Reformer. His time was just before Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers. John Hus was highly influenced by John Wycliffe, who was the first to translate the Bible into the vernacular (common language). Wycliffe supported teaching in the vernacular, which John Hus perpetuated. John Hus lived and preached in Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic), in the early 1400s. His teachings and writings helped lay the groundwork for what would later become the Reformation.

For my presentation I chose to write a short series of letters between two friends alluding to the many things John Hus was teaching and doing. In these letters you will learn that John Hus has been preaching reformation for the Catholic church, teaching that our authority should be the Scriptures only, and also preaching in the local vernacular — something that was never done by the Catholic church. He believed the head of the church was Jesus Christ, not the Pope, and the priests and papacy could not withhold salvation from people. The letters relate a story of a man, Aeneas Sylvius, and his response to what John Hus was doing and preaching. His friend Nicolas is skeptical and wants to ensure Aeneas isn't succumbing to heretical teachings.



To My Dear Friend Nicolas,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. I pray this letter finds you well and of good health. I think often of you, my friend, and your family, and I hope your new son is healthy and strong. As I am sure you have heard, recent happenings in Prague have the city in quite a stir. Do not worry for me, though, as I am well. Quite well, in fact.

Nearly a week ago now a friend of mine invited me to the Bethlehem Chapel to hear a sermon by one John Hus. I had heard his name before, but hadn't yet heard him preach. It was one of the most astonishing things I have ever heard in my life — Mr. Hus preached to us in Bohemian, not Latin! I can scarcely describe to you the feelings it invoked in myself and the other listeners to hear the Word of God taught to us in our own language! As you know, I was privileged enough to be taught to read and write, but only in Bohemian, not Latin. I have never heard the Word of God in a language I can understand from the pulpit, it has only been second hand from those kind enough to interpret for us. We felt as the Jews must have on the day of Pentecost, hearing the Good News in our own tongue. Many, including myself, were moved to tears.

What is more, Mr. Hus affirmed to us that the sale of indulgences is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. He said that Jesus commanded His followers to take care of the poor, and that His forgiveness is freely given, not something to be bought. This has been quite interesting to reflect upon. What are your thoughts on this, my friend? We are hesitant to believe this entirely, though we desperately want it to be true, because we still fear not being forgiven for our sins, and the Pope himself has said the purchase of indulgences is necessary for salvation, along with the blessed Eucharist, of course. Few people here possess great wealth, and most are simply trying to survive. Receiving forgiveness without needing to purchase it would be an astounding gift to us!

Please write soon, Nicolas. I desire to hear your thoughts on these matters. I am planning to attend another sermon by Mr. Hus on the morrow, even though I have heard whisperings that the Cardinals are disapproving of what and how he is teaching. If you were here and could understand what it was like hearing him preach in our own language, I have no doubt that you would wish to join as well.

The Highest Regards, and Utmost Love in Christ,
Peace to you,
Your Friend,

Aeneas Sylvius
August the 2nd, the year 1412

My Dear Friend Nicolas,

Grace to you, and peace from our Lord Jesus, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. I am pleased to hear that you and your family are doing well. These are trying times to be sure, and I am filled with joy to know that you are safe and keeping well fed. I find myself in some distress by the considerable concern in your response, but I want to console you in that I am perfectly safe and free from harm. You can also be sure that my salvation is still secure, and I have not been led astray from our Lord Jesus.

Though in your letter you have urged me to stop attending the teachings by John Hus, I must admit that I have continued to attend. What I received before in Latin was like a small raindrop — what I have received thence in Bohemian is like the entire storm! The Words of Jesus have been moving powerfully through this city, stemming from Mr. Hus and his preaching. Never before has the name of Jesus and His teachings been talked about so profusely in the city. I recognize your concern for my safety and salvation, and I admit the other priests and many church people seem to be on high alert and quite agitated, but I'm beginning to think we need not fear them at all. Please allow me to explain.

Mr. Hus has been preaching many things about what the church is and how it is ruled. He said that any person who accepts Christ Jesus as their Lord is a part of the church. The church is not simply composed of the Pope and his cardinals and bishops. The church is not only those who have been ordained, but it is also us who have not been ordained. If I am within the church as a layperson, why should I fear what the priests can do? Is it not Jesus who justifies me? What is more, Mr. Hus has explained to us through the Scriptures that Jesus, not the Pope, is the

head of the church. If even the Pope must submit to Jesus, then I need not fear what the Pope can do to us. If I cease to purchase indulgences, I will still have forgiveness from Jesus through repentance.

