

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 7, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 4: 12-19

THEME: WHEN SUFFERING COMES

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" **19** Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

In the name of Jesus:

We all have had those days, or weeks, haven't we? Times when difficulties come our way. At one point everything is going your way and then, boom, you wonder what happened? You find that the tables have turned, and you are right smack dab in the middle of a stretch of suffering.

Suffering is in and of itself a bad thing. No one wants to suffer. But suffering is real. Christians aren't masochists, we are realists. It isn't a matter of if suffering will come into our lives, it is just a matter of when.

Jesus promised this when He said: “In this world you will have trouble.” Isn’t that the truth! Peter tells us that we shouldn’t be surprised at suffering: “**12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” And a few verses later Peter says: “**13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” And “let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Ever since the Garden of Eden, God has sought to come into a relationship with the humans He created. It is in fact the very reason why God created us, to be in fellowship with Him! However, because of our sinfulness, we can’t behold God face to face and live. That doesn’t mean that someone didn’t already ask! In the Book of Exodus we see Moses asking if he could see God face to face, and the LORD answered: “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” So how can we see God and know Him? This is where Jesus comes in. God became man in Jesus to reconcile the world to Himself. Jesus says that He and the Father are one, if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father in all of His glory.

But note well, Jesus didn’t walk around with a halo on His head. The prophet Isaiah writes that there was nothing special about Jesus to make

anyone think that He was God's Son in the flesh. He looked and lived as an ordinary man, He was born, He went to school, held a job, He even wept at the funeral of His friend Lazarus. God became man in Jesus, to live as we live and to suffer as we suffer, only without sin.

Luther speaks of this when he says that God hides Himself in suffering. God became so at one with humanity that in Jesus Christ God the Son humbled Himself so that He would suffer as we all do, only Jesus didn't suffer because He was a sinner. He suffered to identify Himself with sinners, so that we might receive help and strength in times of our suffering. This is a great mystery, that Jesus would come down from heaven to suffer. He didn't have to. He wanted to. He earnestly desired that you would not be alone, that you would not be forsaken, that you would have a relationship with the Father, and so Jesus suffered and died for you, to make you His very own child.

Many of us have a cross somewhere hanging up in our home. The cross is prevalent in our sanctuary, hanging from the ceiling, crosses on the side of pews, even the floor plan of our church is in the shape of a cross. The cross is the sign of our salvation. Christ has saved you and saved everyone by means of His cross. Because Jesus was crucified, died, and buried, and rose again on Easter, your sins are forgiven!

The Good News of Jesus isn't fancy. It is pretty simple, really. God achieved His highest purpose in saving you and the world by means of the cross. This really is mind boggling to many today. God turned the tables, so to speak. In our world the saying goes might makes right. But in God's economy, might means nothing, in His world the lowly, the despised, the humble are exalted and blessed. And whoever follows Jesus signs up for trusting in God to work in and through our suffering.

Suffering isn't fun. Whenever we suffer, God seems far away. It seems as if God is out to get us. But He isn't, rather God is with us in the midst of our suffering. Just listen to what Jeremiah, a man who knew suffering, says about God working in and through suffering: "though he causes grief, he will have compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love, for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men." (Lamentations 3: 32-33). The reality is this, when we suffer, God is right there with us in the midst of our suffering. That who God is, He purposely and deliberately wraps His loving arms around you when you are suffering. Just as the Bible says: "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are." (1 Cor. 1: 27-28).

If you are my age you probably had kids who grew up watching Fred Rogers and Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. Mr Rogers came out of retirement in 2001 to help children who were traumatized by the attacks that took place on 9/11. Mr. Rogers said something then and it is true now. When you are confronted with trauma and suffering, Mr. Rogers said: "Look for the Helpers." Look for the Helpers. When there is suffering in our lives and in the lives of others, pay more attention to those who are coming to help the sufferers.

None of us looks forward to suffering. But it is there, if not today, then in the near future. In your suffering, look to Jesus, who is your ever present Help in times of trouble. For as the Bible says: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4: 15-16). In your suffering turn to Jesus, for He will give you what you need in your time of need. Jesus has been there and done that. He embraced your pain and misery in His life, suffering and death. So when suffering comes your way, Jesus is there with you and for you.

And when you see others who are suffering, take a page from Mr. Rogers' book. Don't flee from those who suffer, go to the suffering. Be a

helper. Listen to them. Pray with them. Allow God to use you as a Helper. Point them to Jesus. For God is our ever present Help, and the world's ever present Help in times of trouble.

Amen