Resurrection Faith

What is resurrection faith? I believe that it is a joyous faith, a loving faith; a resurrection faith looks forward past our daily circumstances in hope of being perfected into the image of Jesus who is the very image of God his Father. This is spoken of in Hebrews where we read, “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature…” And later, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Recently a South Vernon UMC member, who is much loved in that community of faith, put down on paper his resurrection experience. What follows is personal and written at great cost and does a far better job than I could ever do in explaining a resurrection faith. I apologize for the length of it, but I believe it is a powerful testimony of God’s love for his people. Out of respect for his privacy his name will not be mentioned.

“I find myself very envious and amazed at those people, who at the drop of a hat, are able to stand in front of a group of people and tell of their love for Jesus Christ. *In Sunday School we’re studying from the book of James. Part of the lesson was the question, ‘What person/s impacted your life in a lasting way. I wanted to share with the class my answer, but I started to choke up and could not verbally respond*. Maybe, just maybe, I can write out my answer.

“Fifty years ago, on the first week of May 1965 my unit, the 173rd Airborne Brigade and half of the 1st Marine Division arrived in Vietnam from Okinawa. This was the beginning of major combat troop deployment into Vietnam. We who were there always called it, ‘The Johnson-Kennedy Drug Money War.’ The Marines went north to the Da Nang area and the 173rd went south to Bien Hoa. Our base camp was to be a buffer zone for the Bien Hoa Air base.

“Our home away from Okinawa looked like this: A perfectly ugly Army tent for our roof. What walls we had, were chest high sand bags. The floor was laid out in a haphazard arrangement of broken down ammo, mortar, and artillery boxes. Our furniture was very quaint: An Army cot with matching mosquito net, and a 105mm artillery shell casing for a combination ash tray/garbage collector. *On the inside of the tent, we used an open reserve parachute next to the top of the tent to help deflect part of the heat developed and held by the tent.*

*“Our pets were awesome. Mosquitos so big that if you could put two of them together, you could ride them like a horse. Candles were our main source of light; the flame made a fantastic, non-electric bug zapper. Many times scorpions were a main source of entertainment. Hold a lit cigarette over a scorpion’s head and watch him sting himself to death. There was always a good supply of scorpions.*

*“By far, our favorite pets were rats. They would get up close and personal if you got a food package from home. Eat it now and eat it quick or you would be sharing with a rat or two. The most annoying and troublesome problem was the rats constant squealing and fighting with each other. All night, the rats would be chasing each other and go across your cot and tear down your mosquito net. When your net is down the mosquitos feast on you. In the dark of night, with no light, and mosquitos biting you on the butt, you’d be amazed how fast you can fix your cot and net.*

*“About fifty feet south of our tent was a so called road. In the dry season there was so much dust you couldn’t see to the other side of the road. In wet season the reverse. Today we would use it for a mud run course. Jeeps and trucks getting stuck were very common.*

“A little over a half mile down the road was the mess hall, beer tent, outdoor movie projection, showing night, after night, after night, on the side of a tent. The morgue was about forty or fifty feet away from the mess hall. The only place electricity was available.

“Across the road from our tent, was a large mine field. There was no map to show the location of any of the mines, because the mines might have been laid by anyone—the Japanese during WW II, the French during the Indo-China War, the Vietnamese, the Vietcong, who knows. *The mines were old and unpredictable. Anything could set them off—weather change, animals, humans, age, take your pick. We lost one of our favorite dogs chasing a monkey across the mine field*. An exploded mine could, and did, very easily send red-hot shrapnel into the top of our tent. *We called these holes ‘sunshine- or air conditioning holes.’ Of course the same holes let the rain come in. Better to inflict holes in an ugly Army tent than a human body.*

*“To the east of us was a huge ammo dump. Bunker after bunker of the most deadly ordnance. At one end of the ammo dump was a Vietnamese guard post. (I just couldn’t bring myself to trust the Vietnamese.) A few yards away from the Vietnamese post was one of our outposts. From the Army outpost, again a few yards, was an Air Force guard post with guard dogs. All the posts had interlocking firing positions with each other.*

