

Going On
By Katie Langston

Lights up. We're in a hospital cancer center. There are three chairs on the stage that appear to be chemotherapy stations. Todd enters, dressed in a hospital gown, as all the characters are. He appears to be murmuring to himself.

TODD:

Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
My eyes grow weak with sorrow,
My soul and body with grief.
My life is consumed by anguish
And my years by groaning;
My strength fails because of my affliction,
And my bones grow weak.

He pauses, considering, then speaks to no one in particular.

My strength fails. My bones grow weak.

He resumes praying the psalm from the beginning.

Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress...

As he prays, Kate enters upstage of him. She watches him for a moment.

KATE:

What are you doing?

TODD:

Who? Me?

KATE:

Yeah. What are doing?

TODD:

I'm—well, I'm praying.

KATE:
Praying.

TODD:
Yes.

KATE:
That's bold. I don't always have it in me to pray.

TODD:
I usually find it's about all I can do.

Kate comes closer.

KATE:
I think I struggle to pray because I'm not always sure God is particularly good.
I mean, come on, it's not like God is *fair*.

TODD:
Isn't he?

KATE:
Of course he isn't! If God were fair, it'd be Kim Jun Un or Donald Trump here dying, not us.

TODD:
Everyone is dying, Kate.

KATE:
Sure, but not everyone knows it. (*Beat.*) I miss not knowing it.

Just then Deanna enters, also in a hospital gown. She spots them immediately and waves.

KATE:
Hi, Deanna.

DEANNA:
Hi!

KATE:

Come on over. Todd here is trying to convince me to pray.

TODD:

I never said—

KATE:

You didn't have to. It was obvious.

TODD:

You can pray or not pray, Kate. I'm not the prayer police.

DEANNA:

You are a little bit, Todd. It's okay.

TODD:

I'm just trying to say: you can be sorrowful in a way that's also filled with hope. That doesn't make it *easy*. But if you no longer trust God's goodness, what do you have left?

KATE:

Precisely my question.

TODD:

You have Christ! God's faithfulness to his promises! It's a mystery, we don't always know how or why, but we're called to wait in thanksgiving—

KATE:

In *what*?

TODD:

In praise—

KATE:

In *praise*?

TODD:

Yes, *praise*! Even lament is a kind of praise—

KATE:

Todd, what the hell are you smoking?

TODD:

It's the entire thrust of scripture, Kate! We wait in the depths for deliverance. We don't know when it's coming so we cry out for help, but God's promises are sure! God is King! You know that!

KATE:

Actually, I'm pretty fucking sure I don't know a goddamn thing.

TODD:

Oh, nice. Real nice.

(Exasperated:) Deanna! Talk some sense into her!

DEANNA:

Whoa whoa whoa, don't drag *me* into this—

KATE:

I'm so tired of people who have all the answers.

TODD:

And I'm tired of people who won't accept *any*.

DEANNA:

Kate, if you don't have words to pray, you don't have to pray.

KATE *(to Todd more than Deanna):*

Thank you, *I know that*.

DEANNA:

Sometimes our words are taken from us. And sometimes not saying anything at all is a perfectly acceptable form of prayer. Psalm 77: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak."

KATE:

Exactly.

DEANNA:

And you should say—or *not* say—what’s really going on for you. God can take it. *We* can take it.
Can’t we, Todd?

TODD (*sighing, relenting*):

Of course we can.

KATE (*still defensive*):

Okay, well, *here’s* what’s going on. I *wanted* a long, luxurious life with my son and my husband. Now I have no idea what’s coming next. I’m a clock that has to be reset every two months with tests and drugs and waiting. It’s awful and terrifying and I refuse to pretend otherwise.

TODD:

You think I don’t get that? I’m 39. I have kids too.

KATE:

I know you do. (*Breaking*) Todd, I know.

DEANNA:

We’re dealing with trauma. All three of us. Our bodies have betrayed us.

KATE:

But it’s deeper than that, isn’t it? Our bodies, yes, but the promise of our futures. We were sold a bill of goods: you can have a safe, happy, secure, long life. Bullshit. Every baby should be born with a warning label. *Safety not guaranteed.*

TODD:

God never promised us long lives, Kate.

KATE:

He should’ve.

TODD:

Perhaps he should’ve, but he didn’t.

DEANNA:

That's the betrayal I'm talking about. Our bodies and our lives have come undone. The trauma isn't just physical but emotional and spiritual. It's faithful to acknowledge that. There's *space* for that.

TODD:

Of course there's space, no one's arguing that.
But if we let ourselves fall into despair—if we let go of all our hope— (*He doesn't finish.*)

DEANNA:

Then what? What happens if we let go of our hope?

TODD:

We lose everything. Don't we? We lose it all.

DEANNA:

Do we?

