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# FROM LIMPING TO LEAPING

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**L**ook, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,' says the Lord of Armies, 'not leaving them root or branches. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall'" (Mal. 4:1-2, CSB).

"Jared, have you ever seen calves jumping?"

"No, I don't think I have," I replied.

It was a bitterly cold, late November day in Vermont, and I sat at the bedside of my friend Natalie, who was bundled up under layers of blankets. Natalie was dying of pancreatic cancer. Much earlier in the year, the doctors had given her a matter of weeks to live, but she'd outlived their predictions. Feeble and frail, she was now spending her final days in the home of her best friends, where they'd set up hospice in a basement apartment. I was Natalie's pastor and had visited her each week, spending substantial time praying and reading Scripture with her and listening to her reflect on life, death, and everything in between. Christmas was coming, and barring a miracle, it would be her last.

Natalie had unusual requests for Scripture readings. She would become preoccupied with particular passages in the Bible, wanting me to read them to her every time I visited, for weeks on end. We'd read John 10 and Revelation 1-3

over and over again. Now we were multiple days into Malachi chapter 4. And no, I'd never seen calves jumping.

When we'd been neck-deep in John 10, Natalie had described the behavior of sheep who recognize their shepherd's voice. Now she was telling me that when calves are figuring out what their bodies do, they bounce across the pasture in ways you wouldn't expect.

I said, "I see." But I really didn't. I was having a hard time picturing it, perhaps because I didn't have the capacity at the time to visualize such an image of joy. My friend was dying. And she wasn't the first. We'd seen so much death in our little country church. I'd lost numerous friends to cancer—young parents, people I'd baptized, people I cared about deeply. Natalie was an older woman but had otherwise been very healthy. She was definitely going "before her time." And as it seemed I'd spent the last three years of ministry largely in hospitals, at bedsides, and in funeral parlors, I was worn out. I didn't feel like leaping. But Natalie did.

As painful as life had become for her, she just kept talking about seeing Jesus. Everyone else was preparing for Christmas, when Jesus came to us. She was preparing for heaven and going to him. We talked about the glory of that moment. We talked about the glories of the new earth to come, when these bodies that we can't keep from winding down finally give way to bodies that won't decay and will live forever. By God's grace, it wasn't just those blankets keeping Natalie warm; it was her hope in Malachi 4:2's "sun of righteousness." Her healing was coming.

# THESE BODIES THAT WE CAN'T KEEP FROM WINDING DOWN FINALLY GIVE WAY TO BODIES THAT WON'T DECAY AND WILL LIVE FOREVER.

Christmas came. My family and I traveled back home to Texas, but we returned to Vermont the week after. I hadn't seen Natalie in a couple of weeks, so after settling in, I drove over to the basement apartment to visit her.

It was January 1. I didn't know—no one had told me—but Natalie had died that morning. I arrived just as her husband and a few others were navigating bringing the pine box she requested as her casket down the staircase. I didn't get to say goodbye.

Her memorial service was held in the spring. As I sat at the big picture window in our rural home, trying to figure out my funeral sermon, I glanced out at the hillside across the street. And there to my surprise and delight came a calf, bounding exuberantly across the rocky hill. I couldn't believe it! It was a hilarious, adorable, joyful sight. Now I knew what Natalie knew.

And one day I will know what Natalie knows—that as dark as our Christmases may be, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. The first time, Christ came to die. But he rose from his grave. He will come to us again. The lame hearts of those who trust in him will leap in their chests. And all will be well. ✨