*“To the west of us were soldiers from Australia and New Zealand. We all spoke English but our meanings and slang were 180 degrees apart. Great people, outstanding soldiers. Very early on you learn to never, never ever drink beer with an Aussie or a Kiwi. While you’re drinking one beer, they are drinking three or four. When you can’t stand up, they are as sober as a judge.*

“To the north of us was the very large Bien Hoa Air Base. The only thing that separated us from the air base, was five rows of razor wire, three on the ground, two on top. You would think it was impossible to infiltrate through the wire. Two VC sappers made it past two rows of the wire before they were discovered.

“People wonder why those of us who served in Vietnam are so paranoid. In my case the answer is very easy. I was afraid, scared, or whatever you want to call it. We knew that one of three things was going to happen to you in Vietnam. 1. You were going to get killed. 2. You were going to get messed up (Loss of a limb, eye, mind, etc.) 3. You were going to go home. And when you got home, you found that no one [cared] about you, or what you saw, did, or felt in Vietnam.

*“I will share with you some of my paranoias. If you bought a bottle of beer or a coke, put your thumb over the opening and upend the bottle and count to ten. If nothing hit your thumb enjoy! If something hit your thumb, it’s probably ground glass, put in the bottle to destroy your throat and stomach region. If your beer or coke came in a can, in some way, crush the can when finished. It only takes a VC five to 10 seconds to make a gravel bomb. It probably won’t kill you but it can easily take out an eye. Recently a Russian airliner was brought down by a coke bomb, killing over two hundred people. Never, never, never use ice in a drink. As the ice melts the poison in the ice is released. An ice cube in Vietnam’s heat, is like the proverbial snow ball in hell. If you got a pass to got to Saigon, never go by yourself. Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Use your eyes, ears, nose, and gut feelings, for your own safety. No matter if were in base camp, in the field, or on pass. Always, always have a weapon on you or very close.*

“Sleep in Vietnam is needed, desired, and an essential part of being alert. In base camp your best sleep is in the wee hours just before dawn. It has finally cooled down some and your deepest sleep is occurring.

“Our Air Force did its utmost to keep us from that desired sleep. Almost every morning, just before dawn, two jet fighter planes would come to the flight line, fire up the jets, then rev up, to an almost unbearable sound, then scream down the runway. *When you are on guard duty, you could, cover your ears and watch the two afterburners flames go out of sight in the predawn sky. As the first sets are just out of sight, another set of jets follow the same exact pattern. Fire up, rev up, and take off. This same procedure may occur until you have five, six, seven, and I’ve witnessed eight sets of jets take off. It all depends on what is going on. There is no way you are going to be able to sleep. From the company commander down to the lowest private.* Lack of sleep makes people grumpy, short fused, on edge, and downright evil.

*“Just at dawn the most beautiful plane the Air Force has comes to the flight line. The elegant, graceful, black beauty, the U2 Spy Plane has arrived. With just a hint of sound and a swish the U2 takes off. Going straight up and in just a couple of seconds, out of sight, out of mind.*

*“Daylight brings out the Skyraiders. A propeller driven plane used to support ground troops. Normally armed with rockets, small cluster bombs, or one 500-pound bomb, and armed with 20mm machine guns. Two Skyraiders always taking off together. As common as all the planes taking off is; it was just as common for the planes to return. It was like a car going up or down your street or road. We just didn’t pay any attention.*

*“One of my fears was a sapper making it past all the razor wire and getting into our area. For an alarm, we would take c-ration, beer cans, or coke cans. Take the top off. Take two or three rocks and put them into the cans and fasten them to the wire. The sound might alert you to any attack or danger.*

“One fine day--it’s always a fine day when you are in base camp--*as I was checking the cans* a pair of Skyraiders returned. One of the planes sounded like a car running out of gas. *Almost shutting off and then speeding up, shutting off, speeding up, spit and sputter.* This plane was heading right for me, just above the razor wire. One look and I knew I was dead! Not only I, but everyone that was in the effective killing range of a 500-pound bomb.

