

SUNDAY, AUGUST 5, 2018

---

**BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE**

SCRIPTURE: 2 SAMUEL 18:5–9, 15, 31–33

---

## Caught

*And he was left hanging between heaven and earth.*

2 Samuel 18:9

In the thick of battle against David's fierce army, the mule on which Absalom was riding took a wrong turn, catching Absalom's hair in the branches of a great oak. He was caught, unable to move—hanging between heaven and earth, vulnerable to his enemies, unable to free himself from the complicated circumstances that brought him to this place. He waits for either the hand of violence or the touch of compassion to resolve his dilemma.

Who in your life is caught between heaven and earth? Perhaps not as dramatically as Absalom, but nonetheless bound by life's complexity? Where might you have the power to release another from being suspended between isolation and community, fear and grace, judgment and understanding? Where might a merciful word, gracious act of welcome, a hand extended in invitation, make all the difference for another? Is God directing your gaze to see the perplexity of another person's "caught" place?



*Holy One, free me to recognize the pain and perplexity of another, to ask what love requires to ease the silent suffering of another caught between heaven and earth. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

MONDAY, AUGUST 6, 2018

---

BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE

SCRIPTURE: 2 SAMUEL 18:5–9, 15, 31–33

---

## Broken Hearts

*“Is it well with the young man Absalom?”*

2 Samuel 18:32

Violence begets violence. We need read only the morning newspaper to see the pileup of hatred upon revenge upon betrayal upon viciousness, layer upon layer. Of course it wasn't well with Absalom: when the question was posed, he was already dead by the hands of his father's soldiers. David and Absalom's story began and ended with violence.

We don't have to look far in the world around us to see the same fierce story playing out again and again, in international news and in the drama playing out down the street. Maybe it is even in our own home.

By faith, we allow our hearts to be broken open by this ancient and modern story. By faith, we pray that Jesus' witness of love will form our thoughts, our actions, our words. By faith, we can boldly enquire, “is it well with my sister?” “is it well with my brother?” and then work with love and diligence to make sure it is.



*Peacebuilding God, grant us your courage to seek the welfare of our neighbors, our enemies, ourselves, committing again to live your life of peace. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

TUESDAY, AUGUST 7, 2018

---

**BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE**

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 130

---

## Expectant

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits . . .*

Psalm 130:5

What does it mean to live with expectancy for that which we most desire? Parents waiting for a new baby don't simply wait: they shop, read, start a college fund, prepare their home, reimagine what the future will be. A church family readies for service by finding out who their forsaken neighbors are, figuring out what they need, and asking what structures have brought them to the outskirts of justice.

Expectant waiting nudges us to prepare for that for which we long. Waiting is active. Waiting is a witness of love. Where do you yearn for the Holy to enter into your soul? The lives of your loved ones? The fabric of your community? The world?

It isn't our job to do all the work of preparation, but it is our gift and responsibility to do our part: to pray, to be vulnerable, to reach out, to dream, and to listen with love. We should expect that, by God's grace, we should help form the world in a more generous shape.



*O Longing of our hearts, we wait for you and your ways. Show us how to live with expectancy. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2018

---

BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 4:25–5:2

---

## God Can Work with It

*Let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors. . . .  
Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go  
down on your anger.*

Ephesians 4:25–26

Did you double-check your Bible to make sure the text really says “be angry”? Honestly, that’s news to me. Somewhere I heard that Christians were supposed to be patient and kind, bearing all things, etc. But there is a place for anger, the kind that isn’t left to fester and doesn’t lead to worse offense. It is the anger that finds expression. I tell my neighbor (my spouse, my boss, my child) that I’m angry and why, as an act of faith.

How could that be an act of faith? Perhaps because truth is more important than comfort, because anger can be born of conscience. God planted within us compasses of conscience that move us further from our desire and closer to God’s will for the world. Perhaps the first authentic thing we can do when anger wells up in us is to recognize it and name it for what it is. And then we can bless it as a gift and let it be shaped by love, choosing words and expressions that fulfill true righteousness, and not the self-righteous sort.



*Spirit of love, transform my anger into energy and  
passion to do your will of love. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

THURSDAY, AUGUST 9, 2018

---

**BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE**

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 4:25–5:2

---

## Perfect Practice

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.*

Ephesians 5:1–2

When my children were small and preliterate, they would listen carefully to the words I spoke when reading them picture books, studying the pictures that went with the words that I read aloud. Then, when they thought I wasn't paying attention, they would "read" on their own, carefully turning each page and repeating the appropriate words exactly as I had spoken them. It made me ever more careful of the books that I chose, knowing how carefully they imitated.

Could we be so attentive to God's actions? How have you known love—yesterday, last week, in your childhood? What did love feel like, look like, sound like? Is God's love the kind that you know when you see it, or do you have to practice to be awake to it? Can we be like a young child, reciting by heart words first spoken by the loving parent? Observing so carefully each consonant and diphthong of love? Christ is all around, in each generous act of compassion and courage. Might we have the will to imitate?



*Christ Jesus, help us to practice to perfection how to live in love. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

FRIDAY, AUGUST 10, 2018

---

BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 6:35, 41–51

---

## Blessed Hunger

*Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life.”*

John 6:35

Most of us get three meals a day, and then some. When we skip a meal, hunger hurts. I can't imagine living without my morning coffee, a bowl of steaming soup, or chicken curry. Our days are framed and our social calendars are punctuated by meals. Our need to be fed is constant. Yet Jesus says that the true bread is not rye or sourdough, but him, as elemental to our existence as a bowl of oatmeal in the morning. On his life and leading we can feast and be filled.

When life has worn us down, no other sustenance can revive us. That's how elemental the life of faith is. Jesus' life infused with mercy is the only thing that will truly satisfy our yearning for a purposeful, sacrificial life of love. And when we fall out of relationship and live on the surface of life, that hunger gnaws at us until we return to the holy feast of love. What would it look like if we tended our relationship with Jesus as consistently as we respond to our bellies?



*Bread of Life, I am so grateful that my hunger keeps leading me back to you. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 2018

---

BOUND IN STRUGGLE, WOVEN BY LOVE

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 6:35, 41–51

---

## Ordinary

*“Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?”*

John 6:42

A few years after graduating from high school in the boring hometown in which I was raised, I heard that a former classmate of mine had a starring role in a musical on Broadway. We had been the leads in our high school musical, and now he was a star? The guy who struggled to learn his lines, messed up his blocking, and failed repeatedly to hit the high note? I was glad for his success but also puzzled by it. How could I have been that close to brilliance and not known it?

Jesus claimed to be the bread from heaven, and his neighbors and friends wondered, where does this regular guy get these big ideas? But ordinary is what God knows best—like the mud that God shaped into Adam, God loves to work with our common bodies, our regular selves. Jesus offered his ordinary human life to a dream of salvation for all creation. May we follow such an example of faith, hope, and love.



*Creator of all, take the ordinary mud of my life and use it for your extraordinary purposes. Amen.*

Melanie Oommen, Eugene, Oregon