I know the Pope may consider these teachings heretical, but if you could be here to listen in our own language, I think you would understand, my dear friend. Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who curse us. He did not tell us to march to war against them, funded by the church.

Many are having their feelings confirmed by the Scriptures and what Mr. Hus is teaching. We have felt oppressed for many years, living in fear of our salvation. This is something we ought to be sure of, and full of hope about, not afraid to lose it if we take a wrong step. Many of us are still attending Mass, but our hearts have been set ablaze by the teachings of John Hus at the Bethlehem Chapel, not from the priest at Mass.

One last thing — Mr. Hus shared with us about John Wycliffe and some of what he taught. Mr. Hus told us that John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. Have you heard of this? Is it true that the English have a Bible they can read in their own language? Can you imagine that? Hearing the Scriptures preached in our own language has been amazing enough, but to be able to read them myself? I can scarcely comprehend the thought!

I hope I have not troubled you too much, my friend, and that you have been doing your own searching and listening between our correspondences. Each day I feel more free, and more hopeful in our Lord Jesus.

May the Peace and Love of Christ be with you,
Your Friend,

Aeneas Sylvius
October the 4th, 1412

To My Dear Friend Nicolas,

Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ, who is still my Lord and yours. I hope this letter finds you in a better state than my last. I am honored to know of your concern for me, but I regret that it has caused you such stress and heartache. That is not my desire, and I want to affirm to you again that you need not fear for my salvation. It would appear that the situation here in Prague has worsened since our last correspondence, but I am confident that it will not last, and that true change is coming soon.

I am very aware of your concern for this city and its people because of the interdict placed upon us shortly after my last letter. If what John Hus is saying is true, and I believe it is after hearing the Scriptures and teachings, then we do not need to fear for our salvation. This is something granted to us by Jesus Christ. Not even the Pope can take that from us.

To help put you a little more at ease, my friend, I will inform you that not two days ago Mr. Hus left for the countryside so that the interdict will soon

be lifted from us, though I think this will not have the affect you are hoping. Many people here are now following Mr. Hus and his teachings. I have tried to convey to you the profound affect hearing the Scriptures in our own language has had, but I am afraid writing it down has not done it justice. Mr. Hus is forcible in speech, but there is something more going on. God's Spirit seems to have been strongly on this city for several months now. Many people have repented, including several clergy, from their previous ways, and Jesus Christ is proclaimed openly in the streets. If this is not a sign of His presence, then I could scarcely tell you what is.

I hope yet that you will be able to visit soon and we can speak about all that has happened in person. I do not want the Pope's declaration that Hus's teachings are heretical to be a hindrance to our relationship, though I would not want you to conduct yourself against your own conscience. I trust that you will hold out your judgment of these matters until we can speak in person.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus be with you,
Love in Christ,

Aeneas Sylvius
October the 18th, the year 1412







BAPTISM STATEMENT

Written by Hannah Scott
For her baptism on October 11, 2016

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all who is above all and through all and in all. **EPHESIANS 4:1-6**

This passage of scripture so beautifully illustrates the multifaceted life that Christ has commanded of us. Paul begs us “to lead a life *worthy* of the calling to which you have been called.” I may not know much about the details of my future, however I am fully confident that life lived on my own accord would be less than worthy of Christ’s call. The only way I am capable of living a life worthy of pleasing Jesus, is living day to day with an eagerness to “maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” And further, to do so by forbearing my brothers and sisters in love with all lowliness, meekness, and patience.

Art Gish writes, “There can be no real unity with Christ that does not include being part of Christ’s body.” If I do indeed believe that there is *one* body, *one* spirit, *one* hope, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God and Father who is above all else, then I must respond appropriately to the simple call that Christ has given: “follow me.” To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “baptism is not an offer made by man to God, but an offer made by Christ to





man.” May I always be humbled by knowing that the opportunity to follow Him, to feel His love and to accept His free gift of grace will never be portions of life that I deserve or earn, but offerings that I have been mercifully given by no worldly logic. The individual choice to die to my old life and follow Him has been made. This decision can only be carried and lived out through the unity of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and it is a **sequential duplexity** that cannot survive or thrive without each other.

By the means of baptism and obedience, I can participate in Christ’s death and resurrection. I can bind my personal conversion narrative to Him, and forever unify my future to His people. Through this, my life will now be found at the cross, under the shared yoke and ownership of Christ. I can hold steadfast in His promise that “the cross is not the end,” (Gish, 1) but the beginning of a life made new because of His blood that cleanses, justifies, and sanctifies.

