

It is good to be done with traveling and back home with my friends and family. I had some interesting experiences while on the road, one of them in a church near Knoxville, Tennessee two weeks ago. After the worship service, I was standing at the door with the pastor shaking hands with people as they left the sanctuary. That's always an interesting exercise. If you do it often enough, you develop the ability to tell who liked the sermon and who didn't. If people don't like the sermon, they always say, "Well, you certainly gave us something to think about."

I was standing at the door when a very elderly man, he appeared to be well into his 90's, approached me and shook my hand. The pastor leaned over and said, "You are shaking hands with the son of a Civil War veteran."

Coincidentally, the Civil War had begun 150 years ago that very week, so I ran the math in my head and said to the pastor, "Don't you mean he's the grandson of a Civil War veteran?" Which I thought was fascinating enough, to be the grandson of a Civil War veteran.

"No, sir," the elderly man said, "My father was a soldier for the Confederacy. He was 71 years-old when I was born."

I just stood there, holding his hand, amazed that I was one handshake away from a Civil War veteran. I said, "It's an honor to meet you, sir."

He said, "Thank you for your sermon. You certainly gave us something to think about."

It is a remarkable world, isn't it, friends? Incredible things happen all around us. I think of those women going to the tomb of Jesus and finding it empty. Mark said they were *amazed*, *astonished* and then *afraid*.

When I was in Tennessee, a woman pulled me to the side and asked whether I thought Jesus' resurrection was a physical resurrection or a spiritual resurrection.

I could tell she was gearing up for an argument. I said I had no idea, that I wasn't there. I sensed she didn't like my answer and it made me kind of nervous because she looked old enough to have maybe been there, maybe even had been the clerk who had filled out the death certificate. I thought maybe she knew something I didn't. I pointed out that the gospel writers weren't even sure what had happened. Mark spoke about Jesus appearing in various forms. Matthew and Luke have him levitated up to heaven. John has him cooking breakfast.

Not even the people writing about it 30-60 years after the event agreed on what happened. After 2,000 years, there's no way I can know. I'm amazed and astounded just like those women at the tomb. We know something happened; we're not sure what. This is an area of faith in which we ought to be very humble. There is much we don't know. But I will say this. While I may not know and understand the *particulars* of the resurrection, I believe with all my heart in the *principle* of resurrection. I believe difficult, dreadful things can happen to us and that our circumstances can be redeemed. I believe we can be handed a plate of mud and rock and sand and that buried at the bottom can be a flake of gold. I believe in the *principle* of resurrection, that good can come from bad.

There's a Tao-ist (Dow-ist) parable about a Chinese farmer and his son who were very poor. One day a wild stallion jumped their fence, and began grazing on their small plot of land. According to local custom, the horse now belonged to them.

The son said, "Isn't this wonderful, father!"

"Might be good, might be bad, who can say," said the father.

The next day the stallion ran away.

"What a tragedy," the son said.

"Might be good, might be bad, who can say," said the father.

The next day the stallion returned leading six more horses.

“Isn’t that wonderful!” said the son.

“Might be good, might be bad,” said the father. “Who can say?”

The son, in his excitement, leapt on the back of one of the horses, which threw the young man to the ground, breaking his arm. The son lie in the dirt, clutching his arm. “This is horrible,” the son said.

The father knelt beside him, wiping his son’s brow with a cool, damp cloth, saying, “Son, it might be good, or it might be bad, we can’t yet say.”

The next day the army came to their village to conscript all the young, able-bodied men to fight a war. They took all the young men, except for the one with a broken arm.

After the crucifixion, the disciples of Jesus hid away in a room and bemoaned the fate of their friend, “This is terrible.” But the true consequences of any situation can never be completely grasped, for in every situation is the potential for both good and bad. This is because every event continues to affect, shape, and inspire circumstances and people for years to come. This is true of the resurrection. Was it a good thing? Yes, if it teaches us to persist in difficulty, if it teaches us to have faith in times of hardship, if it teaches us to forgive when we have been falsely accused, if it teaches us to look for the gold in the mud. The resurrection, if it teaches us those virtues, can be a good thing, a wonderful thing.

But the resurrection also has the potential to make us spiritually arrogant. I have heard, more than once, Christians belittle other faiths by pointing to the resurrection and saying, “Where is your risen Savior? This proves God is with our religion, and not with yours.”

The resurrection is what we make it. Its lessons can inspire and ennoble us, teaching us hope, faith, persistence, and forgiveness. Or it can make us unduly proud of our religion, triumphalistic, and dismissive of other faiths.

What is the resurrection for you? Has it expanded your life? Has it given you faith and hope and trust? Has its message of enduring love caused you to include others? Or has the resurrection shrunk your life? Has it too easily permitted you to exclude others, blinding you to the truths, values, and virtues of other religions?

I believe in the *principle* of resurrection, that good can come from bad. I believe that whether something is truly good or truly bad can not always be known, since it depends upon our willingness and capacity to learn, persevere, and grow. Just as Joshua asked the Israelites to choose whom they would serve, so the resurrection asks us to choose between the enduring power of good and the fleeting power of evil. In one choice we find joy and life, in the other choice, sorrow and death.