

A Hope and a Future
3. *What could this become?*
Sept. 27, 2020

Text: Romans 8:28

A couple weeks ago my wife Linda said, “Look what I did.” She opened her dresser drawer and pointed. She had cut up some cardboard to create drawer partitions to separate her scarfs neatly so they didn’t get jumbled into a ball. I was impressed; she took an old cardboard box and made it useful. She does that sort of thing a lot. It’s called repurposing. Maybe you’ve done that.

Repurposing is using an existing object to create something new. Maybe even turning trash into useful items. Some people are downright amazing at it. For example: one guy turns old wine barrels in to drum sets, someone else turns old tube-TVs into aquariums. There’s a company that takes old belts and turns them into flooring. The *V-8 Hotel* in Germany converts old cars into beds, so you can sleep comfortably in repurposed 1960 Chevy! They even attach old car-wash parts for decoration.

Macro Sea is a real estate developer in New York. They transformed a junkyard in Brooklyn into a recreation area by converting old dumpsters into swimming pools. Swimming in a dumpster doesn’t sound too appealing, but they did such an amazing job repurposing them that it looks pretty refreshing.

Most of us look at stuff like old TVs and worn-out belts and say, “Where can I get rid of this?” Other people, however, look at those same items and ask, “***What could this become?***” With imagination and skill, they re-purpose the things most of us are ready to throw away; they turn trash into usable items.

Over the years, each of us accumulates memories and experiences that we’d like to get rid of: a failure make the grade, a painful rejection by someone we cared about, regrets about the past, guilt and shame over something we did, and more. We might call these the garbage of our lives.

BUT, what if the garbage of our lives could be repurposed into something useful – even something beautiful? That can happen! God is the ultimate expert at repurposing the garbage of our lives into valuable treasure.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* God works for the good in “*all things...*,” even the stuff we hope to get rid of. This verse doesn’t say that everything happens for the best. It says that God can take *anything* in our lives and make it work for his purposes for us. That includes the enjoyable parts, the painful, the successes, the failures, and yes, even the garbage of our lives.

We need to hear that today, because failure, regrets and pain can eat away at our hope for the future. Have you ever thought something like: “My life would be so much better if it wasn’t for _____...” or “I’d have a lot to look forward to if I hadn’t _____” or “I would love to make a difference in other people’s lives, but...”? Maybe we think we have been disqualified for a good future because of our past wounds or failures. Too often, we dismiss the future God has for us because we think the garbage makes it impossible, but in Romans 8:28, God promises to repurpose that garbage into something that advances his purpose for us.

God doesn’t stop working in our lives because we have failed, sinned, or been hurt. **Jeremiah 29:11** is the theme verse for this campaign. It reads, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* That’s a great promise but God didn’t promise the Jews a hope and future because they had obeyed him perfectly and followed his ways. In fact, it was the opposite: God gave his promise because they were being judged for consistently rebelling against him.

For hundreds of years He had sent prophets to Israel to warn them to stop worshipping idols and turn back to Him, but the Jews ignored the Lord, so he let the Babylonians conquer and deport them. As the Jews were in exile, at least some of them thought, “We messed up. God told us this would happen and we didn’t listen. I guess we’ve lost our land.” God then sent the prophet Jeremiah to deliver a message... a promise. God said, “My plan is to give you a hope and a future. You will get your land back” and history records that they did. By the way, after the Jews returned from exile, they never again worshipped idols.

Our failures and past do not disqualify us for a hope and a future. Because of Jesus, it’s like God looks at all of the broken pieces of our lives and says, *“What could this become?”* **Some of us may have been HURT badly. God can repurpose that.**

We all saw the terrible fires out west. It is painful to watch millions of acres of forest be destroyed by flames. In the midst of the disaster, however, there is a seed of hope – literally. Some types of plants only grow after they have been activated by fire. There are certain shrubs that have seeds that will only grow after a fire. They sprout only when they are exposed to the chemicals that come from smoke and charred plants. Those seeds can remain buried in the soil for decades until a wildfire awakens them.

Other plants, like the lodgepole pine and *Eucalyptus* have pine cones or fruits that are completely sealed with resin. These cones/fruits can only open to release their seeds after the heat of a fire has physically melted the resin.¹

Isn’t it amazing how God’s creation rebounds after disaster? You can look at the charred ground where a forest used to stand and mourn the loss, but new life will follow.

¹ *Playing with Wildfire: 5 Amazing Adaptations of Pyrophytic Plants*; by Melissa Petruzzello in *Britannica*.

When we feel burned by loss, by sin, by life, our story not over. God has planted inside you seeds for a new future. It's been said, "God never wastes a hurt." He will repurpose it. "God often turns our pain into our purpose." He wants to use whatever pain you have experienced to help others.

Our Children's Director, Ginny Melhorn, has fought cancer twice – and won. If you got cancer, who better to help and encourage you than someone who has beat it? Someone who has lost a child to miscarriage can help another person who has suffered the same way. Whatever pain you have experienced, you are now positioned to help someone else who has a similar experience.

