

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Hathrac, and for the story, Unremembered Loss.*

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Merry Christmas and welcome to the Unremembered Loss newsletter. Last Christmas (Issue 28) I wrote *The Innkeeper's Story*. Continuing from last year's story I give you *An Innkeeper's Son*. If you don't know the story - and want to find out what happens after my story ends - you can read it in Luke 2:1-20. I've used Hebrew names in the story. You can probably guess that Yosef is Joseph, but maybe not that Miryam is Mary or Abba is Father, and Adonai is The Lord.

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## The Innkeeper's Son

Many years ago, when I was a boy of ten, as the youngest of six, it was my job to take care of the animals - the sheep and goats, the burrows and asses - while the older children took care of the guests. I didn't really mind, it was my place after all, but sometimes I wished I could sit with a guest and discuss the law - the promises of Adonai that the Prophet gave us, that Israel would be restored, that a king would rise from the stump of Jesse. So instead, I told the animals about the promises I had heard.

That all changed one day. The town was filled to overflowing because Caesar Augustus has issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. Everyone who was a descen-

dent of King David had come to Bethlehem to be counted. My family ran a small inn - four small rooms for eight to twelve people - and on that afternoon there were thirty.

For once in my life I was glad to be taking care of the animals. I had five extra burrows to care for, while the rest of the family struggled to feed and care for all those people. Another man and woman came looking for a place to stay and my abba turned them away, but they came back and asked to be treated as travelers, to come and labor with the family. I know my abba didn't want to let them stay, but he was a righteous man and did as the law required. Yosef and Miryam started helping us with the other guests right away even though

Miryam was great with child.

When all of the guests were asleep and everything cleaned up we ate together. I'm not sure why I started talking with Yosef, as it wasn't my place to be talking to an adult, but we talked all through dinner. I asked where they were sleeping and Miryam said they didn't know. I offered them my pad in the stable and before I knew it I was carrying my things to my brothers' room.

It wasn't until I was laying my pad next to my brothers' that I realized what I had done. I had talked when it wasn't my place, I had offered my place in the stable with the animals to our guests, which they must have taken as an insult, and I had moved into

my brothers' room without asking them or my abba if I could.

I lay on my pad dreading my abba coming to punish me, but he never came, and I soon fell asleep. Morning came quickly and I didn't wake up when I should have - usually I woke with the animals.

When I did get up I knew I was in trouble - I didn't hear my abba yelling, but I heard the mother goats baying to be milked and I knew everyone else could hear them, too.

I got dressed quickly, ran to the stable, and burst in. That's when I saw Miryam, still laying on my pad.

"Forgive me," I said, my voice cracking as I slid to a stop. I looked down at the ground and started to back out of the room. "I forgot you were here. Please don't tell my abba."

I heard her giggling at me - I thought I was going to die of embarrassment. I went to the other end of the stable and called the goats outside so I could milk them. As I did, I saw Miryam and Yosef get up and start to work.

Later that day I was in the stable brushing down the burrows when Miryam came in and laid down. In the daylight I realized she looked younger than my sister. That's when I realized that I was staring at her. I felt my face heat up and I hid behind the burrow.

When My chest was less tight, I stood back up and started to leave.

"You don't have to leave," she said.

I stopped, but didn't turn to face her. "You deserve your privacy."

"I'm sleeping with the beasts, what need do I have of privacy. No, what I need is a friend.

I looked at her and saw something in her eyes - hope, honesty, need? I turned away again.

"Please."

I felt trapped. I wanted to run, but her plea touched me - held me. I remembered what the rabbi had read from the Prophet, "Comfort, comfort my people, says Adonai." Somehow I knew he had read it for me.

I turned back to her. "But, I am just a boy. What kind of friend could I be?"

"The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just."

I didn't know what to say - I just stood there for a while. When she motioned for me to sit with her, I did. My mind was racing. She had quoted a Psalm of King David to me - where had she learned it? She had called me a man - a boy of ten. And righteous - what had I done to be called righteous? Wise?

Her words broke through my thoughts. "You are the youngest. You have felt lost and alone even in a household full of people. You look to your future and wonder where it will take you - how you matter. You pray and wonder if Adonai hears you. I see myself in you. I am just like you."

In the silence that followed, I marveled at how well she knew me, but I doubted she was like me. "When have you felt lost? You have a husband and soon a child."

"I have no husband." I saw her smile knowingly when she saw the reaction I was trying to hide. "As soon as I have my child we will be married, so I have been feeling lost."

“But,” was all I could say.

“When I became pregnant I left my home and went to live with my Great Aunt Elizabeth. It was good to be with her, but she is so much older than me. And it was strange because after all these years she was pregnant, too. All her neighbors wagged their tongues - ‘a woman her age having a child,’ and ‘her niece is with child as well.’ So even though people came to visit and the house was often full, I was forty years younger than any of them and felt alone.”

I didn’t say anything. I just nodded, trying to take in all she said.

