

I (Karen) have been sad the first week of this Christmas season. Really sad. The weight of the world, the pain of it, feels like it is squeezing my soul and darkening the sky. I don't know why this particular year...maybe it is the recent bombings... Paris and San Bernardino....

refugee women and children living in container boxes in the Middle East...

human trafficking...

or even small personal daily losses more close to home.

Maybe it is just the stupid draught or the rising price of groceries. I think it is all of it. We are all caught in it, the death of the world constantly in our living rooms, on our phones, in our lives. The world...dark and heavy.

Bill and I recently went to see the last *Hunger Games* movie. (This is neither an endorsement nor a critique of the movie). I enjoyed the all the books, the other movies. This one moved me to utter panic. The ending, after the children die, when the new president takes her office to beating of drums in a scene of gray... I almost had to run out of the theater.



Why? I could not figure it out. Then, I talked with my daughter's friend JOY. She said, "They finally did that movie right. It actually really showed the twisted horror of the story." The twisted story of us...and what we can become without HIM...have become. As a lover of history, I have studied many many gruesome human stories...this year...it clicked.

In Sunday school last week, Katrina Kirtz explained randomly, how much strength it takes to break a chicken wing bone during dissection. We sat and imagined the human strength it took to break the legs of the two hanging on the cross next to Jesus, already dying men, bleeding and gasping for air. How much cruelty did it actually take to do that?



Human depravity is not new. It is absolutely ancient...

I have been blessed to know both the depths of my own evil and weakness. It is pretty ugly. I have never broken legs...but hearts? I am fortunate to have witnessed only the tiniest fraction of human suffering and death. . . and I have always been so very thankful that JESUS came to offer hope and comfort in these. When I sing "O come all ye faithful, joyful, and triumphant..." I sing of this personal deliverance. I cannot trivialize it and I am so very grateful...that HE came...for me...for us... as a RESCUE.

But...this year I get it. He came into the world, was born into that manger and died on that cross...for the absolute worst of it. The grossest ugly. The parts we cannot answer, grieve enough, or forget. HE must be so broken-hearted for what HIS image bearers have become. A fraction of the GOD that HE is never would have come...would you? "Father...really, live with them?" Let alone die for them. I would have sent fire, not my SON. BUT HE CAME....and HE loved...and he rose.

This is the JESUS we celebrate this season. The ONE I celebrate. The triumphant victor over all the centuries of madness. It rings deeper in my heart...what HE actually did...what HE actually offers. The only real HOPE. The only real JOY. The only thread of survival in this spinning mess. Grab the thread. Grab HIM. Hold on tight. Lean in and draw close. Be held. Behold...



This is our JESUS...

*(Jesus said) The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were **fastened** on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:18 – 21*

Aren't we begging for this? The headlines screaming for it? **Fasten your eyes on HIM.**

*When the Magi saw the star rest over the place where the infant Jesus was, the scripture says, "When they saw the star, they were **OVERJOYED.**" Matt 2:10*



As a Christian, I fling around the word *joy* frequently. We say, Joy is not happiness...it like an inner contentment from HIM." This is absolutely true, yet I believe it falls short. They were **OVERJOYED**. Crazy with joy...beyond happy or content.

The **RESCUER** was here...finally. The promised one. The star proved it. And they were filled with joy that brimmed over the top. Maybe they knew the depths of the rescue. Maybe they were just glad the journey was over.

I don't know. But... they trusted the promise. They knew HE was the KING. Brought the best of gifts. Bowed in worship. HIS kingdom would have no end.

*"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be **no end**. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. **The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.**" Is 9:7*

HE is still on the throne...right now. Oh... to be weary of saying this..."The LORD is on HIS throne..." no matter what comes. HIS kingdom is here, right now. HE is here right now...in us. The Jesus people. The overjoyed ones. The marred given peace and hope in HIM.

My prayer for you, for me, for us...is that we would discover, moment by moment...how to live as HIS overjoyed kingdom. HIS rescued ones. Maybe not with an earthly answer, but with heavenly HOPE....so thankful for HIS very real sacrifice and overflowing with joy.

