

Second Sunday in Lent

Year B
RCL

- [Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16](#)
- [Romans 4:13-25](#)
- [Mark 8:31-38](#)
- [Psalm 22:22-30](#)

Hiker Andrew Hamilton has a lofty goal this winter- climb all the 14er's in Colorado in 1 winter. He says about his already completed peaks-- "I think suffering is what I do best." "Anguish to be admired," the voiceover responded. Hamilton has almost completed his goal- he has 16 peaks left to bag. "It's never been done and there's nothing easy about it," the reporter says.

Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Suffering. Rejection. Death. Human things and divine things. This is one of the great mysteries of our faith- why did Jesus have to suffer and die and why must we still experience pain?

Hiker Andrew Hamilton's proclamation- "I think suffering is what I do best"- struck a nerve for me. It's not a statement most of us are comfortable saying. In fact, most of us actively fight against it instead of welcoming suffering into our lives. Suffering can be extreme but at its basic root, it means to hurt, to ache, to feel pain. Who wants to hurt more when there is already plenty of that going around?

Peter, as the foil, speaks the truth in most of our hearts- he's shocked with the prediction of suffering- He doesn't want his beloved rabbi, teacher, and Messiah to suffer. Just like him, we don't want those we love to suffer. Last week was the 50th anniversary of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. Growing up just north of Pittsburgh, and my dad, a Pittsburgh native, Mr. Rogers is dear to my heart. His wisdom for both children and adults alike covers a wide spectrum. About suffering, he said this, "There is no normal life that is free of pain. It's the very wrestling with our problems that can be the impetus for our growth."

Jesus underwent great suffering on the cross. Jesus literally took up his cross on the way to his crucifixion. Like a common criminal, a brutal form of psychological torture before death, Jesus carried his own instrument of death through the winding streets of Jerusalem. And even though Jesus walked that path- the heart break and the pain of death still knocks on our doors day in and day out. To be a follower of Jesus, to take up the cross, just as he did, is to be a witness to pain all around us, and to live both with

the pain and sadness of the world, all the while holding onto the hope of the resurrection.

When we do find ourselves suffering- how do we respond to it? How do we tend to it? How can we learn from Jesus' experience? We walk beside Jesus watching him not fight the suffering on the cross with more violence but rather with peace and love. When we ache, we can remember that Jesus ached, too. When we cry out, "why?", we can recall Jesus' deep grief in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we feel alone, we can feel the isolation that Jesus felt when he hung on the cross. God was already there before us. Our God is a God of life and love. And I do want to push back on one thing- while we can learn from suffering, God doesn't desire us to be hurt or in pain- this is one of the many passages in the Bible that has been used for ill, and has been used to force people to stay in abusive situations. This is not the type of growth through suffering God desires or we want to lift up. Surely, growth so often does come out of suffering, and yet, the pain of suffering is so very different when one chooses it, instead of when it's been forced upon you.

In times of suffering we have a greater need to actually seek God more and not less. To set aside time and be present to the pain and be present to how God is still present with you. There's almost two parts to experiencing pain- the first is what do you do while you are suffering, and

the second is what do you do in the aftermath? Ignore it? Condemn it? Seek revenge? Blame God? Run away?

So, how are you spending your Lent? What Lenten discipline did you take on or is there something instead that you're releasing- that's not serving you anymore? This is a good time to examine some of these big questions of our faith lives. (And this is where I plug our Book study on Wednesday which is examining these very questions.) This is a season to examine our own hearts- how we encounter pain for ourselves and what we do about it not only for us personally but for the pain of the world. It's extremely uncomfortable work- but work we as Christians are called to do- taking up the cross- addressing pain and suffering- calling out the systems that deeply hurt and oppress people and discovering how we can bring hope and healing. That work doesn't come easy or without cost.

The reporter, from the new story I mentioned, got one thing right in how it relates to Jesus' life and death. It had never been done before and it wasn't easy. Was it worth it because of all the hard work or pain? Some ascribe to that theory of living- the harder it is- the more reward. Or could there have been another way for Jesus besides suffering on the cross? We don't know- we may never know. But for Jesus and his disciples, it was a reality. One that would have eternal implications. And when we think about Jesus' mission on earth- this was one of the primary purposes- to find pain and suffering and show it the Good News. Jesus spoke back to

pain and suffering with a self-sacrificial love. He lived into the kingdom of Good News and brought life. Where do you find deep suffering at the moment? How can you speak the Good News into it?