“My uncle couldn’t speak. When I asked Elizabeth about it she told me that an angel of Adonai had spoken to him and told him that Elizabeth was going to have a son. When he asked for a sign, the angel took away his voice.”

“After three months I traveled back to my home. My friends didn’t come to visit. I had lots of time to think about my future. I had always planned to be married and raise a family. I had never planned to do it in the opposite order. Some of my friends said I should be stoned because I was a harlot, I knew the truth, but I dare not tell them. I told only Yosef and my family.

She stopped and we sat in silence again.

“What did you tell them?”

Her face was sad as she looked at me. “I know what you must think of me. How can I tell you?”

“I think you are blessed. You soon will have a child and Yosef loves you so much he is still going to marry you.”

Miryam’s grim face lightened a little. “See. I knew your tongue was just.”

I smiled.

Miryam jumped. “Oh, he just kicked me. Here, feel.” She grabbed my hand and pressed it against her stomach. I was embarrassed and afraid and excited to feel the baby inside of her kicking.

“How do you know it is a boy?” I asked.

“And there is your wisdom. How did you know the question to ask? Not why or how or how could I, but about my son. Perhaps I was right that you could be a friend.”

I pulled my hand back and sat looking at the ground for awhile and then remembered the night before. “Didn’t I say last night that I gave you my pad because we are friends?”

“So you did. If you really want to know...”

I nodded my head, “Yes.”

“The same angel that visited my great uncle visited me. He told me that Adonai was going to give me a child, a son, even though I am still a virgin, and that I was to name him Emmanuel.”

I don’t know what I thought at hearing this. Was she teasing me? Was she crazy? Did I hear her right? Shouldn’t I be working so my abba won’t yell at me? Probably a hundred other things all at the same time. All I knew was I needed to be someplace else. I jumped up and ran from the stable. As I ran, I glanced over my shoulder and saw that Miryam had fallen collapsed on the mat and was crying. I know I should have stopped, have gone back, but I wasn’t thinking. I ran and hid in my brothers’ room.

“Ehi,” I heard my abba calling. I looked out from beneath the blanket I had pulled over my head and saw that it was evening. The goats, I thought, I haven’t milked them yet. Trembling with fear I went into the courtyard to see my abba.

“Here I am, Abba.”

“Ehi, where have you been? Miryam has been asking for you. Go see her now.”

“Yes, Abba.” I walked slowly to the stable and knocked on the door.

“Come in Ehi.”

I hesitated, but my abba had told me to go see her so what else could I do? I pushed open the door, ready for Miryam to yell at me, but she didn't. She was laying on the mat resting and when she saw me she smiled at me.

“I'm sorry Ehi, I shouldn't have told you. Instead of thinking me a harlot you must now think me crazy, but I ...” Miryam breathed a heavy sigh. “... I need your help.”

I stood there. I had been ready to be yelled at, but I hadn't been ready for this. “You must really need help if your willing to talk to one like me.”

Her smile faded. “There is nothing wrong with you. You acted like any good Israelite would.”

Good Israelite? What did she mean? We stared at each other for a few more moments.

“What do you need of me?”

“I'm going to have my baby tonight. My mother is miles away and Yosef needs to keep

helping your abba, so I have no one to help me.”

She left her request hanging there - not willing to put into words what she must have guessed I already knew. To help her, to touch her, would make me unclean. Was I willing to become unclean for the girl I had just met? But, wasn't I the one who said we were friends? Who had given up my place in the stable so she would have a place to sleep? I hadn't acted like a friend when I ran out on her, but she still wanted my help. Something inside of me whispered that I needed to say yes, despite everything.

“I will help you.”

The rest of the evening was spent cleaning up the stable and moving the animals around to make more room. My mother sent for the midwife and I waited just outside the stable until I heard the baby's first cries. When the midwife came out she nodded that I could go in.

Miryam sat on the sleeping pad and in her arms she held her new baby boy. The look of joy on her face seemed to light up the room. I didn't wait for her to ask what to do. I started picking up the soiled pieces of cloth and straw. I bundled them up and took them out of town to the proper spot.

When I returned I washed and changed my cloths per the law and returned to her.

“Thank you Ehi,” she said to me.

I saw that she still held her baby in her arms. I looked around for a place for her to lay him down, but I didn't see anywhere.

“I'm sorry, Miryam, the room I gave you is not good for a child.”

Miryam just smiled and said, “That's alright, Adonai supplied a place for me to lay and you to help me. I will just hold my son.”

I knew that wasn't right - she couldn't hold him all night and the ground was no place to lay a child, especially with beasts walking around. One of the sheep, standing by its manger, bayed, asking for more food. I had an idea.

I knocked one of the mangers over and scrapped out all of the food from it. Then I pushed it back upright and lay my cloak in it. I pushed it over by Miryam.

“It's not much, but you can place him here. He'll be safe and warm.”