In my life before Christ, I was looking to change the world through a false sense of hope and justice. I thought that I could make a difference as an individual, as a woman, or even as an American. However, the true Light of this world has been revealed in my life, and I find hope in the fact that He is “working not primarily through nations, but through a kingdom that transcends nations.” (Yancey, 249).

The sense of purpose that I have been in quest for is *here*. In the midst of searching for what is good, right, and true, I have realized that to seek and find my

identity in Jesus is the only true liberation and peace that I will ever discover in life. This Kingdom of love that “transcends nations” and stands for veracity and truth is where I want my primary citizenship to lie.

May this baptism be my official act of obedience to follow Christ’s call, my proclamation to the New Covenant, and the acceptance of the responsibility of a unified identity in Christ. I want to let my heart be softened so that I can be inclined to listen to the language of The Spirit, and so that I will accept nothing less than the woman God intended me to be. So, I am ready. Ready to buy into the personal character of Christ, submit the individual vision of my own future, and let the contents of my heart be harvested for truth.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2015. Print.

Gish, Arthur G. *Living in Christian Community*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1998. Print.

Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. Print.

Water photographs by Emily Coats
Broken Glass Water Painting by Elyse Brouhard



INCONVENIENCE

Poem and painting by Elyse Brouhard

My wish is that
I could sprinkle grace like confetti,
a continual offering at your feet.
Because so often
I must work to hold my tongue,
to remember what I appreciate.

See,
we so easily let the ties that bind
begin to chafe our skin,
forgetting what a gift it is
to be tied by love at all.

We are led by knee-jerk resentments
for things both done and
left undone.
We hold ourselves hostage
in a tangle of need and want.

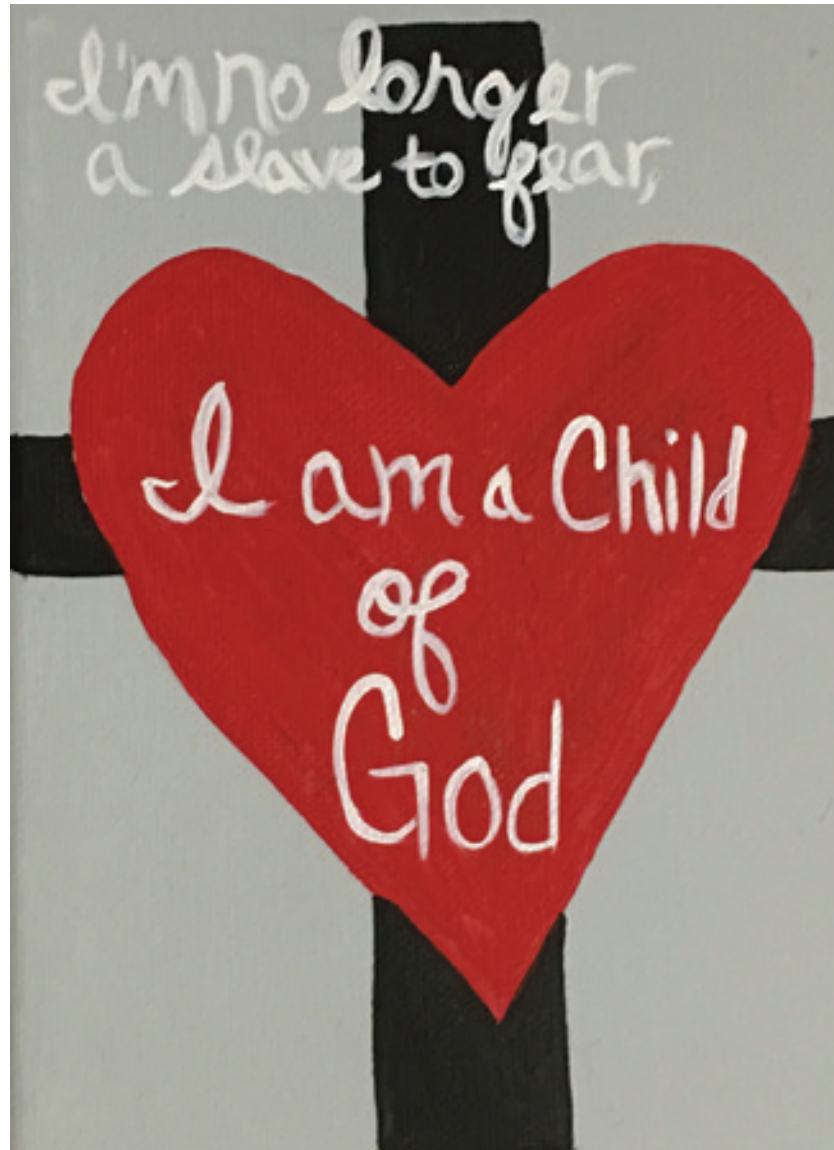
Our lonely hearts crave
the interruption of others.
We wear aching skin that hungers
for loving touch.
We yearn
to belong,
to be wanted,
needed and seen.
We unabashedly reach
for the inconvenience of relationship,
and we begin to resent it
as soon as we unwrap that gift.

