

**“MUD”**

*By Joanna Griffin*

John 9:1-9; 1 Corinthians 13:9-12

When pastor Debbie asked me if I could fill in while she is in Chicago visiting her mother, she hinted about my Africa connection.... I have often shared my missionary childhood experiences gladly.....

But I knew that God intended a different message .....a message I needed to hear.

We come together as family, here, to encourage and share our experiences; to lift up and testify to our belief that God as Jesus Christ the Son walks among us and lightens our pathway. So just for today, my journey is about MUD. It is my prayer that the holy fingerprints of God left on my life may rub off on yours in some way. As I finished writing this I turned on the radio to hear Saturday morning's broadcast of Gabriel Foray's REQUIEM: music of the soul's highest aspiration. This prayer came to me and I wrote it down:

**“Lord, tune our hearts to YOU.**

**.... That we may know you high and lifted up, in reverence and awe,**

**That we may feel you beneath our feet as the nutrients of this earth,**

**And that we may especially experience Your spirit in the faces, hands, and lives of those amongst us now. AMEN”**

~~~~~

**What is there to say about MUD? It definitely has a bad rap:**

**MUD season (We're in it. I remember wiping off the feet of my Golden Retriever every time she would come inside one spring...)**

**Mud pies/not to be confused with MUD PIE!**

**Muddle around**

**Mud puddle (children are often the only ones that can let go and totally enjoy the play of mud)**

**“Here’s MUD in YOUR eye!”**

**Mud bogging**

**Mud slinging**

**Stuck in the Mud**

**Stick in the mud**

**Mud pack**

**Mud baths/cooling, drawing out impurities, toxins**

Families do different things and behave uniquely at funerals. Grief brings to light many depths. Three weeks ago, I came home from burying my father’s ashes in a rose garden in North Carolina. In an early morning quiet time, gathered in a circle, we passed handfulls of his ashes amongst us and took turns returning him to the earth. The wet, cold, February in North Carolina, earth. Afterwards, I cupped my hands around my cheeks and let his dust embrace my face. Sacred dust, to sacred earth, to sacred mud.

That evening, in the midst of dividing and sharing favorite pieces of his clothing, his earthly and treasured familiar belongings...harsh words and painful struggle were exchanged between my sisters and I... We were unable to express the depths of our hurt, the conflicts and the frustration over our family tangledness. I came home carrying a great deal of pain. Shortly afterwards I received a card from my oldest sister with these words. “Allow yourself to sit in the struggle..... Don’t rush for the ribbon to fix this and tie it up and “voila” it’s done! Healed! ..... sit in it, grow IN the struggle, allow God to be with you”

When I came home, the first thing I wanted to do was deny the pain. I sat at my computer and searched almost frantically for my favorite image of HOPE..... The SUNFLOWER. "Oh Lord, THIS is what I want to be.. this is WHERE I want to be...PLEASE..." This is where I should be and where my spirit sings the loudest..... High in the blue serene sky, covered in yellow gold and with the hot sun and beez buzzing around me.... " I found the most glorious picture I could find to match that yearning and pasted it on my computer background IMMEDIATELY!! . I could ~aaaaalmost ~ feel my self singing as I planned my garden and the three rows of Giant Russian Sunflowers that never cease to leave me in awe as I stand beneath them craning up at their 16 inch faces, far above my reach. All from a not very beautiful seed the size of my littlest fingernail. I was almost transported....

And then the answer came... "MUD. "

The glory of the imagined sunflower was gone. The pain and bitterness I carried made me feel like a fat ugly full round bulb. (I had been thinking of them lately and anticipating tulips/irises/daffodils... I poked around in the mud hoping to see signs of growth... nothing. For now, they remained covered in MUD, no sign of life..... Wrinkled and not glorious at all, buried and left out in the cold mud, alone. Bitter, hurt, wounded.

"So, .... What's in this mud? An earthworm whose sole purpose in life is to regurgitate this stuff. Great. What can I learn from him?.

A starving deer in the early morning nibbles at my side..... OUCH! Who is nibbling away at me?!! That's MY body, MY skin, MY nutrient and possibility that you are munching on!

Who is the deer munching away at you? Is his name fear, or illness? Or loneliness? Is his name a grieving sister, a hurting child, the poor the needy, the politics of greed?

And still we sit in the cold wet mud. Feeling stuck. Feeling wet, Feeling cold.

The sun comes and birds arrive with their wondrous songs of hope. What more could you ask than to be serenaded by the song of birds throughout your life.... Until they too, come looking for food, for the small seeds that are beginning to sprout around you.. They too peck at you in curiosity. ....