“Thank you, Ehi. You continue to give me good gifts.”

She handed me her baby so I could put him in the manger. "His name is Jesus," she said.

I put Jesus in the manger. He was soon asleep, and Miryam quickly followed. I sat on the floor, leaning against the wall, and watched both of them sleep. Yosef came in a little later.

"Thank you Ehi, you have been a great help to Miryam. I will watch them now, you can go to bed."

I started to get up, but then hesitated. "If I could ... If it is alright with you ... can I stay?"

Yosef laughed. "I am on a journey that I have no say in. If you feel like you should stay, who am I to send you away?"

Yosef laid down next to Miryam, and soon he was asleep, too.

Several hours later I heard a knocking by the outer gate. I got up and went to see who it could be. Several shepherds, along with their sheep, crowded around the gate.

"We have come to see him. The one the angels told us about. Is he here?"

I looked at them, not understanding what they were saying.

"Is he here," they all kept asking.

Through all the commotion I heard a woman's voice, "Let them in Ehi."

I looked over my shoulder at the faint light coming from the stable, thinking of Miryam and Yosef, and their baby Jesus. Then Yosef's words came to me again, "Who am I to send you away." I turned back to the gate and opened it, knowing that once again I was doing something that my abba might disapprove of, but knowing somehow it was what I needed to do.

The shepherds came in and went to the stable. I closed the gate and followed them. When I reached the stable they were all on their knees.

"The angel told us of his birth," one shepherd said.

"He is the Christ," another said.

"We were told, that as a sign, we would find him in a manger."

The shepherds told Yosef all that the angel had said. About how the sky had been filled with the heavenly host. How the angels sang and praised Adonai. Then shepherds gave Miryam gifts for her son and worshiped Jesus.

After a while I saw that Miryam was getting tired, so I told the shepherds that it was time to go. They didn't want to, but they listened to me. Soon the courtyard was empty again, the gate locked, and I sat and watched as Miryam and Josef went back to sleep.

The next seven days went by in a blur. I still had my chores with the animals and now I was helping Miryam. I guess as the youngest child, I didn't have any idea how much work babies are. On the evening of the seventh day I was brushing the donkeys when I heard Josef and Miryam talking.

"Tomorrow we have to go to Jerusalem to have Jesus circumcised," Josef said.

"I know, but we don't have an offering" Miryam said. "We can't go without an offering."

"We'll get one. Hasn't Adonai supplied everything else we've needed?"

"Well, yes."

"And we have some money. Maybe we can buy one at the temple."

"A blemished one," Miryam said with destine in her voice.

I slipped out the back while they continued to talk and went to find my abba.

“Abba,” I said when I found him, “can I talk with you?”

My abba put down the basket he was carrying. “Do you know how proud I am of you Ehi?”

“What?” was all I could say.

“You have been acting like a man instead of a child. You have cared for others.”

“But, I’ve talked when I shouldn’t have, done things without permission. I’ve hurt people and left my chores undone.”

“True, but you have taken care of Miryam and her son. You welcomed them and treated them as friends. More than that, you have listened to Adonai’s voice and done what he asked.”

“But I haven’t ...”

“Adonai spoke to me and told me you had. I will choose to believe what Adonai says.” Abba patted me on the head. “Now what do you want to talk about?”

I wasn’t sure what to do. Had Adonai really been talking to me? There was the whisper, and now I knew what I needed to do, so ...

“Abba, Josef and Miryam do not have a sacrifice to offer tomorrow. They need a sheep and a dove.”

“If they don’t have the money for a sheep and a dove, the law says they can offer two doves.”

“But, the shepherds said that their baby, Jesus, is the son of Adonai. It wouldn’t be right to offer two doves.”

“What are you saying Ehi?”

“Abba, can I give them one of my lambs.”

“Since when do you have any lambs?”

I looked down at the ground. “The lambs I take care of. One of your lambs.”

“Because Adonai has told me that you are listening to him, I will believe that you are asking because Adonai desires it. I give you my blessing. You may give them a dove as well.”

I threw my arms around my abba and hugged him.

In the morning, as Josef and Miryam were getting ready to leave, I ran to the stable and found my best lamb and two doves. I led the lamb to Josef and Miryam.

“Will you forgive me,” I said as I knelt down before them. “I did not believe you when you told me about the angel and I have sinned against you. Will you take this lamb to offer to Adonai for your cleansing? And two doves for the sin offering, one for you and one for me”

Miryam knelt down next to me and wrapped an arm around me, holding me tight. “You have nothing to be ashamed of, Ehi. You have been a joy to me and I will never forget the things you have done for me. Peace be with you.”

With that, she stood up and took the lamb’s lead from my hand. Josef patted me on the back and then the two of them walk down the street towards Jerusalem.

I thought that would be the last time I ever saw them and a tear rolled down my cheek at the thought. It wasn’t the last time that I saw them, but that’s another story. Lets just say that I never forgot that week either.