

October 13 2019

*This was not a typical sermon. The sermon was shared with 3 others in the congregation, sprinkled throughout the worship service. The following was said as part of the call to worship.*

Good morning brothers and sisters...

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. THIS is the day.

Look around and see those around you, no need to speak or shake hands, just seeing one another and maybe sharing a smile.

For THIS is the day the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Today we are starting a 4 part Sunday School series mostly focused on End of Life issues - how to have necessary conversations with our loved ones, as well as practical information and documents that help put our wishes into writing. But today we start with personal stories of how illness and pain impact our faith. When we met as a Sunday School committee, (Tim Derstine, Paul McCormick, Hope Brubaker and myself) we wondered together about pain and suffering. It was named how illness separates us from our community (communities of all sorts - faith and family) and how the degree of isolation/separation that is felt can be high, even when incredible levels of support are available. Illness and pain are so complex and have the potential to be very isolating - from one another and from God. There are illnesses, especially mental illness and chronic conditions that are hidden, less noticed by society and even by our community of faith and family. These illnesses, often in ways that are less visible, impact not only everyday life, but impact faith in ways that are different from more acute illness.

During this morning's service, we will hear from 3 members of our community, hearing how their faith has been impacted by illness or pain. We will look at our scripture today through this lens of living with suffering and how it impacts one's faith, day in and day out. Questions from scripture will guide us this morning - how long, O Lord? To whom shall we go? How do we create life in the midst of exile?

Our God is a God of abundance, of everlasting love. Our God knows the pain of the cross and the joy of resurrection. Let us worship together.

## **PART 1**

### Psalm 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

How long, how long, how long, how long... the psalmist asks God over and over.

This psalm holds the complexity of life, where as people of faith we find it necessary to pray, 'how long, O Lord' and almost simultaneously profess that the Lord has been good to me. In holding together complaint and praise, we are taught about both God and ourselves. God is involved in all of life - even life at its worst.

This psalm reminds us of our neediness and provides comfort - agony and ecstasy belong together. In theological terms, we are simultaneously people of the cross and people of the resurrection. As we hold space for all suffering and gratitude to exist side by side, *I invite Leah up front...*

## **PART 2**

### John 6 reading with refrain "Lord, to whom shall we go?"

#### *Refrain*

When the crowds found him, they said, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"  
Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life."

#### *Refrain*

Then Jesus said, "very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven...I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

#### *Refrain*

Then the Jews began to complain about him.  
When many of his disciples heard it, they said "this teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

#### *Refrain*

Jesus replied, "The words that I have spoken are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe."

#### *Refrain*

Because of this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

#### *Refrain*

Throughout much of this chapter in John's gospel, there's a pattern of protest - through grumbling, disbelief or rejection, followed by a response from Jesus. Jesus offers himself as the gift of life to those who believe. Life that is eternal, full, here, now and forever.  
At the end of the reading, Jesus presents the disciples with a choice. The Twelve must choose whether to accept or reject the offer God has made to them in Jesus. It was their choice; it is

our choice. John writes that many who were considered followers of Jesus found his teachings too difficult, their choice was to turn away.

Peter, in a moment of clarity, nails it - 'to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.' You are Life - the hard parts and the parts we easily welcome. In his haunting question, Peter reminds us that no matter how difficult our path, the choice is found in Eternal Life - fullness of life offered by Christ. To whom shall we go?

*Welcome Paul up front...*

### **PART 3**

#### Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

The last verse uses the word shalom 3 times. Here it's translated as welfare. It can also be translated as completeness, or peace. "But seek the peace of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its peace you will find your peace."

The prophet Jeremiah was writing from Judah, where he was living. He was not part of the exile to Babylon. His message to those who were deported is essentially the same as what he's been telling the remnant in Judah - "Do not resist; carry on with your lives; learn to come to terms with your situation." Jeremiah is reminding his people that peace is not found in resistance, but in accepting what is. Peace, wholeness, is to be found in settling into life where they are, and they are to pray for the peace of Babylon - the oppressor. The exiles are told to find their life now, in this new and difficult place, assured by God that life is not only possible, but that it can flourish. The promise of creation continues, even in exile. Jeremiah is saying live

lives full of hope. God is with you, even in this strange, foreign, hostile place. Seek peace!  
Seek life!

Illness is sometimes liken to being exiled in a foreign land; unsafe, unfamiliar, unwanted. When we find ourselves in such places, how do we respond?  
Where do we find a sense of home, literally or spiritually?

How can we find the peace or the joy we've been looking for all the time? Might simplicity, peace and joy be found in the smallest of things, no matter where we find ourselves?

Welcome Scott up front...