“The plane was on fire with all of its explosive ordinance, and if he still had all its bombs, the plane was full of fuel. The plane was about 300 to 400 feet out and about 50 to 60 feet above the wire dropping fast. The herky-jerky death bomb was going to kill us all. I froze. I couldn’t move. I’m not even sure I was breathing. As the pilot came even with me, he flipped up his visor on his helmet and our eyes locked. He knew he was going to die. His eyes told the story. He had no fear, no regrets, only true love.

“His eyes projected such a powerful, positive energy. Pure love! His love surrounded and engulfed me. Remember, the first time you fell in love? Your floating, singing, happy, and invincible. You knew your love could change the world. The love from the pilot was a thousand times stronger and a thousand times more powerful. I could feel this love growing and spreading. From the top of my head to the bottom of my feet, from my chest to my back. I could see, hear, and feel the aroma of this love, the love was everywhere. I was floating without a care or a worry. It was such a joy and a warm reassuring feeling. I knew, my heart, head, and body was just going to explode. I knew the more love I gave away; the greater love would return to me. In my mind, this was GOD coming back to earth in another human form. I know this is what heaven is going to be like!

*“I don’t know if these feelings of pure love, tranquility, joy, utopia lasted for seconds, minutes, or even hours. The reality of life came crashing down. My fears returned, the plane flew on, dropping at a steady rate.* As the Skyraider cleared our area, we all ran to one of our guard bunkers to watch. The pilot kept the plane aloft past the ammo bunkers, past the outpost guard area and finally into the jungle beyond. We could not see the plane go in, but the horrible violent explosion could be heard for miles. This was Vietnam. Life was cheap and everyday death was there. Don’t dwell on it, or think about it. Be glad it’s not you. When your time is up in Vietnam, you are expected to go home and try to forget it.

“Life goes on. I, like millions of other vets, I took the path of least resistance. Trying to drown all your memories, rage, hatred, insecurities, fears, pains, depression, and demons in alcohol or drugs. My choice was alcohol. At the same time, I built a perfect dam in my mind to hide and control all of my problems and demons. Nothing would ever get out.

“Time passed, I was now married and had two beautiful daughters. I had pretty much stopped drinking. *On an Easter Sunday, in the late 70’s, we were sitting in our pew and I was thinking how cute the girls were, in their Easter outfits. The service had started, and the minister began his Easter message. The last thing I remember him saying were these words, ‘They were soldiers and they knew how to kill’. I had a major flashback. At different times I had minor flash backs. Helicopters going over, loud noises, and guns firing, would set me off, but nothing like this. I was back in Vietnam. I was scared. My heart was pounding so hard I knew it was going to explode. I was sweating and I couldn’t breathe. I was out of control. I don’t remember much of anything else, until the next morning. My solution to the problem. Build my dam higher and stronger.*

“Emotionally, between Thanksgiving and Easter has always been very hard for me. The spring when my oldest daughter was a junior in high school, my big, strong, and high dam was beginning to spring leaks. It started with uncontrollable crying and cluster headaches. The type of headache where you must go into a totally dark bedroom, lie down, cover your head with a pillow and try to be totally immobile. *And also try not to breathe. Each of these attacks would last 6-24 hours.* Also depression, not wanting to be around people, shame, and unable to function in a reliable manner, were a constant problem. After numerous trips to all kinds of doctors, the diagnosis was stress, ‘It is all in your head, you’re not really sick, you just want attention, you are depressed, etc.’ The cure, ‘Take these drugs and come back in a month and see the doctor.’ *The drugs made me feel like a zombie and with two teenage daughters and wife to support, I couldn’t make it work. I had to learn to work smarter and harder, when I worked, to make up for the days I couldn’t work.*

