

**PDF - Sunday, February 5, 2023 “Rough Stones Smooth” Rev. Wil Darcangelo**

What are we here for? What is our purpose? Why is there so much suffering in life, and what is its reason? Of course these are the great questions of life. And no provable answers are forthcoming.

But we have hints. There are conclusions we can draw from looking at eons of human nature through our stories and legends and myths. Even the stories we continue to tell today are full of glimpses of our encouraging human potential.

Should we take comfort from them? Should we look at our hero tales and martyrdom stories to extract from them a possible consistent thread of our most important human lessons?

I believe we should. Because there is great comfort to be had in looking at the endless array of others' stories as well as the personal experiences we ourselves have had. Good and bad, joyful and sorrowful, all of them together of a piece.

I suggest looking at them with a particular crosshair for the underdog stories. You'll find that they nearly all have aspects to them where the protagonist suffers, sometimes greatly, but with courage and fortitude makes of that suffering something resplendent.

What happens to a jagged chunk of rock that finds itself flung among the rushing waters of a tempestuous river? It is hurled against other rocks as the water carries it away powerless to stop. Over and over again, it is battered against the hardened surfaces of other obstacles, occasionally crushed between them. Sometimes for thousands of years.

And should that rock one day be taken from the river by the hand of a person whose eye caught its now gleaming smoothness, it is beheld as beautiful; a treasure to be displayed. For it has been burnished by nature and smoothed in the course of its hardships. Refined by its grief and the loneliness of its journey. It is beautiful precisely because of its experience.

That is the crux of all human storytelling. A consistent reminder we make to ourselves that we are made more beautiful in the course of our suffering. And even if suffering has no ultimate purpose, we are polished by it nonetheless.

Is this cause for, as some have historically suggested, bringing upon suffering purposefully in order to deliberately cultivate that beauty? No. The human experience contains suffering enough to accomplish whatever ultimate purpose it may have. Those

who believe in self-flagellation as a means toward spiritual perfection are misguided in their understanding of why we endure hardship.

But does God bring us suffering? One might consider that to be true if the evidence they choose to present is God's apparent lack of interest in preventing it. But that is a careless argument. Suggesting that God doesn't care about our suffering simply because It doesn't appear to intervene is no proof of God's intent. And how can we faithfully conclude that no intervention occurred behind the scenes which lessened the burden we might have otherwise experienced? We cannot.

What's left is the possibility that we are accompanied by God during our sorrow. Prodded toward making something beautiful from it rather than allowing it to destroy us. Encouraging us to see new beauty in what before had been only a jagged chunk of debris, cast aside.

Take note of any goodness and beauty that has come from a moment of sorrow in your life. It often does not make the sorrow worth it. But that is not its purpose. Whether or not we recognize the value of the suffering we experience, we are still made beautiful by it. It is the birthplace of empathy, compassion, even peace.

You are so much braver than you know. This journey is long and tiresome, but there is a seed of grace within it all. A hidden potential of beauty already present inside the ordeal, in the same way that an entire leaf is contained within the tiny folds of a bud which endures the winter exposed. It waits for the sun and blesses the cold. For it already knows the secret to our great human story.

The secret is in blessing our sorrow. Not being grateful for it, not inviting more. But acknowledging that it's there, blessing it, and noting that it has a sacred opportunity tucked inside, ready to more fully define who we are and where our strength truly lies. It is a secret waiting to be noticed, ready to bring us comfort in our most painful days. It is the footprints in the sand.