

## Good Suffering

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

These words are from our Gospel reading today. They remind us our Lord Jesus Christ did not seek to avoid suffering, but in fact believed his suffering in this world was inevitable. Jesus told his disciples, "I must suffer," and if we read between the lines we can hear Jesus saying, "I am willing to suffer."

This part of Jesus might be confusing to us. After all, Christians, like most people, do not wish to suffer. We might even ask, who wants to hurt? Not me! So, we, like others, seek to avoid and even escape suffering.

On the one hand, this is ok, in the sense that we don't need to seek out pain. It doesn't really make sense to let ourselves be hurt or to expose ourselves to the coronavirus. Nor does it necessarily make sense if we have a bad headache that we choose to suffer through it, instead of taking something to relieve the pain.

Yet we must suffer too. It's simply part of life. When someone we love dies, we suffer because we loved them. When a child in Ecuador hasn't eaten in several days, she suffers from hunger. When we grow older and we have the normal aches and pains of an aging person, we suffer.

Suffering is part of this world God made. Some suffering is even good. When you touch a hot oven and your finger is hurt, it's good you suffer because then you know to take your hand away from the heat. When you miss your wife or husband who has been away on a work trip for two weeks, it's good you suffer, because then you are reminded how much you love them.

Jesus did not want to suffer either. He wasn't looking forward to being nailed to a cross and dying there alone with his enemies spitting on him. This was not his idea of a good time. However, as hard as this suffering was on Jesus, it was good suffering. It was good that Jesus underwent suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and was killed.

You ask, how is such suffering good? Well, it's good because on the third day Jesus was raised. There you have it. It was good Jesus suffered and was killed so that God could raise him from the dead, and then after the resurrection, God could unleash a whole array of good consequences.

You ask, what were the good consequences that God unleashed after he raised Jesus? Here are four:

First, our sins are forgiven. Through the suffering of Jesus on the cross, your and my sins are forgiven, forever.

Second, we see the Lord loves us. It only follows that someone who suffers and dies for us does so because of love. The Bible tells us the Lord loves us in countless places, but in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, we clearly see the Lord would even give up his divine life, because he loves us so much.

Third, after his death and resurrection, we see that the Lord Jesus can be with us in all times and all places. For example, Jesus meets with Peter in one place, at the very same

time he meets with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is hard for mortal people to understand, but for the resurrected Jesus, it is his nature. As a result, we see Jesus can be with every one of us, helping us, in every time and in every place.

Fourth, we receive the promise of eternal life. The Lord Jesus shows us in his death and resurrection that our mortal death does not have to be our end but can be the beginning of a new and eternal life. Jesus shows us there is life after death and promises that we have such an eternal life as we believe in him.

These are four reasons why Jesus said he must suffer. He was not suffering for no reason, instead, he was suffering for good reasons. On the cross, Jesus was suffering to forgive our sins, to show us that God loves us, to show us that he is always with us, and to give us the hope and promise of eternal life.

Now, Jesus also taught Peter, the other disciples, and he teaches us, that we too must suffer good reasons. Now he does not mean that it is good for us to have a toothache or a bad back, or a headache. These things are not necessarily good. But listen to what Jesus says to us in our Gospel reading today:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Here Jesus says to us that we must suffer too. He says we are to take up our cross and follow him, meaning that we must suffer for the good of other people, just like he suffered to benefit us. So, while a backache is not necessarily good suffering, it might be good suffering if you have it because you helped a neighbor move from one house to another. In other words, Jesus says that Christian people, people like us who follow him, will suffer, as we reach out to help other people. Maybe we will have a sunburn from helping an elderly person paint their house. Maybe we will lose some sleep when we sit, talk, and pray overnight with sad and depressed neighbor. Maybe our friends will ignore us because we spend time helping another person, who they for whatever reason do not like. So, like Jesus, we too suffer for good reasons. We suffer for the sake of other people, all those who the Lord calls on us to care for and love in this world.

Of course, not all suffering is good. For example, maybe having to suffer through this sermon is not so good! But all kidding aside, having cancer is not meant to be good suffering. In fact, cancer is one of the reasons Jesus was willing to suffer on the cross. Jesus suffered so that when we have cancer, we know God loves us, we know God is with us through this hardship, we know God can heal us, but also, if the cancer we have just cannot be healed, we also know when we die that he will give us eternal life.

And, remember the hungry child in Ecuador from earlier in the sermon? This is not good suffering either. She suffers because she has not eaten in several days. Certainly, Jesus suffered on the cross for that child, and Jesus calls you and me to take up our cross and suffer for that child too, perhaps through sending food or money so she and other children may eat.

Whatever bad suffering you go through if life, remember that Jesus suffered and died to help you through it. So, when you have bad suffering, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves you very much, and he who suffered for you will help you and care for you.

And, when you have good suffering because you helped someone through their struggles in life, like Jesus helps you through your struggles, the Bible tells you to rejoice and be glad, because you have helped someone who really needs help, to have a better life. The Bible tells you to rejoice and be glad because your reward in heaven will be great.  
Amen.