I am so sorry for how many moments
the love I have to offer
has been too small.
I want you to always be
a welcome disruption.

I want you to be free
from paying the price
for the things I sacrifice
to be here.
Which somedays are many and
weighty items,
sometimes invaluable and incalculable.
But which are always unequal
to the beautiful mess
I have in you.

I want more than you best:
I want your over-stressed self
that never does dishes,
you that gets overwhelmed
so easily,
who panics when we're lost and
never turns off the lights.
The pair of you who argues about things
I think are stupid,
who are the worst driver and
even worse back-seat driver,
whose external-inner-monologue
never ceases to annoy me.
You who are sometimes over-opinionated
and under-motivated,
I want all of you.

I want to be tied by a love
which sometimes feels too tight,
which comes with the inconvenience
of your imperfections,
but also the blessing of everything else
I couldn't get without it.



Painting by Farielle Houran



Painting by Elyse Brouhard



LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

Written by Richard Gaudette

Design by Jeremy Liwanag

Living in the Spirit means that we trust the Holy Spirit to do in us what we cannot do ourselves; we ask Him to do it in us and believe He will do it.

When we are faced with a new temptation or trial we look to Him to do in us what He requires of us. It is not a case of trying harder, but of trusting; not of struggling but of resting in Him. If we have a hasty temper, impure thoughts, a quick tongue, or a critical spirit, we should not set out with determined effort to change ourselves, but instead, we should reckon ourselves dead in Christ to these things. We need to look to the Holy Spirit of God to produce in us the needed purity of humility or meekness — which means to stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for us (Exodus 14:13).

The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. **GALATIANS 5:17**

The fight with the flesh is not ours, but the Holy Spirit's. If we do not move away from Jesus, out from His cover into the realm of the flesh, then the enemy of our souls cannot get at us.

The fight with the flesh is not ours, but the Holy Spirit's. We tend to go and do our will guided by the flesh instead of what the Holy Spirit wants us to do.

God's promise is: "walk by the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). If we live in the Spirit, if we walk by faith in the risen Christ, we can truly "stand aside" while the Holy Spirit gains new victories over the flesh every day.



Poem by Chris Vander Meulen
Artwork by Jeremy Liwanag

Sin and tear soaked sleeves
Left for dead and empty
Wrought in hurt and misery for all I've sought
All my heart could blaspheme
And new life, light brought

Arrested in my sorrow
A fire starts aglow
Paradise found and folded within a sacrifice
Built upon this old barrow
All too heavy a price

In sin and tear soaked sleeves
My chest hurts and heaves
Decay and ash becomes me, I daresay
All I can do is receive
And all I am becomes unfrayed

My life turned to light
Black and bleak now white
Born by His light and life, I be free of scorn
Set my life to ignite
And my sin and tear soaked sleeves torn



GARDENING AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

Written by Emily Coats

Photography by Emily Coats

“Spring fever already?” asks the cashier as I toss another packet of seeds onto the conveyor belt.

Like clockwork, the incessant rain and gray skies drive me to get a jump start on garden planning quickly after the pink, purple, and red Valentine’s hearts are put away for the year. February may not be the most nurturing climate for new seedlings, but there is always more than enough room to start planting in the plastic trays on my windowsill.

I wouldn’t say that I have a green thumb. Or even that I enjoy gardening all that much. But I rather deeply love — need, even — the color and beauty of flowers, green spaces, and the outdoors. I am a mad fan of the product of gardening. This is where I am guaranteed to see God.

Like most modern-day Americans, I’m addicted to new things. I have lived a significant portion of my life at hyper speed. “Getting things done” can give me a high, and the quicker the turn-around time on that accomplishment, the better. I like planting seeds and dreaming of what will grow. But the in-between toil of weeding, and watering, and pruning? Not so much.

However, as I stretch out the muscles in my back that ache from a weekend of reconstructing the raised flowerbed in my backyard, I am beginning to see that perhaps God values the slow, dogged labor of maintenance more than I thought. Perhaps it is akin to the persistent faith He loves to grow within us.

I have spent the past ten years of my life involved in a college campus ministry in some form or fashion. But it is only recently that I have started to observe that when it comes to the Great Commission, going to “make disciples” is translated practically within our speed-addicted culture into

evangelism. Perhaps the distinction between the two—evangelism and discipleship—is subtle only to me, but clarity on the difference seems paramount when evaluating how one answers the call.