*“In a military way of thinking, the ideal ambush would have certain criteria. Complete and total surprise, hit your enemy when they are in a place where they feel safe, and secure, and if they are stationary, all the better. Victory will be yours!*

“One bright, beautiful May morning, when my oldest daughter was a senior and all excited about her fast-approaching high school graduation, I was at the kitchen table eating breakfast. With pure venomous hate, my first wife said, ‘I have something to tell you. I DON’T LOVE YOU! I HAVE NEVER LOVED YOU! AND I’M TALKING/SEEING SOMEONE ELSE!’

“My dam exploded and I was totally destroyed. All the dreams, hate, anger, fears, demons, and secrets were there for all to see. *All I could do was bawl like a baby and ask the same questions over and over. What had I done wrong? What didn’t I do? What could I do to make things right? No answers. She walked away. All I could think about, was a stupid joke that a friend told me a few days before, ‘A certain man searched the world over for the wisest man in the world. When he found the sage, he asked the following question: “When do I tell my wife I love her?” The wise man’s answer was: “Before someone else does.”’ I didn’t and someone else did. And my marriage was over. When I left home that morning, my mind was in total confusion, upheaval, and despair.*

“Maybe it was time to join the Vietnam Veterans Retirement Program (One veteran, one car equals one fatal car accident.) There are three simple reasons why I didn’t do this. 1) To me, suicide is an unpardonable sin! 2, In my mind, I felt this is exactly what my wife wanted me to do! 3, I was not about to saddle my daughters with the everlasting stain of suicide. The marriage was over, and I got in touch with my old close friend, alcohol, and started a great pity- and poor-me party, which lasted for years.

“One day a very good friend pulled me aside and said, ‘DON’T YOU THINK IT’S TIME TO GET YOUR CRANIUM OUT OF YOUR RECTUM?’ (Not his exact words.) *For over 25 years you heard your ex-wife’s poor me excuses. You couldn’t be the dad, she never had. Your efforts to be the perfect husband and father she wanted was never going to be. Do you think you’re the only one who ever witnessed someone die? Or, that has had someone they loved and trusted throw them on the trash heap.* GROW UP!

“The only one you can trust and loves you--with all your warts and demons, day in and day out--is GOD. He’s heard it all! He’s seen it all! And GOD knew you before you were born! Even with the love of Jesus in your heart and all the promises that GOD has made and kept. Life is not always going to be peaches and cream only; your commitment to Christ, will allow you to enter into Heaven with your wife, Laura, children and Christian friends.

“The 2014 Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons were extremely difficult for me. The feelings of despair, fear, and panic were very strong. I was hoping and praying that if I could make it to warm weather, life would improve.

“As spring approached, things were going the wrong way. I found myself to be more withdrawn and in constant agitation and anger. Many little things were building up to major problems. *The four men slaughtered in the Benghazi disaster, (just because our government would rather play CYA politics, than save lives) was and is beyond my comprehension. Without a doubt, the 50th Anniversary of the Johnson- Kennedy Drug Money War, in Vietnam, was the major factor in the total upheaval in my mind.* The double and the tripling of my anti-depression pills had very little effect. I was afraid my doctor was going to commit me. I got it in my head that the only way I was going to get rid of the demons, was to go to the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, DC. I was torn, part of me said go and part of me said no. I made up my mind that I would go the first week in May 2015.

