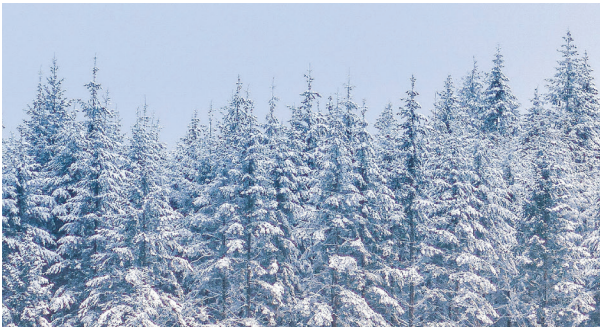


Brian & Aimee

KLEAGER

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**What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.**

Anthony Showalter and Elisha Hoffman, 1887

A Different Kind of Christmas.

As I sit to write our annual Christmas letter, I'm at a loss for words. I've been trying to stir up a narrative that shines the light on anything but the heaviness we feel. It's the holiday season and we want a cheerful, red-and-green, ornament-adorned, poinsettia-christened letter as bubbly and upbeat as a "Here Comes Santa Claus" tune. Yet we find ourselves in the middle of a season that is not any of those things. Sadly, this past September, a good friend of ours took her life. A best friend. Aimee's life-long best friend, Lindsay, whom Jacob nicknamed at an early age, "Gingy." We have cried deeper in the past couple of months than we can ever remember. We have grieved much, and we keep grieving.

I know we are not the first ones, the only ones, nor the last ones to grieve our way through the holidays. I'm sure it is more common than I've noticed in the past. I'm sure many of you empathize even now. This Christmas season we are daily reminded that all is not well in this world. In fact, I think I would reword a couple of lines of "O Holy Night" to the following:

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
*Long aches the world, in grief and heartbreak weary;
Will He appear and our souls feel His worth?
They longed in hope; we join in longing deeply;
May yonder break, a new and glorious morn.*

Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!
O night divine! O night when Christ was born.
O night, O holy night, O night divine.

It was into a broken world that Jesus came. Indeed, it was a holy night, a divine night. But I'm not sure it was a "silent night." Ebenezer Scrooge is not my mentor, even though I may sound a little "bah humbug" at this point.

Sure, this letter may feel heavy, and that is because our hearts are heavy with grief and sadness. For us to conceal this reality would surely be disingenuous. But even in this heaviness, there is a truth that is just as pervasive as the grief. It is hope.



Lindsay and Jacob



Lindsay and Aimee

It is a hope that consumes us with an equal depth and weight to that of our grief. Our hope is fueled and comforted by the One who is its object: Jesus Christ. The One whose birth is the focus of these holidays is the reason we don't grieve with despair. The Apostle Paul describes it this way, **“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14)** We are grieving, but it is with a spiritual peace because Lindsay's faith was in her resurrected savior, Jesus.

Many people are caring for us and regularly ask, “How are you doing?” The truth is that we hurt, we ache, we cry, and we miss our friend so much. It is also true that, in all these emotions, we are grieving as ones who have hope in Jesus Christ. In the heaviness of our emotions, we are attuned to the original words of “O Holy Night”: “A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices. . . .”

It is because we grieve with hope that we are not crushed, and we are not in despair. Our family does laugh, and we are experiencing the paradoxical joy of the Lord amid grief. Our days are still filled with soccer and basketball, Aimee's training room, and Cadence ministry. We are loving our new neighbors and getting reacquainted with American culture. Jacob was home for Thanksgiving and will be

home again for Christmas. Brian is off to Burundi for the first two weeks of December to work with their wounded soldiers. Our church family is a delight. Our house is consistently filled with guests, and we love having them!

And as always, we are grateful for you. More than ever, we are honored to be able to write and say thank you. Thank you for praying for us. Your prayers have lifted us through each of these days. Thanks for caring for us. Thanks for supporting us in so many ways. And to many of you who financially support the work we do, thank you for your generosity that allows us to share the gospel and our lives with those who rejoice and with those who grieve.

Lastly, we know that some of you consider giving extra at the end of the year and we want you to know that these gifts are an integral part of providing for our yearly needs. If any of you would like to give an extra gift this month, please go to Cadence.org/Kleager or use the attached response slip.

Please keep praying for us. Please pray for Lindsay's family, especially her husband and two kids (ages 9 and 12). And it is our prayer that whatever circumstances surround you this holiday season, that you too will experience the peace of Christ as you hope in Him alone.

With love and joy in grief,
Brian and Aimee



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Brian & Aimee Kleager
Partnership Involvement

Acct.# 10677

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