

“Anti-Fragile”

New Year’s Eve

Romans 8:31b-39

“No, In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” Romans 8:37

Antifragility is a concept developed by Professor Nassim Nicholas Taleb, and a term he coined in his book, *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. Things that are “anti-fragile” are things that are enhanced when handled roughly.

In the introduction of the book, Taleb describes it as follows: "Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty . . . Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better" (pg. 3). Taleb conjures up an image of the fragile as an object like wine glasses that we would ship in a box marked “Handle with Care”; by contrast, a box holding the antifragile would be labelled “Please Mishandle.”

Volatility, randomness, disorder, stressors, and uncertainty. There is so much that happens to us personally and in our nation and the world around us that leaves us reaching for those labels—*volatility, randomness, disorder, stress, uncertainty!*

Just consider these five news stories of 2014 (“What Became of the Biggest Stories After the Spotlight,” abcnews.go.com/US/biggest-stories-2014-spotlight/story):

- Kent Brantly, the first Ebola patient to be treated in the US after contracting the disease while working as a medical missionary in Africa. *Disorder!*
- The Russian Invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine shortly after the conclusion of the 2014 winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. *Volatility!*
- Darren Wilson, the police officer who sparked months of protests and debate after fatally shooting Michael Brown this past August in Ferguson, MO and receiving a non-indictment verdict from a grand jury in late November. *Uncertainty and stress!*
- The disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 in March and the continued mystery surrounding the location of the aircraft and reason for it vanishing. *Randomness!*

We might add to this list above the *disorder, volatility, uncertainty, stress, and randomness* that we personally experienced on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis this past year. The sobering news of a sick relative or an injury that we endured. The frustrations of financial difficulties. The uneasy feeling of unemployment. The daunting feeling of a drought of rain. Or the frantic, frenzied feelings that forest fires brought to us this past May. Yes, there are so many personal experiences that lead us to consider the *disorderliness, the volatility, the uncertainty, the stress, and the randomness* of our lives.

I don’t know about you, but on this New Year’s Eve, as I take a moment to reflect on the *disorder, volatility, uncertainty, stress, and the seeming randomness* of my personal experiences this past year and of the events in our nation and in the rest of the world, I feel anything but “anti-fragile.” I don’t see antifragility.

I see Sin having its way with my life, and my body and soul. I see Sin and disobedience to God making a mess of other people’s lives and human relationships. I don’t see myself,

others, or the world benefiting, thriving, or getting better. Rather, I feel even more fragile and delicate. The volatile, uncertain, stressful, and seemingly random experiences of life often make me feel weary and exhausted. I look out at others and the world and see things getting worse. And the Apostle Paul agrees. As he puts it in chapter eight of his letter to the Romans, just before our reading for tonight, “For the creation waits with eager longing . . . For the creation was subjected to futility . . . For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves” (Rom 8:19-23).

But on this New Year’s Eve Paul does not leave us in *disorder, volatility, uncertainty, stress, and randomness*. No, Paul points us to the one who became fragile for us. Christ was born as a fragile, vulnerable infant, becoming flesh for us. And he allowed himself to be subjected to the disorder, the volatility, the uncertainty, the stress, and the seeming randomness of this world and the effects Sin, Satan, and death at work. He points us to the one who allowed himself to be conquered on a cross to pay for your Sin and mine. Our Sin that so often leads to that disorder, volatility, uncertainty, stress, and randomness.

Paul points you and me to this Christ because it only *appeared* that he was fragile. Three days later he rose from death and the grave to show that he is truly the “anti-fragile” one. He defeated the terrifying enemies of your life and mine—Sin, death, Hell, and Satan himself—by rising to new life never to die again. In the midst of a Sin infested world of *disorder, volatility, uncertainty, stress, and randomness* this one conquers it all. The ultimate “anti-fragile” one!

And Paul reminds us that God has joined you to this Christ and his death and resurrection. He has recreated you in Christ to be new, “anti-fragile” creations. In chapter eight of his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul reminds you and me as Christians that we are “in Christ” and “in the Spirit.” We have been baptized into his death and his resurrection. Our old self that was born into Sin and separation from God has been drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism and a new self has been raised. It is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us as baptized, believing children of God.

And because we are “in Christ” and “in the Spirit” you and I are “anti-fragile.” Whether the year is 2014 or 2015 when we as baptized, believing Christians are handled roughly through the difficulties, struggles, temptations, and trials of this world , we are not only resilient, but we grow. We grow in our faith and trust in Christ through the Spirit of God at work within us. We grow in our hope of an eternal life with God where the fragile is no more. Sin is no more and death is swallowed up in victory. Paul puts it this way, we are “conformed more and more to the image of God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:29). He says even now, “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37). “Anti-fragile” in Christ! Amen.