**Where are you God.? Why am I left out in the rain, stuck in the mud, alone? I hurt. It is cold. I am lonely and being assailed.**

**Ahhhhhhhhh, the rain.**

**It takes my breath away with it's coldness. My skin wrinkles. It splits. OUCH again. And then I begin to laugh as the gentle rain tickles me..... all over laughing, all over birthing, all over grace..... Raining down on me.... my roots now move in sync with the earthworm, reaching down and feeding me. I gulp at the air, I whisper to the butterfly, I reach out beyond the dirt, I am high above myself, swaying in the air and singing with some heady perfume. The perfume of grace. "**

**OH LORD, could it be. Could your grace forgive and nourish and puff up this place of darkness with your HOLY Light. Could this cold, wet, earth of mortal struggle ~truly be the sustenance of growth?.**

**Psalms 46:10 answers back: "BE STILL and KNOW that I am God."**

**Paul writes in Corinthians: "For now we see as in a mirror, dimly. But THEN, we shall see face to face; we shall know and be known."**

**A majority of us here remember what it was like when the first pair of glasses were placed on our eyes. At 10 years of age, I will always remember what the stars looked like... walking down a path to school where we were going to view a special movie, I was enthralled. The world was new. I could see twinkling and crisp light, where before there was only a blurred spot of light.**

**Are you longing for a clearer picture in your life???**

**The only reference to MUD in the bible that I know of is Jesus mixing it with his saliva and using it as a poultice on a blind man's eyes, drawing out the blindness and giving him sight.**

**Jesus has healed a blind man on the Sabbath and this has the Pharisees in an uproar. They set about cross-examining first the man, second his parents, and then again back to the beggar, trying to determine if this healer is of God or not.**

Finally the man in exasperation says. "Look. All I know is that I was blind. And now I see.!"

Isaiah 55:11 &12

"Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. Behold I am doing a NEW thing, now it springs up, do you not perceive it?"

Isaiah invites us to have a kind of faith that doesn't get stuck in the past. God wants to create something completely new. We can live expectantly EVERY day!

The mud is still cold and wet and very often uncomfortable.... We don't have to understand the mud of our lives; we don't have to set about fixing it, analyzing it or cross examining it..... we just have to accept the rain of God's grace upon us.

During my visit with family, One of my sisters gave me a gift of a special bottle of hand lotion called "Amazing Grace" ~ the label on the front reads:

*"AMAZING GRACE: the natural aging process causes the soft tissues of our faces and bodies to begin to descend. Our eyebrows frown, our lids droop, our eyes appear hollow, our noses and ears are larger, and our jawbone is less defined. As for the rest of our bodies, it's no different. We can fight the process or we can yield to losing our bodies, gaining our souls, and finding our grace."*

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, amazing grace now pouring down...HIS grace flows down and covers me. It covers meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee, it covers us.

Was it telling me something? I didn't know anymore. I stopped my mind from asking "WHY Lord??" I simply began a habit of singing this song, humming it, writing it, embracing it. "It covers me. His grace flows down

and covers me.” That is all that matters. I smothered myself in the lotion and waited. I could begin to feel the bitterness fade.

Lent is upon us. We wait with our quiet, or unquiet centers, for the change to occur. A brooding, hovering sense of God’s spirit with us in preparation.... For WHAT? To come out of our cocoon? To have the stone rolled away from our own emptinesses?

In a book entitled “WHEN THE HEART WAITS” by Sue Monk Kidd, she implores God in what she calls a “Night Prayer” ... (page 55)

*“I’m scared, God. Make me brave. Lead me into the enormous spaces of becoming. Help me cease the small, tedious work of maintaining and protecting so that I can break the masks that obscure your face shining in the night of my own soul. Help me to green my soul and risk becoming the person you created me to be.”*

Who will you be when the stone is rolled away? Are you able to sit with and embrace your struggle, embrace God’s grace and ability to transform?....

Or will you remain a bulb in the mud.... Waiting for the next go around?? The spirit is there, the hard shell of ego defends and denies ...until we yield, until we allow ourselves to seek the LIGHT

And so we are WAITING.....

Something is **coming**. ~ We’re all excited about it.

It invades our daily thoughts.

It calms and brings us hope.

It is not MUD season. It surpasses MUD season.

It uses the MUD of our lives and the MUD of the world.

It makes **sense** of the MUD of our lives and the MUD of the world.

It is **green** and **living** and **growing** and **planting**, .

.....and **it is HOPE**.

It is **Spring** ~ and it is resurrection ~and it is salvation.

And it **IS** coming to us ~ some **ONE** is coming.....and it is **Jesus Christ**,

who **IS** our savior. Amen and Amen!.

And so, may we go out and Play in the mud..... “Splash in the mud, and feel the rain of grace as the water and mud cover you in splashes... It’s holy mud, holy fun, holy food. Yield to the discomfort and squeal, splash, fly, sit in it and lay in it, knowing that God’s grace nourishes your discomfort, embraces your pain, and feeds you ~ feeds you until you are transformed in HIS image. Thanks be to God for MUD!