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WORSHIP IN THE SCARS

BY CHRISSY COSNER

CHRISSY COSNER IS A WIFE, MOTHER, AND BRAND NEW GRANDMOTHER. SHE HAS SERVED ALONGSIDE HER HUSBAND MIKE FOR OVER 20 YEARS IN FULL TIME MINISTRY, AND IS A FORMER MTW MISSIONARY TO BELIZE. THEY CURRENTLY RESIDE IN HUNTERSVILLE, AND ARE MEMBERS OF STONEBRIDGE.

If you look closely at my left hand, you might be able to see it. A scar. To be honest, I can barely see it anymore. It's been 32 years since I got the scar, and it's so faded that it's barely noticeable. But if I try hard enough, I can still see it. And if you ask me how I got it, I could relay to you in detail the day I burned myself making frozen hash browns, receiving 2nd- and 3rd-degree burns on my hand and arm, and 1st-degree burn spots all over my body.

Pain of that magnitude is hard to forget. And it leaves behind scars that remind us of the pain. I have many scars—and stories that go along with each one. The one on my knee? Age 3. Tripped on the uneven sidewalk in front of my grandmother's house. The one on my forehead? Age 7. Fell flat on my face roller skating, and went blind for several hours. The one on my chin? Age 9. My brother pulled a chair out from under me and I hit my chin on an electrical box. Nine stitches. Tiny scar on my right pinky finger? Age 27. Car accident, and the air bag deployed, cutting my finger. The large one across my abdomen? Age 27. C-section, less than two weeks after that car accident. The little scar near my belly button? Age 29. Surgery to remove my gall bladder.

You, I'm certain, have similar scars, obvious and noticeable, superficial. And, like me, I'll even bet you have some not so obvious scars, too. Those are the much deeper ones. In the hidden and secret places, the scars on our hearts. Perhaps those are the most painful of all, even if they are not the most noticeable.

No one gets out of life without scars. We all have them. Even Jesus had them. And as we reflect on His scars during the Easter season, let's take a moment to reflect on our own, too.

I believe when we get to heaven, and Jesus shows us His scarred hands and feet, **our only response will be worship.** Gratitude for what He went through in order for us to be with Him. Moved by His great love and compassion, brought to us through His suffering. Scars that meant death for Him, but life for us.

When we look back at our scars, is our response to worship? Should it be? I think our tendency can be to focus on the pain that caused the scar. We fall back into self-pity and get caught up in all the reasons we were hurt. In the betrayal. In the lies. In the accusations. In the grief. In the losses. In the abuse. The apologies we need to make. The apologies we long to hear. The forgiveness we still haven't offered. In the sin and the emotions, we feel bitter, lonely, angry, and sad. And rather than just seeing a scar, we tear open a fresh wound, all over again.

I've lived in that place a long time. That wounded place. Scars upon scars. Some from petty little things I let hurt me in big ways. Some from colossal wrongs done to me. Wrongs so big they can never be righted on this side of heaven. A difficult childhood. A lifetime of losses and disappointments. Heartbreaking betrayal by those closest to me. Even hurt from churches and friends who abandoned me when I needed them most. And I know

many of you are living with similar scars. You have profound hurts. You have fresh wounds. You have scars on top of deep, painful, unhealed experiences. You have suffered greatly but don't minimize your pain. But that's what makes Jesus and His scars so miraculous to us. **It doesn't matter the size or amount of the scars. He has the power to heal them!**

If we choose to focus on His scars when we see ours, we will remember that He received them so ours could be healed. He suffered so we could be comforted. We can rejoice and even worship because we are overwhelmed with His love and what he's done to show it. His scars were not in vain.

Time doesn't heal all wounds; Jesus does. And He does it in His time, and in His ways. For some of us, that ultimate healing will come when we meet Him face-to-face in eternity. We will suffer here with the remnants of our pain, with our scars, until we die. But we are not alone. And we are not without comfort (I Corinthians 1:3-7). And for that, yes, our response should be worship.

This season, let's turn to Him, focusing on His scars and letting go of ours. Put your wounded heart in His nail-pierced, scarred hands and receive the healing and comfort He offers. Now, go give yourselves away and be a comfort to others.

