**A Redneck Pastor and a Grand Old Man**

by

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Let me tell you a story about my *Jidee* (“grandfather).

This one took place in the early 2000s, some 75 years after his wedding to my lovely grandmother. By that time, *Jidee* was well into his 90s. At some point in his life, he’d turned from Islam to become Christian, and started attending a little church about two blocks from his home in a small town in Oklahoma. And then when he was 94 years old, he had a stroke, something that left him bedridden for the remainder of his life.

When he passed away at age 95, I traveled back to my grandmother’s house for the funeral and was introduced to the man who had been my *Jidee’s* pastor.

I’m going to be honest; I wasn’t impressed.

He was a big fella; a country boy I was more likely to call a redneck than anything else. Because I am Arab-American, people like that usually are … oh, let’s say “nonplussed” by people like me. I didn’t even bother to learn his name. But after a bit I noticed that my family absolutely adored that oversized white guy—and he appeared to have genuine affection for them as well. I wasn’t sure what to think about that.

After he left, I sat in my grandmother’s living room and she started talking. That man, she told me, loved your *Jidee*. That’s nice, I said politely. She put a hand on my knee. Every Sunday since the stroke, she said, he came and took your *Jidee* to church. I nodded amiably.

My aunt broke in at this point because, obviously, I didn’t understand. Mikey, my aunt said to me, he *carried* *Jidee*. What do you mean? I asked.

Every Sunday, she said, he’d walk down from the church to the house. He’d go into *Jidee’s* room, pick him up in his arms, and walk back to the church. Carrying your grandfather all the way. Then he’d set *Jidee* down in the front row and they’d have church. And afterward, he’d carry him home and lay *Jidee* gently back into his bed. Every single Sunday, rain or shine.

My grandmother patted my knee and said again, “He loved your *Jidee*.”

And now I understood—and felt ashamed for underestimating a “redneck.” I had not seen who he really was because of my own presumptive bias.

It’s now a few decades later, and when I picture my grandfather as that old man, resting in the big guy’s arms—trusting him to accomplish that which my *Jidee* could not, I see more than just a heartwarming story from my family history. I see myself in the arms of God’s Holy Spirit—*who* *loves me*. And every day, rain or shine, I see him faithfully carrying me into righteousness, into hope, into joy and service and kindness and so much more. My job, I understand now, is the same as *Jidee’s* was then: to cooperate, to go along and let him do the heavy lifting for me.

And that brings us to this moment, which also brings to you a choice.

Tomorrow when you wake up to your Christian life, you might see (figuratively) a huge, immovable stone in your path. You might see infirmity of sin that keeps you from doing things that should be easy, like walking or even standing. You might see any of a hundred other reasons why your Christian life is simply too hard, or too discouraging.

But it’s my prayer that, by the time you and I are done with this short article, when you contemplate your daily Christian life you’ll choose to see, instead, that *the Holy Spirit is carrying you through to glory…*

Like a redneck pastor, and my grand old man.

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