

"Joy in the Morning" | BY KENDRA HALOVIK

Advent believers Reuben & Belinda Loveland buried their 17-year old daughter, Mary, shortly after her death on December 12, 1857. It was their third daughter to die in two years. Her obituary in *The Review & Herald* began this way:

"It becomes our painful duty to announce the death of another daughter of brother and sister Loveland, of Johnson, Vermont. Yes, Mary too has gone" (Albert Stone, *The Review & Herald*, Jan 7, 1858).

THREE YOUNG WOMEN, sisters, lost to death in two years. A decade and a half earlier, Reuben & Belinda Loveland had accepted the Advent message after hearing the preaching of William Miller.

They had given up their farm for the cause and experienced the Great Disappointment.

Later, listening to Joseph Bates, they had accepted the sanctuary & Sabbath messages.

For a decade and a half, the Lovelands had studied the law and the apocalyptic writings.

But at Mary's funeral, the homily focused on a passage found in the poetry of the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, which begins...

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children
because they are no more... (31:15).*

The funeral homily also used a phrase two verses later...

*There is hope for your future, says the Lord:
Your children shall come back to their own country (31:17).*

Reflecting on the Babylonian Exile, Jeremiah's poetry captured the lamentation of loss and the hope for a future. These particular words of Scripture acknowledged both the Lovelands' unspeakable tragedy and their Advent hope.

They missed their daughters terribly.

Belinda would write in a letter to Uriah Smith, editor of *The Review & Herald*:

"Their places are vacant around the family altar; no more I hear their shouts of victory and songs of praise" (*Review & Herald*, June 11, 1857).

They missed their daughters terribly.

But the Lovelands also believed they would see their daughters at the Second Advent.

Again, from Belinda's pen in that letter to Smith:

"They will sleep but a little while; for in bright hope they died. Yes, I believe with all my heart in a little time from this, all will be over" (*Review & Herald*, June 11, 1857).

Weeping & Hope, side-by-side in Hebrew poetry and side-by-side in the experience of an early Adventist family.

DECADES LATER, Ellen White, while living in Australia, would watch another Adventist family deal with the loss of a child.

John & Charlotte Pocock had no steady income after John accepted the Sabbath in 1892.

Living 30 miles north of Sydney, John struggled to find odd jobs in order to keep his growing family fed.

Sometimes he did not succeed.

One daughter always remembered the times when her mother had only a cracker to give each child for supper. Then she would say: "Now children, don't tell Dad that this is all you had...He would feel too sad" (Joan Minchin-Neall, "Adventist Heritage," Spring 1992, p. 23).

When Ellen White heard of this family's situation and struggles, she offered John a job helping to build "Sunny-side," her home near Avondale College.

Suddenly the Pocock family's future contained new possibilities!

There was hope for a new start!

Steady work and income.

A community in which to raise their children.

Eventually John moved his family near Avondale.

But within a week of their move, they had buried their 4-year old son, Albert.

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Rachel is weeping for her children;
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because they are no more... (31:15).*

*There is hope for your future, says the Lord:
Your children shall come back to their own country (31:17).*

Weeping & Hope...

Terrible loss mixed with the hope of a new life.

A new start, forever linked to the death of a child...

A place of new possibilities...and now, also, a place of loss.

How did Reuben and Belinda Loveland, John and Charlotte Pocock get through the nights that followed the death of their children?

How do any of us get through the long nights of weeping?

I WAS INTERESTED to learn while reading Gil Valentine's latest manuscript on Ellen White and the General Conference Presidents that many things kept her up at nights; unable to sleep...

Not only concerns for people—her children and her church. But also finances—how to pay the bills; how to meet those responsibilities? Health issues kept her up at nights, as did church leaders who disappointed her.

Several weeks ago, I read a pamphlet in my doctor's office. Over seventy percent of adults suffer from some sort of insomnia; some experience of not being able to rest for all the fears and anxieties.

How did Reuben & Belinda Loveland get through the nights that followed the deaths of their daughters?

