

Fortune Cookies and Hope

You have probably noticed that fortune cookies frequently fail to contain anything resembling fortune-telling. Usually what you find on the little slip of paper is a platitude or ho-hum piece of advice. But every once in a while as you end your meal in a Chinese restaurant and pick up the fortune cookie the waiter provided and break it open, what you find actually is a fortune of some sort.

I have a habit of saving some of the "fortunes" and carrying them around with me. Eventually I'll lose them or throw them away and later accumulate some new ones. The three that I currently have are these:

"Good news will be brought to you by mail."

"Your eyes will soon be opened to a world full of beauty, charm and adventure."

"Someone you care about seeks reconciliation."

I've never run across a fortune cookie with a negative message. It might be a little unsettling to open a fortune cookie and read: "You're going to get a flat tire on the way home tonight" or "By this time next year you will be entirely bald." Of course I can think of some messages that would be far worse. But a fortune cookie company probably wouldn't stay in business long if it produced cookies with messages that traumatized people.

I don't take fortune cookies seriously; they are for fun. Yet they tap into something that is important to the human psyche. We want to know about the future. More specifically, we want to know more about our own future. If we take a negative view of the future, chances are we will look forward with a sense of dread. On the other hand, if we look to the future with a positive viewpoint, we will look forward with hope. Dread wears us down. Hope builds us up.

Some hope is little more than wishful thinking. It has no foundation. We need something more solid, something that will sustain us in disappointing and difficult times. As Christians, the hope we have is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3). We believe God has started something new and it includes us. It is important that we "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" and we can do this because "He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

Hope enables us to lean into the future with expectation. We trust that God has something for us that is deeply meaningful which will enrich our lives. I'm not just talking about something after death but here and now. We live in the present. But for us the present is pregnant with possibility because of the promises of God. There is no telling what God will yet do for us, in us and through us. Whatever it is, it won't fit into a fortune cookie. With God there are no limits. But there is wonder, grace and joy. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 1:13).