Evangelism, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is “the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.” In the gospel accounts, we see Jesus sending out his disciples to share the good news, cast out demons, and advise repentance and turning to God. Jesus even forecasts rejection and tells the disciples to abandon “those people to their fate” if they refused to welcome or listen to their message. This seems all well and good when we consider it. Telling people about God is nothing to balk at. It takes courage and ultimately is a necessary act of love if one is convicted of who Christ is. But is that the same as making disciples?

A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it. Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture. Other seed fell among thorns that grew up with it and choked out the tender plants. Still other seed fell on fertile soil. This seed grew and produced a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted!” When he had said this, he called out, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.” **LUKE 8:5-8**

In Luke 8:4-15, Jesus’s parable regarding the word of God directly refers to the process of seed planting and harvesting. I have always associated this parable with the Great Commission, as both have to do with engaging others in a way that points them to Christ. But I also saw my role in this parable as the seed-sower, and that scattering the seeds was the only responsibility I have in this equation. In essence, I believed that the only task God gave us was to share the message and that evangelism was the same as making disciples.

My foray into gardening has caused me to question that assumption. Initially, I accepted the duty of caring for the flowerbeds in our front yard because I was ashamed at how unkempt they were. I planted flowers and forgot about it until I would arrive home from work some weeks later to finally notice the very dead and sad garden I had neglected to care for. So I planted more flowers. And they died. And I planted more. And they died. And this went on for a full season in which I tried different varieties of plants, all of which met a crunchy end.

In hindsight, there were two main issues: water and soil. It doesn’t take a genius to know that you need to water plants in the summer, but it took me a couple of rounds of this process to figure out that I needed to be much more diligent with the hydration of my flowers. Other gardeners I knew advised me that the clay and rocks did not make a great place for



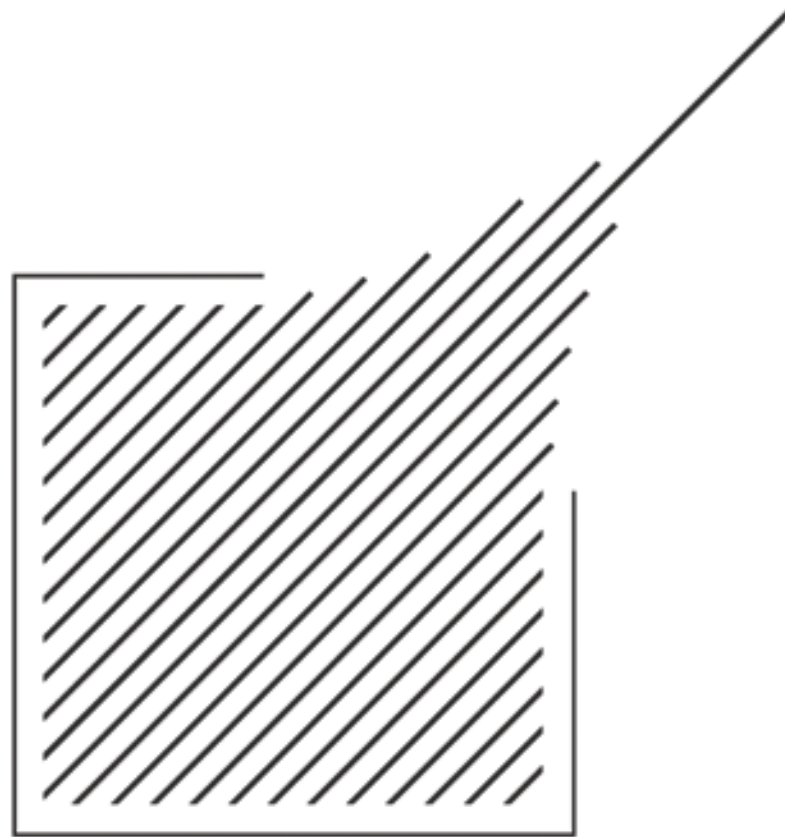
flowers, so I began to enrich the “dirt” in the flowerbeds with compost and better soil. I was putting in a lot more time, but the results were much better from the additional care devoted to the task.

I think we are encouraged to share the good news of Christ with everyone. The parable’s farmer seemed to think it apt to scatter the seeds all over the place, with the knowledge that in some areas it would not grow. (Though to be honest, I wonder about the wisdom of this farmer, as I have never seen seeds grow on rocks and thus do not try to plant there. Perhaps he understands more about the redemptive power of Christ than I do). But there is a different kind of work that goes into discipleship and creating fertile ground than simply tossing seeds out and hoping they grow.

