



**T**here is a unique process in the making of an oriental rug. The master weaver stands in front of the rug. Behind the rug are apprentices who are told when to put in the thread and which color to use. The artist is very much like a painter or composer, and yet he or she is completely dependent upon the hands and fingers of the workers.



When an apprentice makes a mistake, the artist does not make him pull it out. The weaver uses the mistake, adapts the pattern to it and weaves it into the fabric. This is because the artist is the only one who actually sees what is happening and the only one with the global view. It is similar to what a jazz singer or blues musician does when a mistake has been made, when a bent note has been played.

The musician in real time goes with it and creates something new.

Many things happen that God does not desire ~ that go against the plan ~ that break the pattern and require justice and restoration. Things such as the crucifixion of the Messiah. Some intentionally go against God's pattern. Others are the unintended consequences of well-meaning actions or accidents. Yet God can take all such negativities and eventually use them for good. Only God knows the whole picture. Our errors, conscious or not, can be transformed both to the glory of God and for our own happiness.



**M**ake no mistake: God makes no mistakes! How would we possibly know? Who among us has the cosmic perspective that God has to make such a claim?

Joseph with his God-given gift of dream interpretation came closer than most of us to comprehending God's purpose. In the Book of Genesis, after his brothers conspired to kill him, long after Joseph was instead sold into slavery, after rising and falling and rising again in Egypt, and finally reunited with his brothers; at the end Joseph unexpectedly offers forgiveness to them. His surprising rationale for not seeking just vengeance on them is summarized by an insight into God's workings: "You meant it for evil, but God used it for good. God's purpose is bigger than anything any of us can possibly imagine – to preserve our people."<sup>3</sup>

Paul with his God-given gift of insight comes closer too. As he rightly understood it: "For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God."<sup>4</sup>

**M**ake no mistake ~ God makes no mistakes! If mistakes are made, who really makes them? Indeed, was the crucifixion of the Messiah a mistake? Was it something God needed to correct?

On the Emmaus road, the stranger begins to exhort the two traveling companions.

**“[H]ow foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”<sup>5</sup>**

This stranger, not yet recognized as the resurrected Lord, says the most incredible things. He shows how the cross was part of God's plan from the beginning. God knew from the start what would happen if the true Messiah of God came to earth and God had been letting us on to the secret through the



prophets and others. As John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite and a great spiritual mentor, has stated it:

“The cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come... [T]he cross itself...fulfill[s] the kingdom promise.”<sup>6</sup>

Make no mistake ~ the cross is not a mistake, not an unintended side trip, not a “detour” or “hurdle” in Yoder’s words. As inconvenient as the cross is, as uncomfortable a path, the cross is the kingdom itself ~ the essential, the necessary and sufficient condition for God’s plan from the instant of creation.

**I**ndeed, the cross is inconvenient. This is the reason in our heart of hearts we would prefer to jump straight from Palm Sunday to Easter skipping the whole Holy Week culminating in crucifixion. Note how few show up for a Good Friday vigil compared with Easter. As the cross is the visual focus of a sanctuary, the cross is also the center point of history, the one still point in a swirling and changing universe.



Those two disciples, Cleopas and the unnamed one (perhaps Luke himself or perhaps one of the woman) whoever they were, they had misinterpreted the Scripture, had misinterpreted history, had made a mistake.

In my own personal experience, disappointment and bewilderment are the usual responses whenever we humans try to probe God’s mystery and paradox – especially the cross and resurrection. However, these are necessary stages in the deepening of our faith and walk with the Lord. In God’s plan, triumph comes out of tragedy. The cross is the kingdom itself manifested real.

**I**n a column George Will wrote a couple of years ago, he talked about the advantages of disappointment if one can imagine that.<sup>7</sup> In it he references a book *Your Brain On Cubs: Inside the Heads of Fans and Players*,<sup>8</sup> a collection of essays by doctors and neuroscientists on the science and pathology associated with rooting for a team which last won a world series a century ago.

Imaging technology reveals that fans who habitually support losing teams use different parts of their brain. Habituated for delayed gratification, adapted to dealing with cognitive dissonance, they become better adapted to life in general due to more brain calisthenics. One essay puts it this way:



“The scientific literature suggests that fans of losing teams turn out to be better decision-makers and deal better with divergent thought as opposed to the unreflective fans of winning teams.”<sup>9</sup>

Now reflect on Martin Marty’s definition of ‘faith:’ “Faith is a Chicago Cubs fan.” Exactly the point, or one of them, George Will is making. “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am a Cubbiesaholic. Had no choice, runs in the family, but that is no excuse.” Against all odds, we Cubsaholics hope that this is the year the Cubs will rise. Yet even more we see that kind of faith, hope against hope, in the faith which emerges on the road to Emmaus.

Faith in Jesus, hope in the resurrection, Emmaus road against-all-odds variety of hopefulness, faith which roots for the loser, or at least a loser in the world’s eyes, a loser who in actuality is the biggest winner of all time. Reign of God faith, faith which fully expects the last will be first and the first last.

This is the faith of persons who have become habituated for delayed gratification at the both the physical and metaphysical level, adapted to dealing with cognitive dissonance and paradox, consistently involved in advanced brain calisthenics dealing with it. Persons whose frontal lobes are activated almost continually, the sites for planning, reasoning and experiencing subtle variations in feelings.

People of faith are better adapted to life in general, more thoughtful, more reflective and tend to make better decisions, that is, according to the essays which are the source for George Will's commentary. That is good news ~ we who aspire to be persons of faith can better handle Emmaus road disappointment, fear and anxiety because we believe. Emmaus road believers can aspire to be better person, 'better' in the moral, in the personal, in the rational, and in the all around senses.

**I t takes faith** ~ faith on steroids ~ Chicago Cubs kind of faith ~  
Emmaus road faith to be able to withstand the setbacks and the



struggles of life, all the actions and circumstances which render us anxious and fearful.

Make no mistake ~ the cross is the essence of God's kingdom reign, the essential Gospel. Not a side trip but the purpose to which all history points.

Therefore we are able to recognize God's hand weaving, correcting and transforming even the most

disappointing of circumstances, our bewilderment and lose and especially our suffering and pain. Not that God is the source of all this evil – certainly not! As Joseph knew “you meant it for evil, but God used it for good.” Rather God, the master weaver of time and space, is able to



take all our accidents, our stumblings and missteps, and especially our tragic mistakes and in a mystery of sovereignty and freedom weave them into a tapestry of beauty and light.

Be assured!! God is in control and compassionate even when it seems God is absent.

Be assured!! God is good and intends only good for each of us. God will provide. The world (and we in it!) does not have the last word, but the next to last word. God has the last word and always will and that word is unbelievably



- resurrection after crucifixion
- rejoicing after the deepest grief
- Emmaus road faith
- Jesus-walking-beside-us-unrecognized faith
- faith which belies death and pain and fear

Be assured!! As the apostle Paul rightly observed:

“all things work together for good for those who love God.”

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 24:19-20

<sup>2</sup> Luke 24:21

<sup>3</sup> cf. Genesis 45:4-8

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:25-26

<sup>6</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> George Will, “The Last Word: Your Mind on Cubs” *Newsweek*, April 7, 2008, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Gordon, ed., *Your Brain on Cubs: Inside the Heads of Fans and Players*

<sup>9</sup> George Will, “The Last Word: Your Mind on Cubs” *Newsweek*, April 7, 2008, p. 64.