

I HAVE LOOKED RESILIENCE IN THE FACE

I Have Looked Resilience in the Face

Let me tell you what it looks like.

It looks like a senior pastor who continues to serve his congregation faithfully while carrying the unbearable burden of a son killed by a Russian sniper.

The pastor showed me a photograph of his son dressed in military fatigues, holding his two little girls—the pastor's granddaughters. Every time he looks into their faces, he sees traces of the son he lost. Every time he showed me that photograph, tears welled up in his eyes involuntarily. He did not have to search for his grief; his grief was always searching for him.

Yet every Sunday, he mounts the pulpit.

He stands before his people carrying both a Bible and a broken heart. He does not preach because the pain has passed. He preaches because the gospel remains true amid his pain.

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Let me tell you what it looks like.

It looks like a young girl who fled Russia, entered a Ukrainian church, heard the gospel, and gave her life to Jesus Christ. I had the privilege of preaching at the service in which she was baptized and received her first Communion.

Then I watched something more powerful than politics and deeper than national allegiance. The Ukrainian pastor whose son had been killed by a Russian soldier placed his hands upon this young Russian convert and welcomed her into the fellowship of the church.

The hands of a grieving Ukrainian father rested upon the head of a Russian-born daughter in the faith.

He could have seen only the country she came from. Instead, he saw the sister Christ had redeemed. She could have represented the nation connected to his deepest pain, but at the foot of the cross she became family. The gospel did not erase his grief, but it refused to allow

grief to become hatred. Christ had created a relationship that war could not define and national borders could not divide.

Then I watched as that grieving pastor broke the baked loaf and poured the wine into the chalice. A man whose heart had been broken held before the church the bread representing the body of Christ, broken for sinners. A father whose family had tasted death lifted the cup, proclaiming the blood of Christ, shed to reconcile enemies to God and to one another.

War had taken his son, but it had not taken his faith.

Grief had filled his eyes, but it had not hardened his heart.

He could still preach Christ. He could still serve Communion. He could still lay his hands upon a young believer from Russia and call her his sister.

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Let me tell you what it looks like.

It looks like a brother and sister who were only nine and ten years old when the war began. Their mother and father left them huddled alone inside a house. They simply left. They never returned.

Those children do not know whether their parents are dead or alive. They were left to fend for themselves in a country at war, carrying questions that children should never have to ask and burdens that children should never have to bear. But abandonment did not have the final word.

A Christian family opened its home and adopted them. Now these children attend church faithfully and are learning to follow the Lord. The family into which they were born disappeared, but through the church, God gave them another family to hold them close.

They still carry the wounds of being left, but they are no longer alone. I have looked resilience in the face.

Let me tell you what it looks like.

It looks like a man whose brother died by suicide and whose mother and father are also deceased. He has no immediate family left, yet he gives himself to serving wounded soldiers.

He cuts their hair.

He sits beside their beds and reads to them.

He listens to their stories.

He prays with them.

He leads them in Bible study.

The man with no family has chosen to become family to others. He understands what it means to sit beside an empty chair, so he sits beside occupied hospital beds. He knows what it feels like to lose the people closest to him, so he draws close to soldiers who fear losing everything.

His suffering did not make him withdraw from people. By the grace of God, it enlarged his capacity to serve them.

I have looked resilience in the face.

It does not always look fearless. Sometimes its eyes are crowded with tears.

It does not always look strong. Sometimes it trembles while holding an old photograph.

It does not mean that grief has ended, questions have been answered, or wounds have healed. Resilience is the grieving pastor who still mounts the pulpit. It is the wounded father who welcomes a Russian-born convert as a daughter in Christ. It is the abandoned child who still learns to trust. It is the lonely man who becomes family for wounded soldiers.

Resilience is not living as though nothing happened.

Resilience is remaining faithful after everything happened.

I have looked resilience in the face. It was tear-stained but still trusting, wounded but still worshiping, grieving but still giving, struck down but not destroyed.