By tending to our relationships in love, rather than simply informing others of our beliefs, I think we help to cultivate an environment for discipleship and growth. Of course, it is God’s work to do the actual growth within a person, just as it is with a seed.

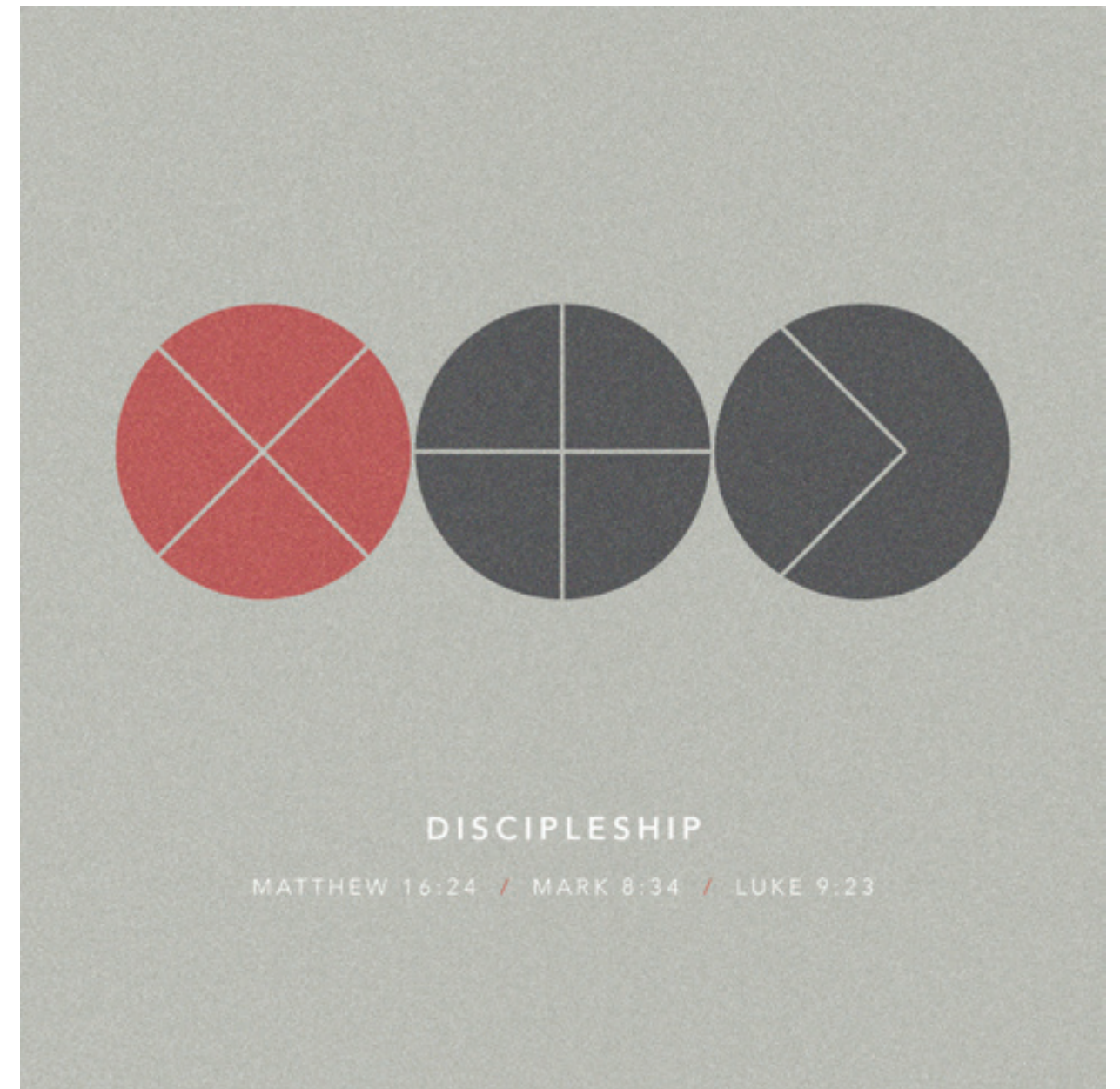
In the ten years I have been involved with ministry, my conversations have changed from addressing the defensive questions like “how can you, as an educated woman, believe that?” to conversations that flush out truth, and weed out the hurt and sin that inevitably crops up in all of our lives on Earth. It’s slower, but it’s much more personal. And I see the fruit of it in my life as well as the lives I am engaging. It is the transforming work of God that I love in a garden.

