

Providential Serendipity

This morning while hurriedly walking toward our front curb to take the trash out, I spotted what I thought was an out-of-control weed growing up from the middle of our yard. I started to kick it down, but thought, no, I'd better take it up from the root. So, I leaned over, took hold of the small plant, pulled it up and to my surprise, found an entire pecan at the end of the root system. The shell was split; I could see the root system branching up out of the rich meat in the middle. I could hardly believe it. I then remembered that a few months ago I carried some pecans around and sometimes I would drop a few here and there while snacking on them. Then, I recall carrying an armful of books and wanting to release my hand for grip, threw a couple of pecans out toward the flower bed. I wonder if the pecan worked its way beneath the soil through the rains. On the other hand, I imagined an ambitious squirrel pushing and burying it to become a source of future nourishment at a later time. Far be it from me to take food out of the mouth of hungry little squirrels, but I just couldn't resist the opportunity to seize the moment, take the young pecan tree, re-plant it with the hope of growing it larger. It's now in our back yard, watered, and well, we'll see what becomes of it.

After planting the pecan tree, I had to run to the cleaners to get my favorite shirts and behold, I pull up behind the same white Ford pick-up that I had pulled behind the day before just as the light turned red. Riding in the bed of the truck was this gorgeous chocolate Labrador retriever. The dog was totally relaxed as he playfully looked across the yard of the neighborhood children's daycare center. After not discovering any kids, he placed his muzzle on the pick-up side as though he were in lost in thought. When the light changed, he lifted his head, looked back at me, as if to say, "See you tomorrow."

Today has been an incredibly busy day, even as I write this my sweet wife Barbara is driving. We are on our way to a speaking appointment. We got caught in one of those unbelievable traffic jams. I called the pastor's house and his son gave us a short cut to our desired location that ended up being another more complicated traffic jam. We finally got through and we are back on the road cutting along at a nice rate of speed. Soon, I'll be dressed in suit and tie, standing up in front of some of God's people and hopefully some non-converts with the hope of seeing some of them believe.

How nice in the course of this busy day, I had two delightful surprises. The little tree and the chocolate lab. Serendipity. The word comes to us from a coined word of Horace Walpole (1754) after *The Three Princes of Serendip* (i.e., Sri Lanka), a fairy tale in which the princes make such wonderful discoveries. It has come to mean: a seeming gift for finding something good accidentally.

The previous paragraphs were written yesterday. We had a blessed service. I was moved as the pastor alluded to a realization that what I addressed in my sermon was exactly what the church needed. Yet another serendipity. Barbara and I did not know that we would be only two and one half hours from Pensacola when we left for this trip yesterday. I am scheduled to speak tonight before we head home for Houston. The pastor, said, "We know you have kids and a grandkid in Pensacola; why don't you go see them, forget our plans for the day, we'll see you at service time." So here I am (as Barbara drives) finishing up the Pastor's Word on our way for an approximate four hour rendezvous with some of our kids. God is good. Serendipity!

If you are a Christian you are probably drawing the same conclusion that I have, i.e. in the Christian experience, there are no accidents, only Providence. I often like to check words in the Thesaurus and I found it interesting to note that one of the synonyms for serendipity is "destiny" and again one of the synonyms for Providence is "destiny". There is however, a big difference. The word Providence is from the Latin word, *providentia*, which means foresight. Breaking down the word we see this is the root we get our word "video" from which means "to see". The prefix "pro" means "before". Placing it together it means "to see beforehand". In the evolving of the word through our language it has come to mean "the benevolent care and guidance of our all-powerful God through His foreseen plan for us." The difference is

that what may seem serendipitous for us is a revelation of the wonderfully surprising plan that God had for us all along. Our forefathers believed so strongly in Providence that they spelled it with a capital "P" equating it with His name.

How can we be prepared to receive what this world would call serendipity and what we would call Providence?

1. Do Not Make an Unchangeable Schedule of Daily Events.

This should be understood as a biblical worldview. The Scripture says, "*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*" (Proverbs 27:1). "*Take therefore no thought (don't be worried) for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself....*" (Matt. 6:34).

2. Leave God Room To Do Whatever He Wants to With and In Our Day.

"*Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow....For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*" (James 4:14).

In His Providence, He will give us the capability to perform in any unseen (on our part) event He brings into our life. "*..and as thy days, so shall thy strength be*" (Deuteronomy 33:25). "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13).

3. Look for Those Surprising Encounters of Destiny.

If we are not watchful, we have a tendency to look at our plans with impeccable credence, as though we cannot possibly be mistaken. When we do that, we defend and try to stay on task with an agenda that God simply wants to improve. The correct attitude is found in those words, "*If the Lord will....*".

The Bible says, "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD*" (Proverbs 16:33). Like our Heavenly Father that He is, the Lord tells us that our future is in His loving lap or bosom as it is also translated. The word disposing is from the Hebrew word: *mishpat*, this is courtroom jargon which means the act of deciding a case. We are confident that in all our plans God holds veto power. May we all delight in our happy interruptions! The big and small events of God ordained destiny can help us live with joyful anticipation (Jeremiah 29:11).

- Pastor Pope -

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