

Surrendering to the Gift of 2020

During one of our missionary training events in 2015, I heard the expression “going palms up” for the first time. Originally, I learned it as a symbol of “having nothing to lose and nothing to prove.” How many times did I have to *go palms up* during that season of support-raising – reminding myself that Christ, and only Christ, is the one providing my credentials for becoming a missionary. But the Lord provided us with beautifully miraculous stories of provision as He brought in the financial support we needed. And then we boarded a plane.

Later, I learned a new meaning behind *going palms up*: “surrendering yourself and your plans for the sake of the Kingdom.” And oh, how many times in the last few years has the Lord found me on my knees with my palms up in prayer to Him as I try to surrender myself to His Kingdom! Like when I had a miscarriage in 2016. Or when we faced constant sicknesses in 2017 and had to make an emergency trip back to the States in 2018. When we fought spiritual battles and experienced pregnancy complications and another emergency trip in 2019. When the difficulties of parenting, and particularly the sin it magnifies in my own heart, have all but crushed me. And then, of course, when 2020 hit.

We were supposed to go back to Romania on April 1, which we missed by just two short weeks when the world shut down. We moved to a temporary home, feeling confident we’d be able to fly back in June. And yet we’re still here, and we’ve moved back in with Derek’s parents with no return date in sight. I have gone back to our former public school as a substitute teacher to help with finances. We enrolled Elin, Atticus, and Denton at a small Christian school because I just didn’t think I could homeschool all of them this year in this context. We’re doing online Romanian language tutoring in the wee morning hours and participating in Zoom Bible study with our Romanian friends. All of our stuff is packed away in various attics in Romania, and we’ve got several suitcases in our attic here, ready to go whenever we get the word that Romania has opened its borders to Americas. And so we’re just waiting in this nebulous phase of complete unknown. It seems like *nothing* has gone to plan since we submitted to the Lord’s call to move overseas. I have felt new levels of fear, anxiety, and depression in the last few years and have frequently cried out to Jesus on my knees with my *palms up* – reminding myself of my identity and attempting to surrender everything to Him over and over again, even when His plan just doesn’t seem to make sense.

But there is also a third way to raise up my palms to God – like a child excited to receive a good gift. And oh, how many times I have recognized the blessings that the Lord has brought to my life both *in the midst of* and even *because of* our surrender to hardship. Tangibly, we have been continually provided for with all of our physical needs. We have gotten to travel this year to see supporters, friends, and family. We’ve been able to praise the Lord in our heart language. We have met new people and become part of a new school community of friends. We have spent time in Bible studies at our home church. And we have been gifted with so much extra time to be with our parents, making memories that will bind our children’s hearts with their grandparents’ even more. And I have frequently experienced my eyes welling with tears and goosebumps raising on my arms when I read Scripture and realize with new clarity how truly life-giving His Word is. As we are learning to endure

and fix our eyes on His Kingdom, we have accepted new blessings with our palms up – receiving more freedom, more peace, and more contentment in whatever circumstances the Lord has us.

I realize that the Lord has really just been teaching us the same lesson in new ways over the past five years. So this year we once again return to Mary’s captivating words of trust. I want to be like her as she holds out her palms in both trepid surrender and grateful reception, and says, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). I want to be like Paul who “learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Phil 4:11). I want to be like Jesus who sweats blood in fear, begs for another way, and yet confidently says “nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). It encourages me that Scripture seems to embrace the paradox of *palms up* – finding freedom and gifts even as we submit to unbearable trials. But no, it’s not just holding both of these truths simultaneously. Rather, I’m coming to recognize that it is *because of* our willingness to persevere through trials with our *palms up* that we are in a position to receive the gift in the first place. And then, we are able to keep our *palms up* in *worship* – giving praise back to Christ, with gratitude, for all the ways we can be more assured of God’s unending love for us.

Our sweet Father knows this truth. He knows that we can better understand His love only when we first experience our separation from Him and His sacrifice for us. And whatever 2020 or 2021 has to throw our way, I know that He freely chose to sacrifice the most by leaving His throne and coming to earth to be with us. It is because God the Son turned up his palms and yielded to a humiliating rescue mission that we can know He understands our hurts. He must have turned up that precious baby palm and reached for his mother in submission to human form – experiencing all the necessary and difficult surrender to God’s plan throughout His life. And because Mary went *palms up*, and Jesus lived *palms up*, His opened palms were able to be pierced. And because they were, we can stretch out ours to receive the sweet gift of eternal life. And then keep our palms up in worship, giving back to Him the praise

We invite you to lift your palms to the Lord today, in letting go of our need to prove ourselves, in submitting to His upside-down Kingdom, in receiving His blessings and gift of eternal life, and in worship of how beautiful He is. There is much to be said about putting our bodies into physical positions of surrender and praise. May we focus our gaze this Advent, not on the festivities of Christmas to cover our grief of this year, not on the heartaches and lost dreams and disappointments of this year, and not even the silver linings of this year. But may we focus our gaze on the beauty of a child – a Savior – who was born to us and gives us hope in our suffering because of His own. What a gift we have in Jesus. Merry Christmas!

With Love and Gratitude,

Derek, Catalina,

Flin ⑥, Atticus ⑤, Denton ③ and Jemma ④

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