

... Out of Suffering Comes Life...



Resurrection of Christ, Raphael

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” (Romans 5:3-5)

When my oldest son was 5 years old, I picked him up from his Sunday School class and asked him what he learned that morning. He said: “I learned about Jesus dying.” Can you tell me more, I asked. “Well” he said, “Jesus got tired of being stuck in a cave, so he pushed the door open and his mother Mary hit him on the head with a wooden cross and killed him.” After picking myself off the floor, I first made sure that his Sunday School teacher was indeed a competent teacher (she was) and then I spent time making sure he knew the real story of how Jesus died. Once he got it right, he then asked, “Is that how the story ends – Jesus dies?” You see, even a 5-year old hopes the story doesn’t end with suffering and death.

The Easter story is a story of hope. Have you noticed that so many of the stories of the Bible are filled with pain and suffering? From the very beginning we learn that the earth suffers, Israel suffers, the great men and women of faith suffer. And then God himself suffers through Jesus. The short view of the biblical narrative is this: “to live is to suffer.” But that’s not how the story ends. The long view is this: “...but out of suffering comes life.”

At the heart of our own story is the hope that our pain and disappointments are not the end of the story. We hope to raise a great family, wonderful children, have a long life ...and then the doctor says...the policeman knocks...the letter comes. I have great dreams, wonderful plans ...and then I lose my job. I’ve been hoping ...and then this habit, that I just can’t seem to shake, has got me in its grip and now...the hope is gone.

The life that you live will flow out of the story you “believe” you’re living. So, if you believe the “short view” of your story –that my story is defined by the misery and disappointment I’m facing right now, then my life will be defined by that “short view.” But all stories have an ending – this is the “long view.” And here’s where the story of the resurrection intersects with the longer view of your life.

Suffering is only a portion of the story; suffering is the short view; suffering only defines a part of Jesus’ life –the story doesn’t end with a suffering, crucified God – death doesn’t get the last word. The end of the story is this: our pain and suffering are no more; our brokenness is redeemed; our mistakes are forgiven; the old becomes new...and out of death comes life. Hallelujah!

*Charles Hall
Dean, International Programs*