



Rejoicing in the Cold

A reflection on God's provisions in difficult times | LEAH KLUG

My family used to have a wanagan. When I was growing up, we built one onto our trailer so that we could store food for the winter.

“Wanagan” is an old logging term used to describe a shack or room to store goods. We lived on Kuiu Island in the Alexander Archipelago in south-eastern Alaska, and because there were no grocery stores, telephones, or paved roads, supplies arrived from the nearest towns via floatplane. In winter, brutal snowstorms often meant weeks or a month between deliveries, isolating us from the world. Necessities like toilet tissue were ordered by the case, milk came seven gallons at a time and joined the fish, deer, and in a good year, moose, in the chest freezer.

Looking into the wanagan, my mother could tell what we needed for our next order and whether we were running low on anything. Sometimes she would send my brother or me to a neighbor to borrow needed items until the next plane arrived.

This past year our community at Quest Church in Seattle has faced a stormy, brutal season as we have grappled together with death, illness, unemployment, loss, and disappointment. The litany of suffering in community is all too familiar to those in ministry. A couple separates and prepares for divorce. Cancer brutally ravages the life of a young family. A father finds himself for the first time without employment or the means to support his wife and children. The local hospital calls: the family has requested a pastor to bless a newborn baby before he dies. Can you come?

These are the cold seasons, the times of desolation. Faced alone, they can seem overwhelming, a spiritual wasteland without end.

But we are not alone. In seasons of need or doubt, we are called to come alongside one another for encourage-

ment and prayer, and we are sent the gift of the Holy Spirit, that God might minister to us directly in our pain.

Ministering to those who are suffering deep heartache and need, we are called to remember those promises that have been stored up in times of plenty, the words of encouragement, Scripture, song, and lessons learned in biblical teaching tucked away in our hearts.



We remember how God has spoken to us and showed himself real before the emptiness came.

Together each Sunday, and alone throughout the week, we mine the rich depths of Scripture to learn of God’s character and promises. In Psalm 30:5 we are promised that “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (TNIV). We are given the ultimate expression of God’s love in the person of Jesus Christ and the sacrifice made for us (John 3:16). In Revelation 7:9-17 we glimpse the final restoration of God’s kingdom come on earth as in heaven, where all God’s children are gathered in worship.

Standing alongside the newborn baby boy who will not survive, and his family, who has already said goodbye to his twin, I pray to God for help. I am not yet a mother. I can guess but do not know how this young woman and her family are feeling as the life support is removed, and the tiny

infant is laid in her arms. I pray, and I hear the Spirit nudging, “Sing to the baby.”

When I ask, I learn there is a song the family has sung often in the short weeks of this child’s life. In one voice, we all sing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” as both blessing and benediction.

“Precious in his sight,” as we sang together that afternoon the baby joined his sibling in the arms of Jesus.

The truth is I have no background or gifts in music. I wriggle out of singing the benediction at church as often as possible. And yet in a small hospital room, with a dozen people present, I felt the Spirit urging me to use what I perceive as my weakest weakness to bring comfort.

Today we may consider ourselves removed from the act of laying up provisions and offering our thanks to a God who has given us the means to survive a difficult season. In that hospital room, though, God provided when I was sure I was lacking. For that provision, and for all of God’s provision, I give thanks.

During those winters in Alaska everything shut down, and drifts piled so deep that the Alaska Pulp Corporation closed operations. With storerooms full, knowing we could borrow from one another when supplies ran short, the few families who wintered in the logging camp built a deep bond. When the northern lights came, we would run from house to house, knocking on doors to let our neighbors know the show had begun. Together we would trudge in our snow clothes to a clearing and lie on our backs in the snow, staring up at the brilliant, living tapestry of light overhead. The kids would break out sleds, the adults brewed coffee, and together we rejoiced in the cold. ■

Leah Klug is lead associate pastor at Quest, a Covenant church in Seattle, Washington.