HOPE FOR THE ROHINGYA

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*. (Romans 8:28 NASB)  
   
Many experience mistreatment in life. You may have had that happen, whether as a child or later in life. For some of us the harm done can be worse than for others—the pain intense, deeply affecting our life. And we wonder: “Where is God in all this? Why is he allowing this? What did I do to deserve this?” We’re victims, hurt by someone often more powerful than ourselves.  
   
And then, there are some in the world who have always experienced constant mistreatment—victims of persistent persecution, without a country to call their own, forgotten by the world, cries of pain not listened to, not considered worthy of attention. I wonder what such people—people like the Rohingya—would think about the above verse.  
   
How can God bring good out of the crisis they live with and have lived with for so many years? Is there hope for them as the scripture suggest?  
   
And yet, I know that amongst these people, hope does continue. What a wonder that is!  
   
The Rohingya don’t believe that their God intends for them to remain victims forever.  They are a resilient people. They cling to the belief that their God (Allah) is in control. Despite the hardships they have been forced to endure, they have clung to their traditions and their faith. It’s truly remarkable. They are a remarkable people.  
   
Remember the story of Joseph? Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him into slavery to someone from Egypt. Over a number of years many bad things happened to him, but he remained faithful to God. Eventually he received recognition for the gifted person he was and was made governor of Egypt.  
   
When there was a famine in Israel, and Joseph’s brothers came to buy grain in Egypt, coming face to face with the brother they had hurt so badly, Joseph told the petrified men, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Gen 50:20)  
   
In my life I have seen how God can work. I have had bad things happen to me and suffered greatly as a result. But God helped me gradually put the bad experiences behind me and replace them with new ones. I became better able to help others who suffered. It took a while, but eventually I could see that the new life God was giving me was richer than the one I had before the pain started.  
   
When someone has hurt you, don’t feel you have to live with never-ending pain. Allow your God to lead you to a new place—away from today’s darkness into a bright and more hopeful tomorrow. Joseph’s story could be yours.  
   
A Rohingya photographer once told me that he was documenting what the lives of their people in the refugee camp were like. And the reason he did this was so that when his people return to their country of origin they would remember what the lives of their forefathers had been like when they lived as refugees in Bangladesh.  
   
He had not lost hope.  
   
He believed that one day they would be able to look back at their past and appreciate how their forefathers once lived and survived. They would remember that Allah had been with them. They would have faith in their God’s ever-merciful love.  
   
The world has much to learn from these people whose faith might be different from ours. . . But maybe it isn’t so different. If we were to learn about them and their faith, I suspect there would be similarities.  
   
As a Rohingya friend who I deeply admire once told me: “Whether we call Him Allah or God, it is the same light that guides us to serve others and bring hope where there was once despair. I believe that through this shared spiritual foundation, we can help build peace not just in our own communities, but in the world at large.”  
   
As God’s children we are never victims. God has something in mind. If we let him, he will let us learn from what we suffer and help good come out of it.  
   
Perhaps we would better recognize a Jesus who would be an example of unconditional love for all religions and cultures. Where Jesus and his love will embrace us all with the same love. Where there would be better understanding of others in ways that had previously seemed impossible.  
   
I pray for this and I pray for the peace that could evolve.  
   
marja