Was it easier decades later?

Or, did the delay of the Advent make their loss even more difficult?

How did John & Charlotte Pocock deal with the death of their little boy?

How do any of us get through the long nights of weeping?

A voice is heard in...Ramah, and in...

Johnson, Vermont

Cooranbong

Elmshaven

Takoma Park

Berrien Springs

and Portland, Maine...

Rachel is weeping for her children...

How do any of us get through the long nights of weeping?

And what does the Psalmist mean when he says:

*Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning??*

HEBREW BIBLE SCHOLAR, Walter Brueggemann, has suggested three categories in which to place the poetry of the Psalter. (Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*)

While not wanting to dismiss their variety, nor to force them into a rigid grid, Brueggemann suggests that most psalms can be seen as either psalms of:

- orientation
- disorientation
- new orientation

Psalms of **orientation** are those that express a season of well being, joy, delight.

Those prayers and poetry that express the speaker's sense of being blessed by God; surrounded by the things that bring contentment.

When one has an overwhelming sense of satisfaction, ease, the good life.

Psalms of **disorientation** are those that express the seasons of anguish, suffering, death, rage, resentment.

Those prayers and poetry created by speakers who know deep loss, discontinuity, alienation, lament.

Since in much of Jewish theology all things find their beginning in God, one must direct such experiences of anger and loss to God; even to an absent God.

Psalms of **new orientation** are those that surprise.

Right before disorientation is loss.

Right before new orientation is gift...

The inexplicable gift that brings an overwhelming sense of gratitude, wonder, awe, thanksgiving.

The gift that moves humans to respond with doxology.

Of course, humans know all three...we know orientation, disorientation, new orientation.

We know the tension found in cries against God's absence...and we know doxology at new beginnings.

For Brueggemann, the Psalms are the seasons of life brought to speech.

I am intrigued by those seasons of life where agony meets newness...loss experiences new gift...

Where: "My God, my God...why have you forsaken me?"

Becomes..."Praise God from whom all blessings flow..."

I am intrigued by the early Advent believers who went through the Great Disappointment but then experienced a new orientation... somehow finding even greater commitment and conviction possible.

Were such individuals deluded? Psychologically unhealthy? In denial?

Or, did they understand, at some level that I long to, the Psalms? Did they get the Psalms?

Did they experience, as Brueggemann states: "that hope [which] is rooted precisely in the midst of loss and darkness, where God is surprisingly present" (Brueggemann, 11–12)?

I guess I'm drawn to theology that takes seriously the experience of weeping at night...

And doesn't let an absent God off the hook.

But, in the anger and agony of experiences of disorientation, keeps talking with God, even if it is to raise a fist and voice in protest...

Somehow, in that action... that action of refusing to give up on a God who seems to have given up on us... somehow...

There is a new experience of the presence of God; a rushing in of new wonder, gift, gratitude.

Brueggemann says that it's...

"Because this One has promised to be in the darkness with us, we find the darkness strangely transformed, not by the power of easy light, but by the power of relentless solidarity. Out of the 'fear not' of that One spoken in the darkness, we are marvelously given new life, we know not how" (Brueggemann, 12).

THIS IDEA HAS BEEN CAPTURED in a powerful way by the musical group, "Sweet Honey in the Rock."

In 1973, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. began an *a cappella* vocal group made up of five African American women musicians. Their songs challenge acts of oppression while embracing the courage of faith and justice. One of their songs is an interpretation of Psalm 137.

They start out slow...and very low...

By the waters of Babylon...where we sat down...and where we wept...when we remembered Zion...

This part of the Psalm is repeated...

By the waters of Babylon...where we sat down...and where we wept...when we remembered Zion...

One can almost see people in chains, walking to Babylon...weeping...being allowed to rest, to sit down beside the Babylonian river Chebar and then weeping some more...

And then there is a reminder of the next part of the psalm...

Those who carried us away to captivity...required of us a song... How can we sing our holy songs in a strange land?