I have learned that fertile ground does not often simply present itself to a gardener. One has to cultivate it, which takes time, and patience, and ultimately trust that the Lord will bring rain and sunshine and all the conditions necessary for a seed to grow. I think that this too is true for the process of making disciples.



For the gate is narrow and the
way is hard that leads to life, and
those who find it are few.

Matthew 7:14



Designs by Jeremy Liwanag



IN ALL THINGS

Poem by Sarah Dufficy
Photograph by Emily Coats

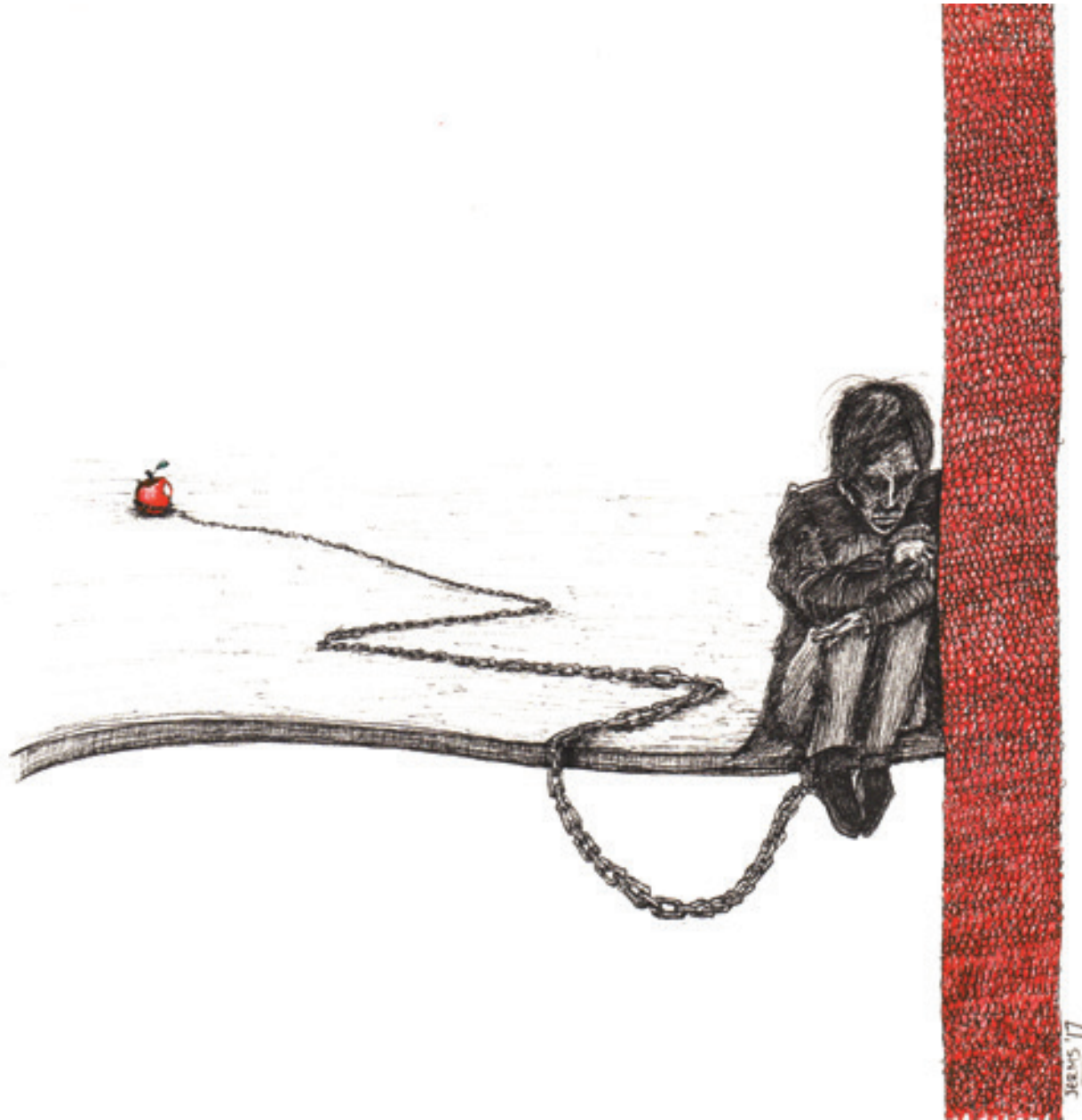
Barren trees,
whose leaves
have flown away.
Sunset colors
to be trampled
underfoot.
They decompose
into Your earth.
Feeding the life
that stirs below.