Almost everyone has suffered some sort of loss during Covid, whether it is getting together with friends, or travel, or income, job, or health. What could this become? God has promised to use it for good – how is he using Covid for your good?

Will you value connection with others more now and be more intentional about connecting with people? Will you be more aware of the needs of others? Will you appreciate what you have more? Your Covid experience can bless others in the in the future.

Some of us have painful FAILURES. God can repurpose that. The Bible says that the greatest leader other than Jesus was Moses. Moses led an entire nation out of slavery and yet, the first time Moses tried to help the Jews, he failed in spectacular fashion. He had to flee to the wilderness. In fact, Moses did nothing useful the first 2/3rd of his life, so it's not surprising that when God called Moses out at the burning bush, Moses resisted. God said, "I'm going to send you to Pharaoh to free my people" and Moses said, "Send someone else." He was remembering that failure.

Maybe God is calling you to try again. You failed before, but that doesn't mean you will this time. Maybe your relationship failed. Maybe you got fired from a job. Don't let your failure sideline you! We can learn a lot in failure; sometimes more than we learn by succeeding! God repurposes.

Each one of us has sinned, but God can take our SIN and redirect us. Doesn't my sin wreck my hope and future? Did it wreck King David's future? David committed adultery which led to murder, and, yes, that led to a lot of pain. But God took it all and repurposed it, so that, to this day, David is known as "a man after God's own heart." He wrote many of the Psalms that believers have used for prayer for 3,000 years.

Did sin wreck Peter's future? He denied knowing Jesus before the crucifixion, but after Jesus rose from the dead, he searched out Peter and commissioned him to lead his church. Peter even wrote a couple books of the Bible! We each sin. Sometimes that leads to pain, but Jesus died on the cross so we could be forgiven. God will use even that experience of sin and forgiveness.

Chuck Colson went to jail for breaking the law during the 1970's Watergate scandal. He then became a follower of Jesus. After being released, he established Prison Fellowship, which has become the world's largest Christian nonprofit organization for prisoners, former prisoners, and their families; and a leading advocate for justice reform.

Stop accusing yourself. Jesus already paid the price for your sin, so don't try to pay for it yourself. Don't let your past be your focus. Edwin Louis Cole said, "No one drowns by falling in the water. You drown by staying there." Receive his forgiveness and move forward.

A few years ago a friend of mine led a mission trip to Haiti. Their guide was named Jean-Claude. When Jean-Claude met them at the airport, he was wearing a T-shirt that said, "I am hope." There was a story behind that shirt.

Three years before, a severe earthquake shook Haiti, killing over quarter of a million people. When the quake struck, Jean-Claude was working in a medical clinic translating for a medical team. The building collapsed around him. He was buried under tons of concrete, but he didn't lose consciousness. When the dust settled, he prayed, "God, are you going to leave me buried here?" Inwardly he heard a voice saying, "You can do something." Jean-Claude replied, "God, there is nothing I can do." The voice replied, "You can do something." Jean-Claude tried to move his legs and he couldn't. He tried to move his arms but he couldn't. He said, "God there is no way for me to do it." The voice kept saying, "You can do something." Jean-Claude said, "If God said so, then I am going to do something."

After wrestling for a while, he pulled his right arm out enough to use it. He was still holding his cell phone in his right hand. While buried in rubble, he texted his nephew. Everyone thought Jean-Claude had died, but now they knew he was alive. They got to work and eventually freed Jean-Claude, who walked away without a broken bone. For weeks afterward Jean-Claude wondered, "Why me? So many died. Why did I survive?" He concluded, "If I am alive, it must be for a reason."

He started to work with a Methodist mission in a rural area. He noticed that a lot of the kids there were not in school. He asked around and learned that their parents didn't have the money to send them. So Jean-Claude saved enough money, then he went to the mayor and said, "I'd like to have a piece of land so I can build a school." The mayor was pleased to sell him some land and thanked him for caring for the people. Jean-Claude said, "If I'm alive it must be for a reason."

Jean-Claude didn't have money left over, so he gathered materials left over from other building projects and whatever else he could find lying around and repurposed them to create a makeshift structure. That was the start of the school, which has now grown into a multi-building campus with a community center, guest house and more. Hundreds of children now have a new future because of Jean-Claude.

God took the tragedy of an earthquake and repurposed it to be the motivator for Jean-Claude's life. That's why he wears a shirt that says, "I am hope."

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Maybe you haven't survived an earthquake, but you have survived a pandemic. You are alive for a reason. You may have been hurt, you might have failed, you have sinned like everyone else, but God will repurpose all of that if you let him.

Whether you feel trapped today or not, God says, "You can do something." Where you live, work, and play, there are people in need of friendship, support, hope and encouragement.

If you have never taken the step to yield your life to the control of Jesus, that is the step God is calling you to take. In this moment of silence let's ask the Lord to let us know what he wants us to do.