

Column

The first time I saw a loom was in Gatlinburg, Tenn. I was a child, and my family and I stood outside a shop and watched through a plate-glass window a woman turn thread into cloth. The machine she was using was made mostly of wood and appeared to be very old. Nevertheless, in the hands of this skillful operator, it performed flawlessly.

Looms make cloth and tapestries, but they serve another purpose as well. They teach us about God and life. An unknown poet has given us these words:

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

I reflected on these words this week after a housefire left a local family homeless and caused both man and wife to be airlifted to a burn center in Atlanta. The fire apparently started when an automobile parked in the garage of the house burst into flames. The miracle was that the wife, exhibiting superhuman strength, was able to get her disabled husband out. As I write, both are expected to recover.

We don't know why bad things happen, especially to people who are good, decent and kind. What we do know is that God is not the author of evil (1 John 1:5), but that we live in what theologians call a 'fallen world', a world of change

and chance, death and decay. Paul says as much when he writes in Romans 8:22: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

The good news is that God purposes to put all wrongs to rights, to overcome the results of the Fall (Genesis 3), to bring about new heavens and a new earth (Revelation 21). Because of this expectation, Paul can say: “the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

The problem, of course, is the time in between, the time in which you and I find ourselves living. It is at this point that the imagery of the weaver and a loom is helpful.

In the Weaver’s poem, the author’s answer to human suffering is an honest one: On this side of the great divide, we don’t know how the bad things humans experience fit into God’s ultimate plan for good, but one day we shall. The veil will be pulled

back, and we shall see why “the dark threads are as needful . . . as the threads of gold and silver.”

In the meantime, we have a job to do. That job is to pick up the fallen, encourage the downhearted, to proclaim Jesus who brings the God of hope down to earth. Why not look for opportunities this coming week?

O GOD, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany, The Book of Common Prayer)