“As I approached the Wall, all the emotions started to boil and fester. I stood in front of the wall and just bawled. Uncontrolled crying that seized my body and mind. Several people came to me and gave me a hug. Said things like, ‘God Love You! Thank You For Your Service! You Are In My Prayers! I Was There, And I Understand!’ And many more words of encouragement. I have no idea how long I cried. I spent over four hours going and looking for names and then coming back trying to find their names on the Wall. Names I knew, of guys who had died*. Just so the greedy Democratic Party could make millions from their drug sales. Unleashing the drug plague on the United States that can’t be stopped. A greed that has 95% of the heroin entering our country from Afghanistan. If you have ever been to the Wall, you know and understand there are many foreign visitors at the Wall.* A young man, from a different country approached me and asked, if I had been in Vietnam? I said yes. He said he was from Vietnam, and asked me some questions. Where was I stationed? When were you there? What branch of the service, etc.? The next question he asked stopped me cold. He asked if I would talk to his dad? My dad, was your enemy, he was in the North Vietnamese Army. My answer was a strong YES! His son said, his dad spoke no English and asked if it would be ok that he served as our interpreter? As his father stepped forward and our eyes met. IT WAS THE PILOT’S EYES! GOD in another human form.

“The same feeling of the earth-shattering, down-to-the-bone, overpowering peace and love had come upon me--the same as fifty years before. I was in heaven. I was experiencing and feeling, tasting, seeing, hearing, smelling. I was experiencing such a mind-blowing love. I was floating in love. Sometimes it’s thunder-booming loud love. And other times it was whisper quiet, tranquil love. The type of love that can only come from GOD! As before, I have no idea how long this energizing feeling lasted, minutes, hours, or days. I only remember, the North Vietnamese soldier and I were locked in a bear hug of love. Our tears of love were flowing and mixing, and how great a feeling it was. I was to learn this man had been having the same demons as I. Now his demons, like mine, were gone. God’s love can and will conquer all the demons in you. And bring peace to the world. Open you heart, unlock your mind, and allow your soul to breathe GOD’S TOTAL LOVE.

*“Over the years, I’ve heard hundreds, maybe thousands of sermons. Only one sermon always comes to mind, and goes like this. Years ago (Late 1800’s, early 1900’s) a church would have a Homecoming Day. They would invite or hire some famous politician or famous actor to read from the Bible and have a feast of a meal after the service. One extremely hot, humid August morning, people were taking their seats with everyone dressed in their very best, hot, Sunday clothing. The Homecoming was to begin. (At his time of life, there was not such a thing as air conditioning. Many of those attending had taken their Saturday night bath. Sunday chores of milking and feeding the hogs were normal. They probably drove a horse and buggy to Church. To say the least, the aroma of humans and animals might not have been too pleasant.) Hand fans were fanning, and the heat in the church was beginning to rise. The young minister was the first to read, thankfully, it was a short reading. Next, the famous politician started with his long drawn-out reading, which seemed to go on forever. As he finished, the young, inexperienced minister made a near fatal mistake. Thinking, no one would dare to read after this famous person, he asked, ‘Would anyone else like to read?’*

*“From the back of the Church, a voice said, ‘Yes!’ The outrage and comments were heard all over the church. Those in attendance were beginning to melt like butter, and the aroma inside was getting strong. An old gentleman started up the aisle. Complaints were getting louder and more offensive. Who was the person? He needed a haircut; his suit, although clean, was out of style; his shoes were all but worn out; and his Bible had seen many, many years of use. As the old gentleman began to read, total silence fell over the Church. No one remembers how long he read from the Bible. Suddenly, he said ‘Amen”, closed his Bible and walked out of the Church. Never to be seen again!*

*“During and after the dinner, many people came to congratulate the politician. Until a young boy asked the question, ‘What did you think of the old man’s reading?’ The politician said, ‘As you can see, I have the best and most up-to-date clothing money can buy. I practiced all my lines and knew how to pronounce all the words. My performance, my emotions, were perfect. But that old gentleman, KNEW THE AUTHOR.’* When you know GOD, it doesn’t matter what you look like, what clothes you wear, or words you can or can’t pronounce. IT’S FEELING GOD’S LOVE THAT SETS YOU FREE! GOD’S coming to me, in different forms, impacted my life. GOD can and will change your life in an everlasting way. Share GOD’S LOVE, and you will have PEACE, FOREVER!”

Psalm 118:24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.