

Finding Redemption

A reflection by Danny Nelson Schweers for February 11, 2024.

Eventually, God gets the blame.

Once you start wondering why things go wrong, sooner or later you will ask why omnipotent God makes terrible things happen. “Why, God? Why?” is a question cried in anguish but also a question asked calmly, soberly.

An answer I dislike — not that my preferences much matter — is that God works in mysterious ways, that while individual or even historical tragedies seem bad, they are part of a greater good we cannot see. We — ignorant beings that we are — may never understand. I do not like this answer. It makes everything bad somehow good and leaves us short-sighted.

When I broke my hand recently, I wondered why. The first answer, the obvious answer, is that I was stupid. That answer rings true enough — I headed up a very steep hill without a thought that I might only get so far and then fall on the way down. “Let’s see what happens” was the depth of my thinking. It’s a shame it wasn’t on video.

If you have ever done something stupid, you know how it is afterwards.

You keep replaying the incident in your head, reliving what happened and what you were thinking and how you can keep it from happening again. That is one way to redeem an incident — learn from it. Hopefully I have learned my lesson. In the future, I will hesitate; in the future, I will think.

Will I? I am not so sure and that scares me.

Reliving the incident over and over in my mind, not satisfied with calling myself stupid, eventually I asked the bigger question. If God is in control, how was my falling and breaking my hand a good thing? Why did God want to give me a break?

I don’t usually ask myself God questions. Then again, I was trained as a philosopher, with an undergraduate degree and three years of graduate school. There are signs and the interpretation of signs. Carl Jung’s teachings come to mind, especially interpretation of actions, treating them and dreams as signs of something deeper, all the while looking for symbols and wordplay.

Why did God give me a break?

Here was wordplay. Did I need a break? Certainly not in the sense of two broken metatarsals. But what about getting a break from my workaholic life, a break from my endless list of things to do? This accident certainly gave me that. After my fall, I have been taking whole days off!

Rather than say that God is good and that every thing bad is actually good, I want to say something else. I want to say that bad things happen and God redeems them. Bad things are actually bad, but God is actively redeeming them.

If we are on God’s side, if we are looking for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven, we will seek to be part of that redemptive work. God is actively offering us redemption, wants us to be better, wants our lives to be better, and wants us to participate in redemption.

What might it mean for me to take a break? What do I really think? What do you think? How can this break be redemptive?

It has surprised me how many people care. My arm in a sling has had the effect of making me more approachable. People I rarely connect with are suddenly open and confiding. And because I post on social media, I suddenly am connecting in deeper ways with those I have known for years but may never have really connected with. They have had breaks, too.

If I may give them and myself more credit, it isn't the sling, or my social media bandwidth that has made the difference. I have become, for the moment, more open. That's what they see. Something broke open after my metatarsals broke. I am more exposed, more human. I like it!

Even so, I am not climbing steep hills any time soon. Please, God, no more breaks!

--Danny Nelson Schweers, danny@w2mw.com, 302 475-0998