TODD:

We believe in a God of life! We believe in a God whose enemy is death. Christ has overcome.
We can protest, we can weep bitterly, but in the end there is triumph in Christ!

DEANNA:

Then why protest and weep bitterly?

TODD:

What?

DEANNA:

If you're so certain there is triumph in Christ, why protest and weep bitterly?

TODD:

Because it hurts. (*Beat.*) Because it hurts so much.
The separation. The fear—

DEANNA:

Of what? (*Beat.*) Todd? The fear of what?

TODD:

Of loss—of loneliness—of...of— (*He falters*)

KATE:

Of falling into oblivion.
Of not even knowing you're dead.

TODD (*after a long pause*):

Yes.
Of there being *nothing*.
Of there being *nothing* at all.

DEANNA (*gently*):

You don't think there's space for that, too?

TODD:

How can there be space for that?
Because if there's space for that—if there's space for *that*—

DEANNA:

Then what?

TODD:

Then how can I go on?
(*When Deanna doesn't respond, he almost pleads with her.*)
How can I? How can I go on?

DEANNA:

Maybe you can't. Maybe you *can't* go on, Todd.

TODD:

But, oh God, if I can't go on—

DEANNA:

It's okay to say it. It's okay to say the words.

TODD:

I *have* to go on!

DEANNA:

But I'm saying if you *can't*. If you *can't* go on. It's okay to admit it out loud.
I can't go on. I can't go on.

Todd hesitates, considering.

KATE (*breaking in*):

Well shit, *I can't go on!*
Some days there's *no fucking way* I can go on, not for another second.

TODD:

Then what do you *do*?
What do you *do* when you can't go on?

KATE (*simply*):

I go on.

TODD:

What?

KATE:

I go on.

Because what else is there? It's maddening, it doesn't make a bit of sense, but what else can I do?

DEANNA:

That's just it. That's it right there.
I can't go on. I'll go on.
That's the agony and the paradox and the *humanness* of all this.

TODD:

So, what? We just abandon our hope?

KATE:

Oh, give it a rest, Todd. We don't abandon our hope anymore than God abandons *us*. Our hope doesn't belong to us in the first place. Is that what you think? That if you lose your steely resolve God will leave you to your misery?

TODD:
Of course not!

KATE:
Then why do you think God can't handle your despair?

TODD:
I never said he couldn't handle my sorrow—

KATE:
Not your sorrow, Todd, your *despair*. Your breaking point. Your hopelessness! Your moment without even a glimmer beyond the darkness. Why are you so certain God can't handle *that*?

TODD:
The scriptures don't model it! The scriptures model that in prayer we are never alone. In prayer we are never godforsaken. Jesus prayed, "let this cup pass away from me," but then yielded to God, "yet not what I want but what *you* want!"

KATE:
Oh for God's sake, Todd, you are *not* Jesus Christ!
(*Exasperated:*) Deanna! Talk some sense into him!

DEANNA:
I don't know why you both keep expecting *me* to be able to solve this—

TODD:
Of course I'm not Jesus, I never claimed otherwise, but aren't we all *in Christ*? Isn't that the point of all this? To join Christ in praying through our tears, our anger, our confusion? To grow into his very image?

DEANNA:
But even Jesus experienced total abandonment on the cross.
Even Jesus prayed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
Was his cry rhetorical? Was Jesus just *playing at* being human?

Todd doesn't respond.

KATE:

Ha. She got you there.

DEANNA (*shoots Kate a look, then goes on*):

Todd, what if godforsakenness makes us Christians?
What if it's the way in which we identify most deeply with Christ?

There is a long pause. Todd doesn't speak. Todd walks away from the women and kneels.

TODD:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He breaks down. Kate and Deanna watch him from a distance, then move closer to him, kneel next to him, saying nothing.

TODD:

I can't—I can't go on—

DEANNA:

Of course you can't.

TODD (*his voice rising*):

I can't go on.

DEANNA:

No, no, it's all too much.

TODD (*shouting now*):

I can't go on! I can't go on!

KATE:

None of us can! None of us can go on!

He weeps, and she begins to pray the 31st psalm.

Be merciful to us, LORD, for we are in distress;
Our eyes grow weak with sorrow,
Our soul and body with grief.

Our life is consumed by anguish
And our years by groaning;
Our strength fails because of our affliction,
And our bones grow weak.

TODD:
But what if he isn't there? What if it's only darkness?

KATE:
We'll pray anyway. Like Jesus did.

TODD:
And what if we can *never* go on?

KATE:
Then we can't.
But we'll go on. Oh, Todd, we'll go on, until our dying breaths—and, God willing, into whatever
lies beyond. What else is there to do?
Cancer or not, what else is there for *anyone* to do?

The curtain falls.