

“Like Flowers of the Field”

Psalm 103:13-18

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The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more... (Psalm 103:15-16) I have here with me a tiny little sprig of pressed flowers, plucked from a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Flowers of a field... the wind blew over them and they were gone, and their place remembers them no more. But these flowers are a memory for me... a memory of the words of Scripture recited on that hill by my friend, Julia, whom I've known for 20 years.



The hill we were on was the place that may have been the very place that Jesus preached the sermon on the mount. And as she spoke, I wept, because she had not only memorized these words and called them to mind for us, but she had prayed through them earlier in the day, knowing she was going to recite them, and she had matched the beatitudes with different group members and had looked at them while she spoke. And she looked directly at me when she prayed, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Julia knew me, and she knew how well-acquainted with grief I have been – how much I know the truth that “The life of mortals is grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.”

There is a sadness in this verse... for we long to be known and remembered... by our place... by our people... by the generations to come... to leave a legacy that matters and means something.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy holds many stories, but the central one is that of two humble hobbits from the Shire – Sam and Frodo – who are on a mission to destroy a powerful Ring.



In the midst of their mission, toward the end of the second book, Sam and Frodo wax eloquent, wondering if they will be remembered... if they've managed to work their way into a story that will be turned into a tale that is told to all who are to come. "I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales," Sam says.

"We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards... People will say: 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?' 'Yes, my boy, the famousest of the hobbits, and that's saying a lot.'"

And then Frodo laughs and goes on:

"Why, Sam, to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you've left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted. 'I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn't they put in more of his talk, dad? That's what I like, it makes me laugh. And Frodo wouldn't have got far without Sam, would he, dad?'"

Later Sam asks, "Don't the great tales never end?" Frodo answered: "No, they never end as tales... But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later

— or sooner.” Frodo, too, knew that our is like grass. We flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over us and we are gone, and [unless someone writes a big book or song about you] our place remembers us no more.”

You and I are not on a mission to save all of Middle Earth from the power of the One Ring that rules them all... We have humbler missions here... Even if we have no desire to be memorialized in some grandiose way, we want to live in such a way that we’ve ‘made a difference’ – a positive difference in this world... that we’ve built toward the kingdom... that the words ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ will be fitting words when we cross from this life to the next.

So we hold that, on one hand, and on the other hand, we hold the reality that we are like grass... and fading flowers... Isaiah 40:7 says, “all people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them.” The breath of the Lord – could also be translated the Spirit of the Lord... the *Ruach Adonai*... Here today. Gone tomorrow. At the very breath of God! And our places remember us no more.

It may be true that our place will forget us... that our people – the generations that come after us – will forget us. And in some cases, it may be that we are forgotten even before we die... Psalm 27:10 says that sometimes fathers and mothers abandon their children... And we know that children sometimes forsake their parents before they die... And leaders and kings oppress their people... and husbands and wives reject one another... It may be true that we will experience the forgetfulness of others long before death takes us.

But God remembers us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him... for he *knows* us... he knows our form... he knows how frail we can be *and* how strong we can be... how beautiful and flourishing we can be... and how rootless we can be.

That God knows us and all our extremes is part of what it’s like to be remembered by God. When Julia looked straight at me and said Jesus’ words of blessing, I felt known by her and by Jesus.

That it is the very breath of God that blows on us to take us home is part of what it's like to be remembered by God. I was with Johanna the other day (we've known her for most of our time as Jane, but she has been particularly enjoying her given name, Johanna). And she told me by pointing to one letter at a time that every night she prays that the Lord would take her home. And every morning when she wakes up, she thanks God for this beautiful day. She is thankful for her life, and waiting for the breath of the Spirit of God to take her. God remembers Johanna.

That God's love is with those who fear him from everlasting to everlasting is part of what it's like to be remembered by God. The love of God is neverending, lasting from generation to generation. As we traveled together in Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, talking about our ancestors in the faith, Rabbi George would often refer to the shoulders of those who have come before us, and how we stand on those shoulders... we don't stand in the shadows of our ancestors, he said, we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before – and those who come after will stand on our shoulders. We are living stones, built on one another... an everlasting temple. All of us are part of something bigger because of the everlasting love of God.

The psalmist writes that God's righteousness is with the children of those who fear him, and their children after them. The righteousness of God is with us – and not just with us... within us, insofar as Jesus is within us.

The Lord's love is with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. It turns out that we are rememberers, too... It is not just that we want to *be* remembered, but that we are called to remember – to remember the ways and movements of God – to remember those who have gone before – to remember the covenant... and at the table... to remember Jesus.

If you wouldn't mind returning with me here to Sam and Frodo... They were so faithful... to each other and to the mission upon which they had been sent. When they accomplished their mission, spent and exhausted, they simply waited to die. And as they waited for the sea of chaos to envelop them, Frodo and Sam talked:



“I am glad that you are here with me,” said Frodo. “Here at the end of all things, Sam.”

“Yes, I am with you, Master,” said Sam, laying Frodo’s wounded hand gently to his breast. “And you’re with me. And the journey’s finished. But after coming all that way I don’t want to give up yet. It’s not like me, somehow, if you understand.”

“Maybe not, Sam,” said Frodo; “but it’s like things are in the world. Hopes fail. An end comes. We have only a little time to wait now. We are lost in ruin and downfall, and there is no escape.” ...

They stood now; and Sam still holding his master’s hand caressed it. He sighed. “What a tale we have been in, Mr. Frodo, haven’t we?” he said. “I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they’ll say: *Now comes the story of the Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?* And then everyone will hush... I wish I could hear it! And I wonder how it will go on after our part.” (228-9)

Spoiler alert... Sam and Frodo are rescued by the eagles and are brought to safety and to the forested land of Ithilien. A great banquet is spread before them, a banquet for *them*, where they are being properly thanked. And suddenly, who should come centre-stage, but a minstrel with a song:

“Lo! Lords and knights and men of valour unashamed, kings and princes, and fair people of Gondor, and Riders of Rohan, and ye sons of Elrond, and Dúnedain of the North, and Elf and Dwarf, and greathearts of the Shire, and all free folk of the West, now listen to my lay. For I will sing to you of Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom.”

And when Sam heard that he laughed aloud for sheer delight, and he stood up and cried “O great glory and splendor! And all my wishes have come true!” And then he wept.

And all the host laughed and wept, and in the midst of their merriment and tears the clear voice of the minstrel rose like silver and gold, and all men were hushed. And he sang to them, now in the Elven-tongue, now in the speech of the West, until their

hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness. (232)

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, there was not a banquet, but a quieter meal – the Passover meal. Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, saying, this is my body, given for you. Do this in *remembrance* of me. And after supper, he took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood – do this, whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. Truly, I will not eat this bread and drink this cup with you again, until my kingdom fully comes.

And you know what I like to think? That Jesus is like the minstrel. And when we gather at the wedding supper of the lamb, at some point during the meal, he will stand up to sing. His voice will raise like silver and gold and we will all hush. And he will sing to us in a language that all will understand, and our hearts, wounded with sweet words, will overflow, as he sings, from his memory and from ours, the story of love and compassion – of flourishing and wind – of righteousness and redemption. And our tears will be the very wine of blessedness.