This part of the Psalm is also repeated...

Those who carried us away to captivity...required of us a song... How can we sing our holy songs in a strange land?

The song increases in volume...and in intensity...and in hope as one realizes...

Even as they ask, *How can we sing a sacred song in a strange land?* they are, indeed, doing just that!

These women, representing all who weep through the night...all who experience an absent God...

are walking to Babylon in chains... and asked by their oppressors to sing/perform/entertain us...

they respond: *How can we sing our sacred songs in a strange land?*

Yet, at that very moment, they are singing a sacred song in a strange land...a new psalm is created!

The psalms/songs of disorientation are a bold act of faith.

It is a bold act of faith to say you can't sing in a strange land even as you create a new song.

It is a bold act of faith to shake a fist to the heavens on October 23 and say "Where are you?" because more than anything you wanted to be in the presence of God; and shaking a fist is at least aimed somewhere.

It is a bold act of faith to attend a conference and to ask tough questions of Adventist history and then to participate

in an Adventist worship service early in the morning on a Sabbath morning.

The Psalms of disorientation are a bold act of faith. And they are an act of new creation; a new song.

The voices, in their state of alienation, bondage, disorientation, the loss of all that is familiar, those very voices...

...will testify

...will create new sacred songs

...will sing once again.

How does it happen?

What moves the poetry from weeping...to hope?

What transforms the weeping itself into song?

How is it possible to sing our holy songs in a strange land?

How to sing when our children's voices are no longer with us around the family altar?

When we stand at a grave site?

When nights seem endless and sleep doesn't come?

When there is no easy forgiveness...of our enemies, our plight, of our God...?

The Psalms take seriously the experience of disorientation.

Disorientation means real loss...

- of a companion, of a child
- of a church we no longer recognize
- of an imagined future
- of a heritage that must be re-evaluated, re-considered

Disorientation means real loss...and the Psalms take disorientation seriously...are honest about tragedy; tragedy that makes it difficult to breathe, to move, to put one foot in front of another...

but then, sometimes, with just a pause in the poetry, in a break between stanzas, there is a shift in the poetry from weeping...to hope

From Psalm 30:5—

Weeping may linger for the night,

but joy comes with the morning.

So how does one move from the poetry of night ... to the joy of morning?

How does one move from "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?"...to a new song?

As Brueggemann works through these Psalms, he observes:

...the speaker and the community of faith are often surprised by grace, when there emerges in present life a new possibility that is inexplicable, neither desired nor extrapolated, but wrought by the inscrutable power and goodness of God. That newness cannot be explained, predicted or programmed... (124).

The believing community responds in amazement and gratitude through song because "new life requires doxology" (127).

At their best, communities of faith do what the Psalms do...

They take the seasons of life and bring them to speech.

Seasons of orientation...and disorientation...and new orientation.

Communities of faith know great disappointments where they "weep and weep until the day dawns."

But then there is a brand new day. And those same communities of faith sing their Advent hymns once again.

ON APRIL 25 OF THIS YEAR, the grandson of John & Charlotte Pocock, Arthur Patrick, along with his wife, Joan, took the great great great granddaughter of Reuben & Belinda Loveland to a dawn service in celebration of ANZAC (Australia—New Zealand—Army Corp) Day.

It is a day each year remembering those who have sacrificed during times of war. It begins before six in the morning; before dawn.

Arthur, Joan, and I went to the service held in Morisset, a small town not far from Ellen White's "Sunnyside" home in Cooranbong.

As we stood in the darkness, the memories and scenes of war brought tears. Those of us gathered in the dark considered the loss of so many young men and women. We imagined the soldiers riding the train nearby, headed to Gallipoli and the Kakoda Trail and Kabul and Bagdad. All the Rachels weeping for their children.

But then the dawn came; the sun began to rise...and the local college band, the Avondale College band, played...

And we sang songs of freedom and hope.

And I don't know exactly how it happened,

but there was joy in the morning. ■

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