

# Praising God from Within Your Own Darkness

By Alice E. Nash

Isaiah 61 10 - 62 3 and Psalm 148

In the reading from Isaiah this morning, we hear of joy, salvation, and righteousness. The garments of salvation and robes of righteousness are "The clothes God puts on in order to establish justice – within and without – are here garments of the righteous servant."<sup>1</sup> God is about to bring justice to the people of Zion. Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Isaiah 40-66* states "The speaker is filled with the joy of a bridegroom, the delight of a bride, full of loveliness, of expectation, of buoyancy, of confidence concerning all the newness that is about to happen."<sup>2</sup> A reminder that there is great joy. Brueggemann continues on about the passage "Yahweh decides to break the silence. It is as though Israel, Yahweh's people, has been exploited and abused. And all the while, Yahweh has observed silently, permitting the exploitation and abuse without any protest or intervention."<sup>3</sup> It is like God has decided that this will no longer continue and has decided to break the silence.

In today's second reading, Psalm 148, focus on creation and a call to praise God. This Psalm is a Song of Praise. "By the end of the psalm, the word "praise" has occurred eleven times as a verb and once as a noun (v. 14). This impressive repetition in itself suggests the inclusivity of praise, which Psalm 148 invites." <sup>4</sup> Therefore, we should all praise God.

Praising God, it is a concept that seems simple enough when the times are happy and good. Have you ever tried to praise God from within your deepest, darkest despair? It is no easy task.

In November of 2011, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. When I heard his doctor in the emergency room say that, my world stopped. My father had fallen at home. We thought he might have broken his hip, now the doctor was telling us it was lung cancer and he had about 2 months left. 2 months, is a relatively short time to spend with someone that you deeply care for. Mom and I decided that we were going to take him home and care for him there. Hospice would come but Mom and I would do most of the watching and talking with him.

For those who don't realize this already, I was a daddy's girl. I had that man wrapped around my little finger from a very young age. He taught me the things I would need to know to make it this far in life. I can wax a car to a showroom shine. I can change a car's spark plugs. I have a heart that is big enough to love a lot of people, yet it hurts when I see someone that I don't know that well in a bad situation.

Christmas was his favorite time of the year. He loved giving. It was something that came naturally to him. The thing he didn't like about Christmas was shopping, and really, who does? He would always take me out to get a gift for mom at the last minute. We would shop on Christmas Eve. Why? Because, as he put it, there are less choices to make that way. The racks

were rather picked over by then. His love for Christmas has made all the Christmases since that diagnosis bittersweet (at best).

Caring for Dad was never easy. He wasn't always the best patient. Mostly he would keep Mom up for 24 hours straight. I would get there and watch him so Mom could take a break. Darrin would stop by and help out as well as he could. We had friends who would stop by and bring us food, sit with Dad while he told them stories. One couple came and helped Mom bathe Dad and change the bedding.

Just a few months before Dad's diagnosis, I'd found my voice again. That is, two months earlier, in September, I had started singing in the choir here. That was a blessing. Furthermore, I was blessed to have an understanding choir director, Dominick, who knew that I could run late getting to choir rehearsal and he also let me borrow a hymnal so I could sing to my dad. What better medicine than having your daughter sing to you in your time of despair? I sang his favorite hymn to him "How Great Thou Art". I also sang "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty". Knowing that, at least for a time, this took his mind off of what was going on was a comfort to me.

When you are a caregiver, after a while, you just start going through the motions. Knowing full well what is just around the corner can make you numb. You care for the other person until you are exhausted and you aren't really sure how you keep going. After the time of caring for the other person has ended, there is a release. It is a freeing feeling that you feel guilty about. You are free from taking care of someone, but that someone isn't around anymore.

You might be wondering how I praised God through this.

I praised God for the time I was able to spend with my dad.

I praised God that I had a wonderful husband of a year and a half that understood that caring for my dad came first.

I praised God for the angels that walk among us who helped care for my dad.

I praised God for the fact that I can sing.

Almost 8 months after losing my dad I had a night that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. At 10pm, on Wednesday, August 1, 2012, I was getting ready for bed. It had been a long, hot day at work printing photos at the photo lab that I owned at the time. I never dreamed that I would be getting a phone call from the Colonie Police Department to tell me that my store had been hit by a drunk driver.

Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined seeing what was in front of me when Darrin and I drove up to the accident. The store that I had put my blood, sweat and tears into for 17 years was barely standing. The main support column on the corner was on the shoulder of the side road. Three windows were blown out from the force of the impact. There was a white

Chevy Tahoe on the lawn next to my store, wedged between the building and a fire hydrant a few feet away from power pole with transformers on it.

After a while, code enforcement allowed me to go inside to grab the expensive things that could be easily stolen. Inside, there was absolute chaos. The desk that was near the front windows was pushed into the photo printing machine. Ceiling tiles were falling out of the ceiling, insulation and wires were hanging. The vertical blinds were blowing in the warm summer breeze. Still in shock, with Darrin, my mom, and my mom's neighbor by my side, I quickly pointed to which items to grab. In any situation like this, when owning a photo store, you grab the photos. Those photos are someone else's memories. Then we grabbed the cash drawer, since it had the prior business day's sales still in it waiting to be deposited. After that, we grabbed the computer that we stored the photos from portrait sittings and weddings.

I was still in shock. I held it together while everyone was still around. Once everyone left, and it was just Darrin and I sitting in my car. I let out a scream. The tears started to flow. The full weight of what had happened hit me like that truck slamming into my store. That truck was driven by a girl, who was not legal to drink, and her blood alcohol content was almost 3 times the legal limit. The area of the building that she hit was where our most expensive machine sat. That same area, was where I would sit until the wee hours of the morning printing people's Christmas Card orders. If this accident had happened during our Christmas season, I could have been injured or killed. She was going about 55mph when she hit the corner of the building.

The reconstruction of the store took 3 months. It finally finished when our Christmas season started.

Again, you are probably wondering how I praised God during this time.

I praised God that my store was closed when the accident occurred.

I praised God that I hadn't decided to work late that night.

I praised God that not one innocent person was injured.

I praised God that my husband stayed by my side through this.

I praised God that my family and friends surrounded me.

Again, I praised God that all of you were in my life.

During both times, I praised God in gratitude for what was in my life instead of focusing on the bad stuff. Trying to focus on the good when everything around you seems to be going wrong is never easy, but it is worth it. Focusing on the good things will make the bad things seem not so overwhelming. For me, I found life more manageable and I was able to still see the beauty and wonder that was all around me. The next time a crisis hits, the waves of despair seem to be overtaking you, and the worst doesn't seem like it will ever end. Take a few moments, praise God

for what you are thankful for and see what happens. Things might not be so bad after all.  
Amen.

1 The New Interpreter's Bible A Commentary in 12 Volumes, Volume VI, Abington Press,  
Copyright 2001, page 515

2 Isaiah 40-66 by Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky,  
Copyright 1998, page 218

3 Isaiah 40-66 by Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky,  
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4 The New Interpreter's Bible A Commentary in 12 Volumes, Volume IV, Abington Press,  
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