

Words of hope and other words too

By [Joanna Harader](#)

October 28, 2015

The lectionary readings for All Saints Day and All Souls Day include lovely words and images of God's care for us and the Divine's promise of eternal life:

- "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."
- "God will swallow up death forever."
- "Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more."
- "If we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him."
- "I am the resurrection and the life."

In the face of death, these are the promises we cling to as Christian people. And they are good promises. True promises.

And, to be quite honest, annoying promises to have repeated to you over and over and over again when you are in the midst of deep grief.

Maybe my situation was a little different from most. Maybe because my dad was a pastor and my mom is a pastor and I am a pastor, people felt like they had to quote all of these eternal life Bible verses to us when [dad was dying](#) in the hospital. And after.

It's not that I didn't want to hear these words of hope and promise. I did. I still do. I need these words in order to breathe sometimes.

It's just that these are not the only words I wanted to hear. A basic Internet Bible search will bring up passage after passage about people grieving: Genesis 23:1-2; 37:32-35; 50:7-11; Exodus 34:5-8; 2 Samuel 18:33; John 11:17, 20-36. Abraham mourning for Sarah. Jacob bewailing Joseph's blood-splattered robe. Joseph mourning Jacob. The Israelites weeping for Moses. And, of course, David's heart-wrenching cry over his son. A cry that must resonate in the heart of any parent who has experienced the death of a child: "O my son, my son. Would I had died instead of you."

Because even with the promise of eternal life, death is horrible and hard. And the enactment of grief is a faithful response. Wailing, weeping, tearing clothes, traveling, burial.

We also have this beautiful story of Lazarus' death and Jesus' response. This story from John 11 contains what is arguably the most popular memory verse of all time: "Jesus wept." It's popularity as a memory verse stems, no doubt, from its length. But I love this verse for its depth.

Jesus weeps at Lazarus' death. Even though Jesus has just told Martha that he is the resurrection and the life. Even though Jesus surely knows better than anyone that the promises of God are true. Even though Jesus is getting ready to raise Lazarus from the tomb. Still Jesus weeps.

And the people watching say, "See how he loved him!"

Our grief does not mean that our faith is weak. It means that our love is strong.

And that love, tears, and the promises to which we cling are all part of the flickering flame that lights our way.

*Originally posted at [Spacious Faith](#)*