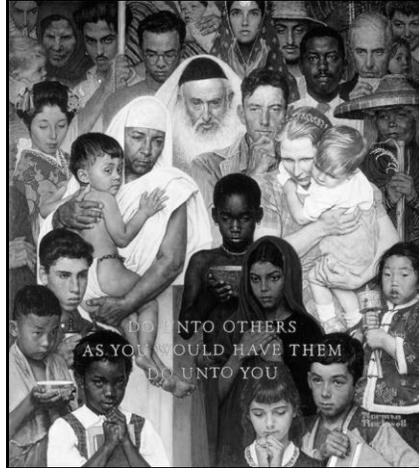


DO WE ALL FEEL LIKE JOB SOMETIMES?



Scripture:

Psalm 26

¹Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. ²Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. ³For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you.

⁴I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; ⁵I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD, ⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

⁸O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. ⁹Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, ¹⁰those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes.

¹¹But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. ¹²My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

A Book of Job Reading

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



The experience of suffering is universal. For those in Oregon, the suffering must still feel very raw after the killing of innocent college students and teachers. Syria experienced additional suffering this past week now that Russia is bombing from the air, too. And another huge hurricane is

weaving a wave of destruction as it floods the east coast.

Sometimes the suffering of brokenness and chaos may not be as severe as in Job's life. Sometimes the brokenness and chaos can be smaller daily obstacles and irritations. Other times it can be chronic,

something that goes on and on with no end in sight.

Joyce Rupp in her book, *The Cup of Our Life* says that whatever the difficulties we experience, they can be a source for spiritual growth. Our brokenness can be viewed as instruments for positive changes. Madeleine L'Engle wrote, "Looking back at my mother's life I can see suffering deepening and strengthening it. Some people I have also seen it destroy. Pain is not always creative; received wrongly it can lead to alcoholism and suicide. Nevertheless, without pain, we do not grow." No pain, no gain.

LOVE AND SUFFERING

So on World Communion Sunday it seems fitting to talk about things that bond us together: love and suffering. Some people try to protect themselves from suffering by not loving so they won't get hurt or be disappointed.

When Jesus said, "You must lose your life to save it," Jesus was warning us against protecting ourselves too securely from the chaos in this world. Jesus was saying: When you risk spreading his good news by getting close to people and risk your life to love and help others, you will lose the safe secure easier comfortable life you now have. But you will gain a much deeper more fulfilling life experiencing God's love despite the loss and suffering that may come along with it.

Psalm 39:18 says: The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

We all go through suffering in differing degrees. Ever since the beginning of consciousness, humans have tried to understand suffering.

Yet our common experiences bond us together. God's wisdom must have a greater purpose in allowing free will and chaos to exist in creation. Alcoholics Anonymous attendees often bond closely because they have all suffered the trials that result from being alcoholics.

Survivors of cancer bond together and share what they have learned with one another. Mothers and fathers of children who have died formed a group called Compassionate Friends for support of one another. GriefShare is another example of how groups bond over common suffering. When people come together over personal losses, they find strength through one another.

"We are one, after all, you and I; together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other." - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

C. S. Lewis wrote a lot about suffering after losing his wife to cancer. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, he said,
"Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny."
"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering and you find that you have excluded life itself."
And he added,
"The real problem is not why some pious, humble, believing people suffer, but why some do not."

JOB'S INTENSE SUFFERING

Yet how do we explain Job's intense suffering? It was worse than most of us will ever have to bear. This story might seem

like an exaggeration, but I bet all of us could tell a story that echoes at least part of Job's suffering. I think that is the point for having it in the Bible. It shows how God understands the complexity of suffering and is compassionate to the anger, confusion, doubt, and depression that humans feel when struck with suffering.

So how do we free ourselves from being impacted by suffering?

All the major faiths have sacred scriptures about suffering.

- **The Buddha** said, "To be free of suffering, free yourself from material attachments."
- **Kahlil Gibran** said, "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars."
- **The Dali Lama** says, "When you think everything is someone else's fault you will suffer a lot. When you realize that everything springs only from yourself, you will learn both peace and joy."

Helen Keller, who was born blind and deaf, knew suffering intensely and yet she overcame it. She said, "The struggle of life is one of our greatest blessings. It makes us patient, sensitive, and God-like. It teaches us that although the world is full of suffering it is also full of the overcoming of it."

This reflects on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

WHY?

Part of my answering the call to become a pastor was inspired by the nagging question I still have about why does evil and suffering still exist in a world where God can move mountains.

Only God knows the reason, but now we see through a mirror dimly what will become clear to us in the next stage of eternal life.

Yet, the details of heaven are not laid out in the Bible because if they were, we might be too anxious to get there before we fulfill the purposes God has for us here. So it is kept a mystery and we are just told there will be no more pain or sorrow, our tears will be wiped away, and we will be embraced with joy, mercy and love.

In his book, *Love Wins*, Rob Bell writes that life as we know it, with births, aging and funerals, is part of eternity. We are not merely being good to get into heaven one day, but we should be trying to bring heaven to earth today through how we live our lives. When we think of heaven, we think of peace, love, health and the wiping away of every tear, but it doesn't have to start in the afterlife. It can begin right now. We can love more and let go of grudges. We can let peace rule our hearts and minds. We can bring heaven to earth everyday."

EVERYDAY SUFFERINGS

Joyce Rupp gives us questions to ponder about dealing with our everyday sufferings. She asks, "What would happen if we met our frustrations, pains, and heartaches as we would meet a visitor who has something to teach us? What if we asked our brokenness to help us grow? What might we learn from the broken pieces in our lives that are still incomplete?"

**Anne Lamott's answer is,
"Hope begins in the dark,
the stubborn hope that if you
just show up and try to do the right
thing, the dawn will come.
You wait and watch and work
and you don't give up."**

Amen

Benediction:

Rob Bell ends his book, *Love Wins*, about Heaven by saying, "At the end of the day, the gospel is a story that hits to the heart of what everyone's longing for in this broken life: a second chance, a spring after the winter, redemption, and resurrection.

Jesus succeeded on the cross at saving humanity, and He did it because "God so loved the world."

That includes you, me and "every person who ever lived," as Bell said. The "Good News" is that ultimately love wins."

So go and spread the good news. God still loves the world no matter how often we feel like Job.

**And may the grace of our Lord, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore.
Amen**



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