

- [Romans 8:6-11](#)
- [John 11:1-45](#)
- [Psalms 130](#)

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

God of all time, we ask, we weep, we wait, we die, we hope, we live
We carry on, we pick ourselves up, we try to understand,
We misunderstand, we learn, we ask again,
We wait for an understanding.
In all of these may prayer be a companion, not a torment.
May we find in prayer the consolation
That sustains us through all things,
Knowing that some things change,
And some things remain the same.
Amen.

(Prayer by Padraig O'Tuama: *What Were You Arguing About On The Way*
p.126)

“You just don’t understand.”

When was the last time you said this phrase?

When was the last time you said this phrase, yourself?

From the cry of the child whose parent clearly does not understand their need for those red shoes and not the sensible boots for the snow

To the teenager who is in the midst of all of the new and exciting options of friendships, academics, extra curriculars and immediate needs and will not get in the car in a timely manner.

You don't understand mom, dad, granddad, grandma.

YOU

It can hurt to hear these words.

They are pointed and have sharp edges that pierce the heart.

They say that some one seems irrational and obtuse.

When these words are spoken, they indicate a potential break down of relationship.

A division of YOU and Me.

One person doesn't seem to get the WHY of what is going on,

It is perceived that they cannot see what the other is seeing.

A wall can go up.

Irreparable damage can occur.

At the same time, these words CAN be the invitation to dig deeper into the relationship.

The reply, “You are right, I don’t understand” speaks a truth aloud in the midst of tension, of division, of misunderstanding.

With these same words, a new pathway can be found.

In the Peace Corps, each volunteer attends a 3month long orientation session. These sessions invite each peace corps member to respect the culture around them and to listen and learn. Orientation attempts to teach you the big cultural norms and then you learn the rest of the norms through living life in community. You are transformed by those around you.

As a dedicated and eager volunteer I, too, tried to learn from those around me. In our orientation, we traveled as a group to learn how to do the trainings we would in turn lead on our own later in in our service. By this time in our training, we all had attempted to blend a bit with our clothing. I attended this gathering with a beautiful new traditional skirt called a payne. I was delighted to see the same fabric on my counterpart and that I might blend a wee bit (despite my blinding white skin and red hair.- not common in my region) and as we gathered in the rural community, immediately I realized something was not quite right. Murmuring ensued and some giggling. A few people pointing and many stares.

And then.

Like a magnet drawn to another, the entire village of women circled around me and took care of the problem.

My beautiful skirt was made of the correct material BUT there was a major misunderstanding. What I did not understand was that HOW one wrapped the skirt mattered. If the skirt was wrapped to the right, it indicated that you were an upstanding respectable woman. If wrapped to the left, well, it was the indication that you were -how shall we say- available. Rather than let me remain in this fashion, these women circled around me and solved my misunderstanding quickly. They, otherwise known as origami professionals, rewrapped my skirt before I realized what was happening. Out of hospitality and pastoral care they quickly transformed my outward appearance and wrapped my pale white legs into a suitable presentable attire so that our training could continue.

I did not understand.

These women enfolded me and said, “You do not understand. Here is the way.”

Literally re-wrapping my entire self.

We will show you the way.

I don't understand, help me to understand.

The gospel of John reminds us constantly how confused the people are when they see and hear Jesus speaking, teaching, healing.

Remember the first miracle in Cana?

Jesus turns water into wine when he ready and then asks for silence about this extraordinary act.

Remember the parables that Jesus told and the Disciples say “I don’t understand.”

Remember Nick at Night, Nicodemus not understanding what this being born again means?

Remember the Woman at the well not understanding the living water that Jesus offers?

Remember Peter understanding and saying “You are the Messiah” and then misunderstanding what that meant and saying in the next breath “stop talking about this death and suffering stuff”

Jesus says, “You don’t understand.”

AND “let me show you the way.”

Let me help you wrap your head around this bigger meaning.

Today we encounter Mary and Martha, Jesus and then Lazarus.

Jesus, while with his disciples, hears that Lazarus is sick.

His disciples know how close that Jesus is to Lazarus and say, “Let’s go now, we want you to have this time with Lazarus.”

Jesus says, “this illness does not lead to death, rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

By now the disciples are pretty use to Jesus’ curious and sometimes confusing statements.

They think they understand.

Perhaps Jesus is taking his time because life is dangerous right now, perhaps, the disciples think, there is something else to be done.

Perhaps, if Lazarus is just sleeping, perhaps he is just getting rest and did not die.

Misunderstanding.

Jesus stops them in their tracks.

And sets the record straight, “Lazarus has died.”

Jesus tells them, “We are going there, through the danger of those who want me dead too, we are going to be there, you will see.”

Mary and Martha meet Jesus on the road.

Community gathered around and they too tell Jesus personally that Lazarus has died.

Jesus asks them, do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life?

Do you believe, do you put your trust in me?

Jesus is saying, let me re-wrap your understanding of what being resurrection and life means, let my love and grace embrace you and open this new path of understanding.

This is a new understanding where when only death was seen before, life can actually be transformed.

Let me show you a new way.

Mary, the prayerful one, says “I believe.”

Martha, the practical one- “it’s gonna smell pretty bad, but I put my trust in what you say.”

The disciples are also doubtful and curious.

Lazarus seems to be the only one who understands.

Jesus says, YOU don’t understand what it means to be the way, the truth, the life.

AND Jesus continues.

Rather than leaving this as a stand off of emotions and “you just don’t get me,” Jesus surrounds them and calls Lazarus out to be unbound.

Unwrapped.

And like the blind man who can now see, the woman at the well who has experienced living water, the crowd begins to understand more fully the deeper invitation to listen and be present with Jesus.

They took in a bit of how Jesus is always talking about the eternal when we seem to be stuck in the temporary.

Those who listened believed, or trusted in, this man- more so than before.

The story of Lazarus is an invitation to a deeper understanding. An invitation to those who gathered around, and to us, to unwrap what we think we understand about death and be transformed by the love that surrounds us and invites us into a deeper understanding of the depth of love that God has for God's people.

Jesus, fount of wisdom, patience, knowledge and mercy, reminds Mary and Martha and those around him that in death there is sorrow, there is gnashing of teeth, there is anger and also... there is hope.

Hope

because in death there is transformation,
there is the reminder that we are not in control and that God is.

We have hope because we are not alone.

The God we believe in and put our trust in is:

A God who understands our deep pain when we feel like no one understands us. (Jesus Wept.)

A God who sits with us in our own misunderstandings. (Jesus redirected Peter and loved him.)

A god who invites us to see these moments of death as moments of new beginnings where grace and mercy transform and rebuild.

After all, this God of ours created us and knows our innermost beings and loves every part of us.

Perhaps we should let go of the divisive part of our misunderstandings and lean more into this Holy time we are living in and be bound up in God's love and mystery rather than being wrapped in our misgivings.

Be Opened to hear more fully the deep understanding of each other and God at work in our midst.

Amen.