

The scariest road I ever drove on on our Appalachia trip  
wasn't a road at all.

Over the 25 years of going on our annual mission trip,  
I've driven roads that tightroped along ridges, with terrifying drops on either side,  
and I've zigzagged down mountainsides on hairpin turns with coal trucks coming the  
other direction.

But this was a whole 'nother ball game.

To get to the home of the woman whose house we were fixing,  
we had to drive up a creek bed.

That's right, a creek bed.

There was no road to Mary's house,  
perched at the top of the holler.

She was literally up a creek.

So every morning, for a week,

I drove through the water -- had to gun it over the little waterfall --  
up, up and up, emerging with a thud and splash into Mary's front yard.

It was worth it, though, it was worth it.

Because Mary was worth it. One of the most amazing Appalachian women I've  
known.

80- something years old, tough as nails, sitting in the little house near the top of a mountain with an outhouse out back and a crumbling foundation.

We all loved her. She used to sit on the porch and sing gospel songs while we crawled around under the house,

she'd talk about Jesus all day long;

she'd hug us when we arrived, and hug us again when we left.

At the end of the week, after we had worked our tails off for Mary,

finally getting the pipes laid for her indoor plumbing,

at the end of all that, she hugged us and said,

"y'all have done mighty fine work for me," and we were all so proud.

And then she said, "of course, this ain't actually my home."

Well, that took the wind out of our sails.

"Wait," said one of the kids, "whose home IS it?"

"Oh, I live here now," she said, "but it ain't my real home. Because my home is in

heaven. I've got a beautiful home there waiting for me,

a house not built with human hands.

I can't wait to see it."

"But in the meantime," she said, "it sure is nice to have indoor plumbing."

When David said to me, 'on Easter, how about I talk about Proof of Life, and you talk about Life of Proof,'

I started thinking about all the people who are living proof to me, people whose lives show me that Christ IS alive, and faith is for real.

And I thought about Mary:

living in the worst poverty I'd seen to that point,

singing those songs of grace and joy,

knowing, really knowing, that death was nothing to be feared,

and that a place of love and welcome waited for her.

A Mary who was as much a witness to the truth of the resurrection as that first Mary had been, two thousand years ago.

Who else did I think of? Well I thought about my Indian friend TL, whose story I told just a week ago,

who pours his life into caring for the children of the slums.

He'd be mortified that I'm talking about him at all, let alone two weeks in a row, but I couldn't help remembering a story he'd told me when we first met.

We'd met after the Tsunami of 2004, when he organized a bunch of us to take relief aid to the hard-hit towns along the southeast coast of India.

We handed out fishing nets in one village,

and we handed out rice in another,

and it got a little scary, 'cause there were more villagers than bags of rice,

and our van was surrounded and rocked side to side.

Later, I confessed to TL that I'd been just a wee bit terrified,

and he chuckled.

"You should have been with me after the typhoon in Orissa," he said.

"I drove a truck-full of rice up there," he said, "I drove right into a village where they

hadn't seen any aid yet,

and a man pulled me from my truck, threw me into the street, and took all the rice

to his house."

"My God," I said.

"So," said TL, "that night I went to his house for dinner."

"Why??" I said.

"Well," said TL, "for one thing, I knew he'd have plenty of food.

But mostly, I wanted him to see what a CHristian looks like.

I wanted him to see that I was not afraid.

I wanted him to see that I could still break bread with him.

That's what CHristian looks like. And I wanted him to see."

"The next day," TL added, "he gave away all the rice to his neighbors."

People who are living proof  
show us the truth of the resurrection:  
they show us that love is unstoppable,  
that there is no end to God's mercy.  
They are living proof.

I read last week about Dr. Stephen Foster,  
maybe some of you did, too.

He was the subject of a column by Nicholas Kristof of the Times,  
who shared his story as an example of something Kristof said he has come to  
realize over his years of travel:

"A disproportionate share," he wrote, "of the aid workers I've met in the wildest  
places over the years, long after anyone sensible had evacuated, have been  
Christians: priests, nuns, evangelicals."

Kristof met Dr. Foster this month in Angola, where he has run a hospital for 37  
years.

He was given a visa by a government which was virulently anti-Christian in public,  
but in private confessed to him "you Christians are the only ones we know willing to  
serve in the midst of the fire.' "

Foster and his family have dealt with everything from cobras to soldiers with AK-47s to malaria and polio and famine.

But he is still there, tending with great compassion to children weakened by malnutrition,

to women with fistulas,

working side by side with other mission doctors and Angolan Christians.

**He** is living proof.

The truth is, we are *all* called to be living proof.

There's a saying: the only Bible most people will read is your life.

So your life, our lives, must tell the resurrection story.

I know, the stories I've told you are written in bold print and exclamation marks:

a shack at the top of a West Virginia holler,

rice from the back of a truck in impoverished India,

a hospital in Angola.

Our stories may be written in a smaller font.

But that's okay: anyone's story can be a resurrection story,

When we love beyond measure, we tell the story of a God who does the same.

When we live without fear, we tell the story of a God who ended death.

When we live with abundant hope, we tell the story of a God who never leaves.

We become, each one of us, living proof.

Amen.