BE STILL

BY REBECCA PARKINSON

REBECCA PARKINSON IS A WRITER AND BLOGGER WHO SEES GOD'S GLORY REFLECTED IN THE NATURAL WORLD. HER FAVORITE PLACES FOR PEACE AND INSPIRATION ARE THE CAROLINA MOUNTAINS AND NANTUCKET.

My walk in the woods today was blessed with brilliant sunshine. As I sat on my favorite fallen log, I reveled in the sun warming my face. There were few walkers or runners out today because of the cold. The only sounds were birds calling in the trees as they foraged for food, the creek babbling, and a squirrel's claws scratching the bark as he ran up a nearby tree. It was still. No lawn mowers, leaf blowers, trucks backing up, just lovely peace and quiet. Even the raucous ducks on the creek were swimming silently.

I found myself wondering, how often do we give ourselves time to sit in silence and listen to what is around us? How often do we actually sit still in God's presence? And, of course, why not?

There are several words in the Bible used to convey the word "still". One of the most familiar is, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10). What I did not realize was that the context for this is war. The setting is a battlefield. God is speaking directly to the nations who are His enemies. What struck me is that the words are a command.

It is powerful to believe in a God who can defeat an enemy simply by the words He speaks. Ponder that reality and you will find yourself still. That kind of power and force is only available to the creator of the universe. The psalm also says, "He raised His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold." (Psalm 46:6-7). God's voice can not only stop a warring nation, but it can also melt the earth! That power will silence us in reverence and awe.

There is another passage of Scripture with which most of us are familiar, "He leads me beside still waters." (Psalm 23:2). Some translations say quiet waters. So often when I am walking, I search out these places. It doesn't have to be by water, but a place of quiet and peace in which to meditate on the beauty of His creation and listen for His voice.

Jesus, who was besieged by large crowds, said to His disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (Mark 6:31). He knew when to withdraw to rest and pray. Quieting our bodies and minds takes some practice. But just as we attune our ears to learn the bird calls in the woods,



A MOVING MIRACLE

BY PENNY OLIVER

PENNY BECAME A MEMBER OF STONEBRIDGE IN 2011. SHE WAS PART OF A TEAM THAT PROVIDED EVER-POPULAR COFFEE AND TEA BETWEEN SERVICES PRIOR TO COVID. AS YOU CAN SEE BELOW, PENNY LOVES TO DABBLE IN PAINT.

My husband Jim and I were finally moving! Jim had decided to retire from UNCC after 47 years as a professor and researcher in microbiology, helping to establish the first PhD program in the Biology department. Jim's career helped feed his passion for travel as he lectured at universities and conferences around the world. Seems he needed a travel partner to tend to the luggage...so I was elected to travel with him. At last count we have been blessed to visit over 60 countries! With COVID ending our travel for the foreseeable future, we figured it was as good a time as any to downsize. Our 5-bedroom home had been a blessing for 19 years, much of that time hosting one or more of our 6 children and 5 grandsons. That, my friends, is part of the reason for downsizing...lest some of them move home again!

I will say, downsizing is not for the faint of heart - not sure where all this stuff came from - and it took many trips to Camino, advertising on Market Place to sell furniture, and many refills of the garbage and recycle bins to finally get down to a "manageable" 200+ cardboard boxes of possessions we didn't feel we could part with.

So...on the with story of moving day...

All was so incredibly organized (those of you who know me understand this). Each box was not only labeled for content, but was color-coded so the movers would know in what room to place them. I was prepared for a smooth and stress-free move.

The big day approached, and the moving company, "You Move Me", a company based in Charlotte, was due to arrive at 8:00 AM on Wednesday, November 11th. Destination? A huge home on Union Street in Concord! What??? What happened to downsizing? Well, the Lord does provide in big ways! Long story short, this huge home belongs to a friend of mine, and it was to sit vacant for a year-how perfect would it be for us to rent it while we looked for our next adventure!

Then began the dire warnings from the weatherman: Sunday - "Big storm brewing, headed our way - could be record-breaking rain." Monday: "...really need to prepare for massive flooding on Wednesday...". Tuesday: "Possible historic flooding to hit Charlotte on Wednesday". Yikes!!! I tried to convince our landlord and the movers to reschedule for Thursday, to no avail. No question that we were going to fill this mansion of a house with 200 rain soaked cardboard boxes.

