

## Making Sense of It All

As with most children, this young boy was always excited when his grandfather came to visit. In those days the horse and buggy ride from Richmond, Virginia, to the foothills of Pennsylvania took three days, so the visits were special events. Each visit was filled with treats, candy, walks in the woods, foolish games and silly jokes. The grandson also found great enjoyment watching his grandfather keep his soggy cigar lit.

Then, for ten years, the boy and his grandfather didn't see each other due to events beyond their control. Their next encounter occurred on one of those early spring days when the trees were yet to reveal their leaves and the ground was moist and cold, but the bright sun and the brilliant, soft, blue sky held promise of life.

During the long journey over the rolling hills, the grandfather reflected on those earlier visits with his grandson – visits filled with warm smiles, joyful laughter and unconditional love.

There was on that day of the reunion, a chill in the air as the grandfather reached his destination. The old man, now barely able to walk, got out of his buggy, put out his cigar, as if the playfulness of life had left him. In silent respect, he removed his hat so his old, bald head was vulnerable to the breeze.

As he turned his head, he realized he was on Holy Ground, for there, in the midst of the Gettysburg battlefield he saw the grave of his grandson. With tears in his eyes, he approached the young soldier's grave, knelt down and looking up to heaven asked: "*Why God, Why?*"

I am sure that every one of us has uttered the grandfather's words from time to time: "*Why God, Why?*" Being confused about life's painful events is easy, especially in the midst of war, famine, humanity's evil and the coronavirus pandemic we are now living through. Whether our involvement is as intimate as the grandfather weeping over the grave of his grandson, or as indirect as watching and listening to doctors and nurses risking their lives to save lives, the same questions arise: "*Why did this have to happen?*" and "*How can such a thing take place?*" As inquisitive creatures, we human beings want answers to life's tragedies and horrors, not to mention our everyday anxieties and concerns.

At moments in life when we struggle with making sense of it all; our pattern of thought has been to ask, "*HOW?*" and "*WHY?*" On this, the most important day in all of Christianity, the question we need to address is "*WHO?*" and "*WHAT?*" From the creation accounts in Genesis to the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus, from Mary's conception of Immanuel, "*God with us,*" to this Easter Day – the message is clear: God

creates, and God redeems! But God does not inflict harm!

Scripture does not describe the physiology of Christ's resurrection. No human being witnessed the precise moment. What we have though are countless witnesses to the empty tomb and to the risen Christ. It is WHO is risen and WHAT God is telling us in Jesus' resurrection that matters on this day. On the mountaintops and in the valleys of life, we must begin with Christ's resurrection if we are ever to get beyond the HOWs and WHYs of this world.

Once we understand in our hearts "WHO" Christ is – God's Son – and WHAT the resurrection is all about – God's redeeming grace – then we can let everything else go. Christ's resurrection reminds us like nothing else in the entire world that God is in the business of life, not death; love, not hate; hope, not despair; faith, not fear! But as finite human beings we want to be in control. Rather than letting Jesus' resurrection work in and through us, we want to be in control. We want to create things in "our" image rather than God's. And when we do, trouble abounds.

The famous writer, George Bernard Shaw, a great intellect of his day, received a unique proposal from the beautiful dancer Isadora Duncan. She believed that the two of them should have a child together. As she explained it: *"Think what a child it would be with my body and your brain."* Shaw, quite aware of humanity's frailties as well as his own declined the offer and responded this way: *"Think how unfortunate the child would be, with my body and your brain."*

Easter reminds us that God is offering us the things that we cannot purchase, yet matter most in this world: LOVE, PEACE, HOPE, REDEMPTION AND SALVATION. As his creation, we need to seek His presence among the chances and changes of living each and every day.

It is our acceptance of WHO Christ is and WHAT He is about on this Easter Day, that makes it possible for God to help us make sense of all we are confronted with on a daily basis.

During this time of year when we hear about tornados ripping through communities throughout the south, my mind wonders back to The Rev. Kelly Clem and the congregation of Goshen United Methodist Church in Piedmont, Alabama, on Palm Sunday 1994. On that day a tornado destroyed their sanctuary during the worship service, injuring ninety and killing twenty people. Six of the dead were children, including the pastor's four-year-old daughter. At the time the storm hit, the children were singing, *"The Lord Will Provide."*

If we know WHO our God is and WHAT he is about, then we cannot say that God causes bad things to happen. The God of love, compassion and redemption revealed in Jesus does not send tornadoes to kill young children singing his praises. Nor does God send a pandemic to disrupt our lives and threaten our existence. The God of Easter is in the business of creating life, not destroying it. Easter is our solace, our assurance that

life conquers death...that on Easter God proclaims victory over evil. The same God behind the creation of the universe, the same God who rose from the dead that first Easter morning is at work this very day, bringing comfort, hope and redemption to our lives and our world.

What then bridges the gap between the heartaches of living on this earth and Christ's victory over death? It is FAITH! Faith steps in when we cannot understand. Faith carries us along when we cannot walk. When we choose to believe and live into a God who creates life in the midst of death, then we are on the road to a better tomorrow. Only a loving God can take the tragedy of the cross and turn it into an Easter celebration.

One week after the tragedy at Goshen Methodist Church, The Rev. Kelly Clem stood in front of his congregation, now worshiping on the front lawn of the Church, and proclaimed Christ's resurrection. *"If I didn't believe in Easter,"* said Rev. Clem, *"I wouldn't be able to stand here now."*

On this, the most important day of the year, despite our physical separation, let us dare not forget the community we have been given through this incredible gift. In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God rolls away the stones from our tombs of grief, confusion and hopelessness and helps us make sense of it all. On this day the gift has been given, the hope endures, the grace revealed! Now it is our turn to be an Easter people by boldly living into this truth and assist others in making sense of it all.