

Sermon August 30th, 2020

God's Redeeming Love

Recalling last week's gospel about Peter's revelation of Jesus, the disciples are now excited, because they know without a doubt that they are in the presence of the messiah. The one who will lead them to victory over the Roman Empire. The one who will restore the Davidic Kingdom. The one who will bring the kingdom of heaven down to us on earth.

Then in today's gospel, Jesus spoils the party. Jesus says that he will have to suffer, die, and be raised to new life, which goes against the understanding of messiah for the disciples. "We thought you were going to build up an army so we can defeat the Roman Empire, and be freed from this oppression. Instead, you are going to suffer and die?"

What I find interesting in Peter's response to Jesus is that he mentions nothing about Jesus' foretelling of his resurrection. Peter focuses on the suffering and dying that Jesus will have to do. It was like he missed the resurrection part completely. Or maybe the idea of his mentor and friend having to suffer and die is so painful for him to process that he is unable to hear the good news about the new life that awaits Jesus.

As much as Peter's response interests me, it doesn't surprise me at all that Peter reacts this way. Our brains are programmed to first process the negative stimuli we experience, because these stimuli could threaten our ability to survive. So, even if good things are happening to us at the time, if one negative thing happens to trigger that survival response in us, everything else becomes second thought.

We see this play out in our everyday life experience as we see how hard it is to look past the negative messages and stimuli we experience.

For example, someone starts off by complimenting you on something you said or did, and then follows it up with that infamous "but". Chances are you will dwell on the criticism you hear versus all the compliments you heard before hand. Even if the compliments list was much bigger.

Or you make a mistake at work, and your anxiety over possibly losing your job turns into negative self talk.

Or you are grieving from a broken relationship, and are struggling to move forward. Your mind stays stuck on all the things that went wrong in the relationship. Your insecurity grows. You are afraid now to get involved in another relationship.

Or your favorite sports team is not doing so well, and all you can focus on is all the mistakes they are making, and how they will never be good enough.

How often do we complain about the news being so negative all the time, and yet, we feel drawn to watch the news?

This pandemic has probably been the greatest example of how impactful negative life events are on our well being. Like Peter in response to Jesus' possible suffering and death, we want to rebuke it. We want the pandemic to just go away already.

Sometimes this inability to face our suffering head on leads us to behave in neglectful ways, as we try so hard to ignore the pain. Like pretending that the pandemic isn't happening. Or sometimes we use outside stimuli like drugs or alcohol to increase the endorphins in our brains to try and override the negative stimuli we face. Or when it comes to the break down of relationships, sometimes we build invisible walls inside ourselves as a preventative measure to avoid future pain. Keeping people at a safe distance emotionally. Isolating ourselves from others.

For many of us we focus too much on the negative stimuli in our lives, and when it gets too much, we try everything in the world to avoid or distance ourselves from the pain. We are not very good at dealing with suffering in our lives and in our world.

In response to our inability to handle suffering, God gives us the gift of faith that motivates us to find ways to live in the midst of a suffering world with hope in God's redeeming mercy and love. Our faith helps us break down the walls we create. Our faith helps us turn to God for relief. Our faith helps us face our suffering head on. Empowering us to work through our suffering. Not just try and shut it up. Like putting a Band-Aid on a deep wound.

After Jesus calls out Peter, Jesus turns to all the disciples and bluntly tells them that part of living a life following him is suffering. Sometimes when we

try to do good to others on the margins of society, we will face some push back from those in positions of authority. Sometimes when we follow Jesus, we will run into those who don't understand and try to inflict suffering on us. Sometimes, we will suffer, from forces beyond human error, because we live in a broken world where disease, natural disasters, and other natural phenomenon occur.

Unfortunately, to be a creature in this world, is to experience suffering. Yet, Jesus encourages those who follow him to take up their crosses. Jesus says to us this morning "don't let this suffering stop you from living out the good news. Yes, you will die with me, but you will also rise with me. Though you will suffer, you will also experience the redemptive love of God through me."

This is the power of the cross. In a moment where everything looks dark God is doing something miraculous. God's redeeming love is at work creating a new narrative for our suffering. No longer will suffering have the final say in our lives. Now through Christ Jesus we will all experience new life.

During this pandemic, we as the church are called, to shine light in people's darkness. To reveal where God is at work redeeming them in the midst of this suffering. Where new life is being experienced.

We are all struggling to find hope right now as we hear that we could be suffering in this pandemic for quite some time. Our lives have changed significantly, because of this. We find ourselves standing in Peter's shoes.

Yet, our faith tells us that Jesus is standing before us today, asking us to take up our crosses and follow him. To face this suffering head on, cleansing the wounds of our society so we can all heal properly. Hoping and believing that God's redemptive love will make us new. Will make our world new.

Let us pray, loving God, our suffering can paralyze us from following you. Grant us faith and hope to see your redeeming love in the midst of our suffering. And grant us the wisdom to reveal this to others. **Amen.**

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