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“The Worst That Could Happen”

By: Roy G. Pollina+

For the longest time my wife, Susan, and I had two dogs. We had to put one of them down right before we move to Martinsville; he was a very elderly dog. You may have heard me mentioned from time to time my wife’s dog, Fiona. She is the one that we have now and if you have been to our house, that’s the one that jumps all over you. Fiona was younger, more rambunctious, more in your face dog. Because she was and is like that she tends to get more sermon illustrations. My other dog was the older dog. He was “my dog”, Riley.

Riley was a lay around, seen it all, never get excited type dog. Riley was a big eyes, lopped eared, and perpetually sad expression kind of dog. My daughter, Amity, was fond of quoting a comedian when she was around Riley. She would remind us of a favorite joke, “Think of the absolute worst thing that can happen to you. Then, look at your dog. He looks like it just happen to him.” That’s pretty much describes Riley’s forlorn expression.

When hearing that joke, “Think about the worst thing that can happen to you,” nobody actually does that ... think about the worst that can happen. The worst that can happen is a little bit different for each of us. There are certain intersections with the worst thing that could happen to us. You know the list. Death is a biggie. Things like cancer, blindness, utter poverty, and imprisonment, those are pretty bad things. What happen to others, also, has enormous impact on us. So the worst that might happen might not be something that happens to us, but to someone that we love. Not our death, but the death of loved one or their

incapacitating illness, or their imprisonment, or their utter poverty.

Of course, the worst is difficult to pin point but there are a host of things that we can all agree are really bad. Losing one’s home and possessions due to a fire or flood; those we can agree, are really bad. Living in times and places of war with all of war’s uncertainties; living under persecution for race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or political beliefs is really bad. There is the worst that can happen. There is the really bad that can happen. We each have a different list for ourselves with, as I said, some intersections. Every human soul values their own life, their own health, their own freedom so when these things are lost or in jeopardy they appear on everyone’s “worst” or “really bad” list.

There is one thing that makes you and me different from just every human soul; we are different because of our faith in Jesus Christ. While the rest of the world gets to make its own list of “the worst” and “really bad” for themselves, Christians who have faith in Jesus Christ, cannot judge what is “the worst”, what is “really bad”, until it has been touched by the hand of Almighty God.

You and I are bound by our faith to recognize the sovereignty of God over everything, even the painful and destructive. We are bound by our Faith to confess that everything is within the salvific powers of God. **Nothing is over and done with until God is done with it.**

Do you remember the word of God we just heard, the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah? How the fearful of hearts are made strong, how the blind will see, how the deaf will hear, how the lame will leap like a hart, and how the dumb will sing. Being fearful, blind, deaf, lame, or dumb is not the worst that can happen to you because God won’t let it be.

The witness of the Prophet Isaiah is confirmed by the psalmist. God will not disappoint those who hope in him. So there is justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, freedom for the prisoner, sight for the blind. God makes a special point of caring for the weakest, for the stranger, orphan, and the widow. We are people who believe that God will not leave things alone.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is brought a deaf man with a speech impediment. Our Lord touches the deaf man's ears and touches the speechless tongue and commands, "Be Open!" The deaf man's ears are opened and he spoke plainly. Our God is a Savior God. The worst you have will not be permitted to stay that way. Jesus Christ is the redeemer of the world. Jesus loved us and was obedient to the Father. But we took him and crucified him and laid his dead body in the tomb of a stranger. It was the worst thing the world ever did to the best that God had to offer. Jesus crucifixion showed us at our worst, Jesus crucifixion revealed God at his best. Jesus death won for us our redemption even in the terrible thing we did. God could not allow the worst to remain so after 3 days Jesus rose from the dead. Through Jesus death (the worst) we now have eternal life (the best). The instrument of

death and torture, the Cross is now the sign of God's love for the world. We now live in faith in the risen Jesus who has revealed that Good Friday in our hands becomes Easter morning in God's hand. When "the worst" or "really bad" happens in your life you can believe that your loving Father has already begun the process of your redemption. He cannot, He will not leave the worst or really bad as the final word in his creation.

I know its common, even de riquer, for Episcopalians to speak about how reasonable their faith is; we do have a reasonable faith. Well, today I am preaching a faith beyond reason. When things are at their worst, there is no reason in the world to believe it will get any better. Only faith in Jesus Christ can give you that confidence. Only faith in the resurrected Jesus gives us hope when death is all around. Whether it is the death of kindness, death of love, death of future plans, or finally, physical death. Faith in Jesus Christ brings life in times of death. Faith in Jesus Christ is our assurance that the worst won't last forever. Nothing is over and done with until God is done with it. You have been redeemed the worst is not the final word. Throughout all generation we shall shout Hallelujah, Amen.