Evergreens
remind us,
life still goes on...
through the loneliness
and gloom.

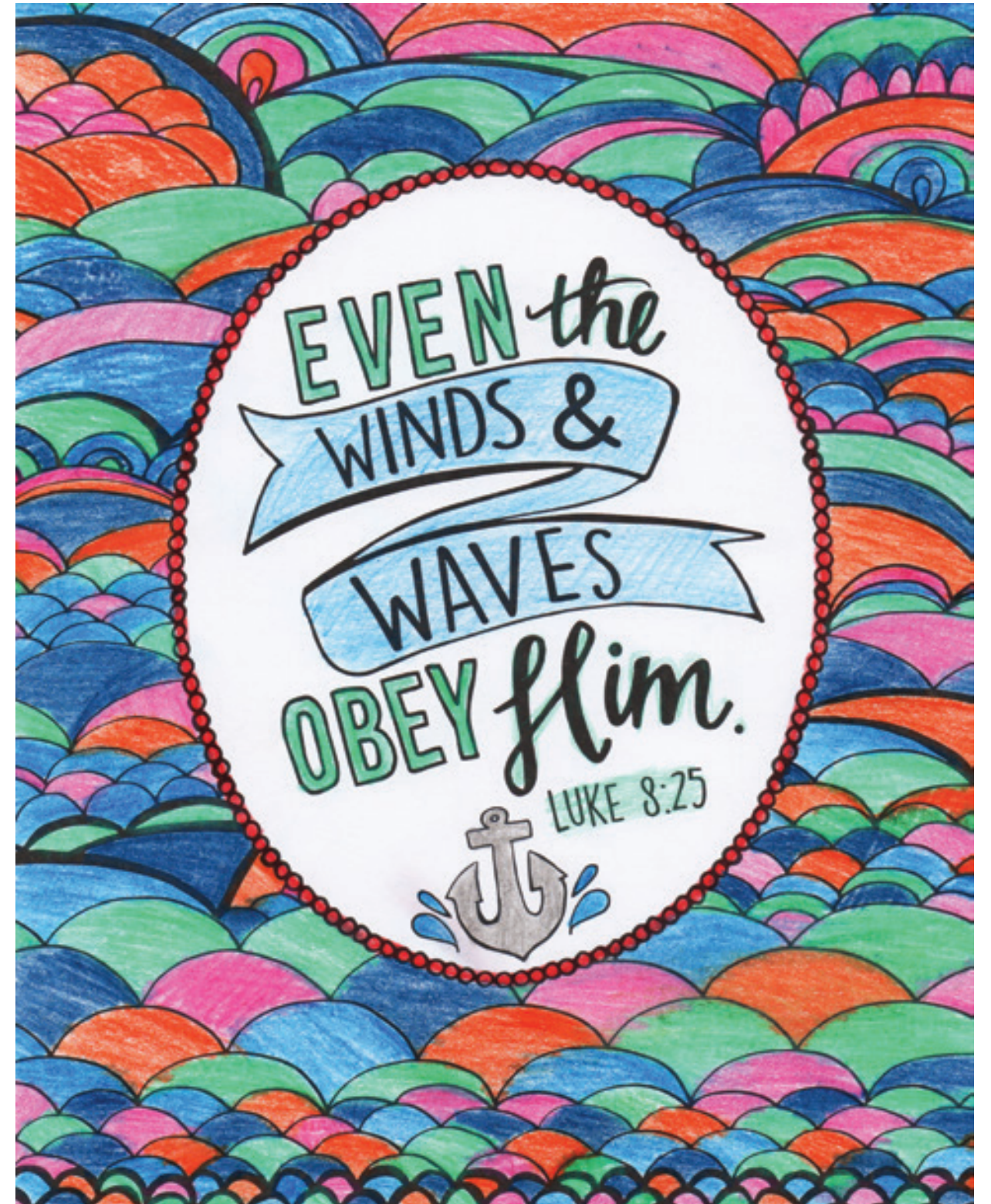
Rivers fall
from the sky,
they seep down
via roots
to nourish and grow
new life.

Her blue eyes
sparkle and shine.
Her gummy grin
screams joy.
A conduit of grace,
innocence,
and the mystery to come.

In all things...
are you.
Wilderness.
Abundance.
Desolation.
Flourish.
Loneliness.
Kinship.



Drawing (above) by Jeremy Liwanag
 Coloring page (right) by Kristy Granger
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 Photography (next) by Emily Coats





Design & Layout
Emily Coats

Copyedited by
Elyse Brouhard

Typography
Alegreya ht Pro
Alegreya Sans
Playfair Display

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