Now, you can be sure there had been a lot of prayer concerning selling our home and moving; a lot of prayer for strength in packing, a lot of prayer for direction about where to move. And, not a surprise, a whole lot of answered prayer. God is good that way! But this? This was a historic storm...on my moving day! There was a whole lot of prayer about this! Friends, family, and neighbors all praying that we could manage moving in such a storm.

The movers arrived on time and promised to do their best. All my organizing paid off as we were able to load the truck in record time. Dark clouds were threatening as we pulled away from our driveway. It was as if the clouds were chasing the truck, saying, "we are going to get you!" As I was following the truck, I was praying the entire 20-minute ride: "Please Lord, hold off the rain."

The big van had to park on Union Street, and with traffic detouring around the truck, these five strong men worked like high-speed robots, moving boxes in a line like a bucket brigade, hustling those boxes up two sets of steps and a long front walk - literally tossing the 200+ boxes through the front door.

The clouds loomed; the movers worked hard; I directed the traffic of boxes and cars. We didn't even take a lunch break!

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BE STILL, *continued*

we can learn to hear God in a peaceful and quiet setting. He often speaks to us in that soft voice that can only be heard when we are...still.

Whether you are walking beside still waters, listening to a brook's harmony as it passes over rocks or listening to sounds of the forest around you, take time to rest, quiet your thoughts and listen to the silence. And remember, you are sitting with the God of the universe. And He wants to talk to you.

"LET ALL THAT I AM WAIT QUIETLY BEFORE GOD, FOR MY HOPE IS IN HIM. HE ALONE IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION, MY FORTRESS WHERE I WILL NOT BE SHAKEN." PSALM 62:5-6 (NLT)

ARE YOU READY?

Spring comes faithfully every year, thanks to our wonderful Creator. We are refreshed by the sensory beauties of spring. People come out of their homes to walk in the neighborhood. Even the birds that stuck around with us all winter long sing with new gusto.

It's now been a year since the pandemic began, with its isolation, restrictions, illnesses, and death. Will it continue? We don't know. But we do know that in this land which is not our home (Philippians 3:20), we have been given a hope that doesn't disappoint us (Romans 5:5).

Our hope is not in the return of spring, nor in an end to a pandemic, nor in anything else the world thinks of as hope; our hope is in our soul's eternity, in a return to our native land, where there are no inclement seasons. Our soul's flight home will bring us to the place where God intends us to be. So let's not lose heart. We may be far from home, but not far from our Lord, and better yet, He draws closer when we call on His name in praise and prayer. So, like the birds, let us sing with new gusto in praise to the Lord of Easter Day. He is risen, and for those of us who believe in Him, so shall we! Are you ready? -Ed.

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A MOVING MIRACLE, *continued*

Amazing! Even more amazing, the clouds hung onto their rain!

The storm that had threatened to wash out all Wednesday, for some reason known only to those who prayed...was held back! The poor thunderclouds were about to burst! The movers couldn't believe it...but I did!

Precisely at 4:00 PM, as the lead man came to me with the invoice to pay, we heard the thunder. As I signed my check and handed it to him - no kidding - the skies broke open and the predicted massive storm that caused major flooding, evacuations, and water rescues began. The storm continued through Thursday (remember I had asked the movers and landlord to change the date to Thursday?)

God not only answered my prayers for strength, He answered my prayer to hold off the rain - down to the minute! It's as if He held a stopwatch and said to the clouds, "Ready, set...GO!"

Driving my car back to the home I was leaving, I had goose bumps thinking about this miracle - God holding back the waters! I was crying and laughing and rejoicing. I called my buddy, Leigh Williams, to share the events. We both rejoiced in God's grace, laughing in tears at the thought of these poor clouds holding back their rain for so long.

I've repeated this quote many times, so some of you will know it well:

"The Lord always hears and answers every prayer. Sometimes He answers "Yes", and sometime He says "No", and sometimes He says, "You have got to be kidding!"

"NOW THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WE HAVE BEFORE HIM: WHENEVER WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US" 1 JOHN 5:14-15 (HCSB)

"IN THE BONDS OF DEATH HE LAY WHO FOR OUR OFFENSE WAS SLAIN;
BUT THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY,
CHRIST HATH BROUGHT US LIFE AGAIN.
WHEREFORE LET US ALL REJOICE,
SINGING LOUD, WITH CHEERFUL VOICE,
HALLELUJAH!" -MARTIN LUTHER