

Blessed is She Who Mourns

Just as Summer sat herself into her rocking chair to fondly watch Autumn play in our back yard, I began to grieve all over again. With tears threatening to spill down my face, I wonder how something so constant can feel so unexpected. Then I wonder if I mean sadness or seasons.

Maybe that is the entire difference between children and adults. Grief.

Even my teenagers, so close to adulthood, fill with anticipation in change. Jake and Libby long for the newness of the fall. Plans form for the excitement of cider, and school, and new warm clothes. But Rikki and I just sigh as we make room for the aging sunshine on the porch. We make mental lists of the fun undone, and reminisce of past happiness.

Of course it is “better to have loved and lost than never loved at all.” Clearly I praise God for the time I took her for granted. Obviously I am a grown woman capable of living without the protection of my mother. But all I see today is the phone still in its cradle and the x-ray of the latest tumor.

“Truly I tell you, unless you become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Thus, I believe that motherlessness has earned me grace. I have become child-like: weeping and wanting and insecure. I’m not really sure that is what the bible intended. More like the Beatitudes... blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Comfort can come from the rhythm of the Earth. Since inception, babies are born, children are nurtured, lovers unite, so that babies are born and children get nurtured, and so on. But that fourth season doesn’t really catch our attention. Not until we are in it. Babies are born... and the rest of us? We die.

Heaven is a concept I have difficulty with. Sunday school teachers had us draw pictures of Jesus eating ice cream cones next to pink ponies. Mom saw a dark TV room hosting my Pop in a rocking chair with my dead sister in his lap. I guess they were smiling and waving at my mom like in silent home movies. I sort of picture the grainy film and thwip thwip thwip of my mother’s heart at the end of the reel. If it’s true, I’m sure she has already painted the room a brighter color. I hope it matches the leaves on the trees at the edge of my woods.

Knowing that summer symbolizes strength and autumn wisdom, I try to realize that maybe I am just entering the next season of my life. Maybe the loss of my mother was the moment that my understanding surpassed my might. I felt the epiphany actually- right around the year anniversary- right before my last scan. I weighed my words more carefully, practiced more patience, and felt her presence somewhere in my core. Or was that the cancer?

Stage four. 12 cycles. Second recurrence. 1 tumor. It’s a numbers game. Thank God that three is the magic number.

My summer is over. Logically, even Sampson’s strength is no match for the side effects of poisons poured into my body for an entire calendar year. I must fight this time, in my weakened state, with my intelligence. Welcome Autumn- with wisdom, with knowledge, with experience. With psychology.

And as I lay in my featherbed, watching the tops of the trees sway in the less humid breeze, I get it. Watching my life pass before my eyes, I am forced to see the seasons rolling over and over like high-speed photography. I create a story for my mom, my gram, and every mother before her. I whisper to all of them, to all of you, “Look what we’ve accomplished.” And I close my eyes to feel them all nod in agreement, in a pride swelling my heart greater for all children - as Jake comes in swinging the car keys before heading out the door. Libby snuggles in at my feet to replay the details of her day. And I notice Rikki is learning a new song on the acoustic guitar in the next room. I have entered the kingdom...

I am vulnerable, like a child. I have faith, like a child. I surrender, like a child. I love, as completely and unguarded as all children. This must be heaven.

New England fall is sensational... and short lived. So was my mom. This, then, is the wisdom of growing up; be child-like. Instead of grieving the loss, I will delight in the sound of leaves crunching under my feet. Then Autumn and I will stand at the back door, with Earl Grey tea cupped in our hands as we welcome Winter into our yard. I will dream pleasantly of snowshoes and wood stoves and festive lights.

Heavenly, I will continue to change with the seasons. I may, of course, cry from time to time, but honestly, I get the opportunity to live with a long line of women who have come and gone before me. I get to love. I get to sass my children, and chase my grandchildren, and make new friends, and learn new skills, and remind my husband to smile with his eyes, because it's very sexy. And when it becomes time for the real winter of my life, the sighs won't be mine. For the sadness will be rolling into Spring for everyone I love left here.

Submitted by Alicia McCormick