

Nicholas Winton died last year at the age of 106. I will admit that I had never heard of Nicholas Winton before this week. Nicholas Winton was a stockbroker in England. In most every way he was just an ordinary stock broker. The people who met Nicholas Winton described him as a quiet and humble man.

But in 1988 his wife found a scrapbook with the names and documentation of 669 children. She never knew anything about these 669 children until finding this scrapbook. One of these children listed in this scrapbook was named John Fieldsend.

John Fieldsend was born with the name Hans Feige in 1931 to a Jewish family in Czechoslovakia. When the Nazi's invaded Czechoslovakia John Fieldsend says that it was at this time that his parents put him on a train to England. He was 7 years old at the time.

Before he left on the train, John's parents said to him, "Sit down, son. You're going on a long journey. We can't come with you." John Fieldsend then says his mother took off her wristwatch and gave it to him through the window of the train, and simply said, "This is for you to remember us."

John says his parents probably knew what was going to happen to them. Can you imagine what it was like for these parents to send their 7 year child away at that moment with the expectation that they would never see each other again?

John Fieldsend arrived in England as a refugee and was taken in by a foster family. He lived with that family until he became an adult. When World War II was over, John received a letter. It was a letter from his parents and it said this.

From Mother

When you receive this letter, the war will be over, because our friendly messenger won't be able to send it earlier. We want to say farewell to you, you are our dearest possession in the world, and only for a short time were we able to keep you.

Fate has not left us for months now. In January 1942, the Weilers were taken; we still don't know where to and whether they are still alive. In June, Grandmother Betty. In September, Aunt Marion, Uncle Willy and Pauli. In October, your Steiner grandparents. In November, your 90-year-old great-grandmother and the Bermans. In December, it will be our turn.

The time has therefore come for us to turn to you again, and to ask you to become a good man, and think of the years we were happy together. We are going into the unknown; not a word is to be heard from those already taken.

Thank those who have kept you from a similar fate. You took a piece of your poor parents' hearts with you, when we decided to give you away. Give our thanks and gratitude to all who are good to you.

From Father

Your dear mother has told you about the hard fate of all our loved ones. We too will not be spared and will go bravely into the unknown, with the hope that we shall yet see you again when God wills. Don't forget us, and be good.

I too thank all the good people who have accepted you so nobly.

Signed,

Curt & Trude Feige, 1943

Curt and Trudy Feige were sent to Auschwitz prison where they eventually died.

I began this story by talking about an ordinary stock broker named Nicholas Winton and a scrapbook that was found by his wife in their attic. The scrapbook contained the names of 669 children. These names in this scrapbook were the names of the 669 Jewish children that Nicholas Winton paid for, forged travel documents for, and made arrangements for to leave occupied Nazi territories and resettle as refugee foster children in England.

Nicholas Winton never spoke publicly about what he had done to save these 669 children. His wife was not even aware. And it was not until this scrapbook was revealed that John Fieldsend knew who arranged for him to depart Czechoslovakia. But when Nicholas Winton visited Poland before World War II and realized what was going on as Jewish families were being scapegoated, he decided then that it was his calling to help some families find hope in their midst of their suffering.

Nicholas Winton was just an ordinary stock broker many miles away from the suffering of Jewish families. He had no tie to them. But he dedicated himself to making a difference in helping 669 children move from suffering to hope.

Paul writes about that in what we read today when Paul wrote a letter to the church in Rome. Paul tells the Romans that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint. But Paul says that before there is suffering leading to hope there is grace. Grace which comes through Jesus Christ.

And the people that Paul writes to are not in a place where hope is easy to see. During this time Caesar ruled the Roman Empire where he was called God and Lord on the money which these new Christians used. The Christians were facing more and more hostility by these Roman powers. So to proclaim hope to these Christians spoke against what they could see around them.

But hope originating in God's grace is what Paul preaches to them. Paul tells them to not be rooted in fear and worry but instead in hope. Hope moves us forward in faith. Fear and worry keep us stuck.

Hope originates in the belief that God sent us into the world for a purpose and that if we do not fulfill our calling then the world will be worse off because of our lack of response to God's grace.

Certainly that was the case for Nicholas Winton. If he does not respond to the needs of the suffering that he chooses to see then there are 669 children who perish in the most inhumane ways possible. A true person of faith recognizes what is right at the moment and responds. Winton responded to the suffering of others by recognizing the grace which he had in his life. Grace which helps us to recognize God's love in our lives through Jesus Christ.

Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope says Paul. When you see suffering around you do you focus on fear and worry? Or do you speak a word of hope? When you see suffering around you do you ignore it or do you feel a sense that as a follower of Christ you are to be a part of providing hope and possibility?

When you are undergoing your own suffering do you waller in self-pity? Or do you recognize the hope which comes through Jesus Christ? Do you see suffering as punishment or do you see suffering as the beginning of a road toward hope and possibility?

Suffering leads to hope. When we accept the grace that God has given to us through Jesus Christ then we are able to look beyond the suffering and see that hope. AMEN.

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-Fischer, Rev. Charles, "Suffering to Hope," Day 1, http://day1.org/7241-suffering_to_hope

-"Britain's Schindler Is Remembered by Those He Saved from the Nazis," NPR telecast 5/16/16,
<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/19/478371863/britains-schindler-is-remembered-by-those-he-saved-from-the-nazis>

-Text: Romans 5:1-5

-Given: May 22, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)