

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Sermon June 12th

God's Love is In Our Hearts

A long time ago, I came to the painful realization that with this wonderful gift of life we receive from God comes suffering. Unfortunately, we live in an imperfect world as imperfect beings. We make mistakes. We sometimes suffer at the hands of other people's mistakes. Sometimes our suffering comes from illness or physical disability or mental unwellness or from a natural disaster (**Image**).

A long time ago, I came to the painful realization that with this wonderful gift of life we receive from God comes suffering. Despite all the messages out there that told me that life without suffering in this world is a possibility. If only I do A, B, and C then suffering will be no more.

What happens when we listen to these messages is we find it a lot harder to deal with suffering in our lives. We try to avoid it or ignore it or run away from it or settle for some kind of quick fix scheme to deal with it. Putting a band-aid on a deep wound. Hoping the bleeding will just stop already.

As a community, as individuals, we struggle to understand suffering, and how to live our lives in the midst of suffering.

Well, in the early church in Rome, the people are trying to live out their faith, continuing Jesus' work in the world, as they face suffering. They face persecution from the Empire. From neighbours, family, friends. For talking about Jesus. They face inner strife as some of them have roots in Judaism, and others have roots in Greek and Roman thought. Two different communities trying to unify under Christ. Unfortunately, their differences are making it hard for them to get along.

So, in sum, the people who are attending the churches in Rome are dealing with a lot of suffering that comes with the breakdown of relationships.

We can relate. Of all the suffering we experience in our lifetime, the pain and grief that comes with the breakdown of relationships seems to be the most universal suffering we experience.

For example, dealing with the breakdown of a friendship or a sibling relationship over an addiction or you find yourselves going in different directions in your lives, and end up growing apart. Or you get in a big fight over something that at the time seems larger

than life. You say really nasty things to each other that you can't take back. And now you find yourselves too wounded to forgive.

Or your marriage fails, because you find yourselves struggling to communicate with each other when facing stressful life events. And eventually you wear down from all the fighting (**Image**). Feeling like you have nothing left in the tank to give to keep the relationship going.

Or your adult child stops talking to you, because they feel so hurt by your words and actions towards them. And for some reason you can't get to that place where you see that you did hurt them. So, you justify your actions by saying something like, "I did the best I could." Instead of saying, "I'm sorry for hurting you. I'll do better."

Or your adult child is going through their own struggle like dealing with an addiction or have made some bad choices in their life. And feel too ashamed to face you. So, they avoid you.

Or your parent stops talking to you, because they feel overwhelmed by all the problems you are dealing with. They can't help you anymore. They are burnt out. Unfortunately, we see this lots when people are struggling with addictions or other mental illnesses.

I am not going to put you on the spot here. But if I were to ask you to stand up if you have experienced at least one relationship breakdown in your life I wouldn't be surprised at all if everyone stood up. We are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world.

Now, Paul can see that the church in Rome is struggling to hang in there as they face suffering. So, he sends them a letter to encourage them to persevere. To keep living life the way God intended them to live it, even in the face of suffering.

How often does suffering keep us from living our life in the way God intended us to live it?

In our reading of Romans today, Paul addresses the suffering the people are experiencing head on. First, he names it. Paul doesn't try to ignore the suffering or tell them to suck it up. Paul recognizes that they are suffering, and acknowledges that it isn't easy to live with suffering.

Second, Paul encourages them to continue to be the church as they live in suffering. Paul does this by reassuring them that God has poured out God's love in their hearts through the Holy Spirit.

They are not alone in their suffering. God's love dwells within them. Helping them be Jesus' hands and feet in this broken world.

Paul goes on to tell us that by believing that God's love is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, we then can live with hope. Hope that through the Holy Spirit, through the church, through one another, we will experience God's healing and redemption.

We will be able to live with our suffering, because with suffering also comes God's healing and redeeming love.

A long time ago, I came to the painful realization that with this wonderful gift we receive from God comes suffering. Many years later I came to another realization that though we live in a world where suffering touches our lives. We also live in a world where God's healing and redeeming love touches our lives (**Image**).

And it is through this belief that God has poured out God's love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that gives us hope, that through us, the church, people will see God walking with them in their suffering. People will experience God's healing and redeeming love.

We will see God walking with us in our suffering. We will experience God's healing and redeeming love.

In our gospel, John too shares this message when he says to his grieving disciples that through the Holy Spirit, they will continue to reveal to people God's kingdom come. A kingdom where we experience healing and redemption from our suffering. A kingdom where we are not alone in our suffering. A kingdom where God's hospitality and grace reign.

Suffering is inevitable in a world where we are imperfect. Where the world is imperfect. But God's healing and redeeming love is also inevitable in a world where the Holy Spirit is at work. Where the Holy Spirit is at work pouring God's love into our hearts, so we can be the church in this broken world.

Jesus, Paul, proclaims this message to the early church, to us, to give us hope that we can continue to live out the kingdom of God in the world. Showing people God's hospitality and grace in the midst of their suffering. Walking with them in their suffering. Helping them experience God's healing and redeeming love.

Whether it is helping two people find healing and reconciliation in a relationship (**Image**). Or helping them find healing in themselves so that they can move on and enter into new healthy relationships. Whether it is walking with someone in their illness, helping them connect with the right resources to find healing. Or helping them come to a place of peace and acceptance when their illness becomes terminal (**Image**). Whether it is helping someone get to a place of forgiveness or repentance or getting to that place ourselves.

Jesus, Paul, proclaim this message to us, to give us hope as suffering children of God, that through the Holy Spirit, we are also healed and redeemed children of God.

Let us pray, gracious God, help us be your church as we face suffering in our lives and in our community. Give us faith to believe that your love is poured out into our hearts. Heal us. Redeem us. Empower us to do the same to others. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

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