

I Peter 2: 21-23

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. **22** "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." **23** When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

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The New Living Translation of these two verses says: For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example and you are to follow in his steps.

Today's scripture speaks of suffering in the face of injustice. When I think of a famous sufferer, Job comes to mind. According to the Bible, he lost his entire family to a "mighty wind", his wealth to war and fire, and his health to painful boils, such that he had trouble even sitting down. In our society, we are taught to ask "Why?" even at the slightest injustice. But in the story of Job, his friends blame him and all heaven is silent for a long time. Then when God did speak...finally... he did not apologize for allowing this calamity; instead he talked of mountain goats giving birth and ravens in their nest, and mountain lions on the hunt. He cited the wonders of space, the mystery of the sea, the cycle of seasons. And Job was able to conclude that if God had the power to make all of this, then he was also a God that could be trusted in times of suffering. And as we recall, the end to this step of releasing the "Why?" to God resulted in much happiness and blessings at the end of Job's life. Trust. What if Job had not chosen to sit and listen, to pray to Jehovah? Listening is what every deep relationship starts with and often, when trust is there, we share the rough places in life to a sympathetic ear. Do you trust God enough to listen to the divine voice of the suffering servant?

What does suffering mean to our North American way of looking at suffering? Have we allowed ourselves to be insulated from the suffering of the world, because of our imbedded-ness in our American way of life?

What does suffering for the sake of the gospel mean as individuals and as a community?

I remember the winter of 1977, when 14" inches of snow fell and we got 14 snow days off that winter. I was a high school choral director at that time and a newlywed. Living one field over from the farmhouse I had grown up in, I remember trudging behind husband as a necessity, carefully following in his slightly bigger boot prints. He cleared the way in front of me. Even though it was hard making our way to the farmhouse, I had the security of those footprints right ahead and the hardship became an adventure. Now, decades later, I see my Savior leading the way for me in much the same way. No matter what the future holds, I have his steps to follow. And if I listen and trust that he is going ahead, but staying very close to me, my life becomes a joy, even with the knowledge that there is and will be some form of suffering connected to following Christ.

This way of the cross, this way of allowing Christ to live within us is not a downward path. It is letting go and letting God work.

It can't bring you down. It gives you joy, the same joy that has marked the people of God, no matter their earthly circumstance. In Romans 5:3 Paul writes "we rejoice in our sufferings" because he knew they build character but also because he wanted to share in the honor of Christ's sufferings, Philippians 3:11, "becoming like him in his death, that if possible I am attain the resurrection from the dead"

Tiny Briella has been born into a world containing much suffering, but God chose to give her a mother who brought her to a community of faith, a place where I pray that she will learn the power of nonviolent love. where she will learn that her life is precious and has purpose.

Helen Keller, blind, deaf, and mute, wrote these words as an adult:

I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.

As we partake in remembering Christ's suffering and death for our sins today, may we also be keen to understand, through the stirrings of the Holy Spirit here this morning, what it is God is calling us to do for the sake fo the Kingdom this week, what it is we need to let go of and leave at His feet,even though it may involve a little suffering.

Amen.