

Prayer for Michael Good

Sacred Heart Luncheon 12 noon - 5 PM - Free will offering - Sacred Heart -
No donuts

Christ's Body, the Church

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA meeting in Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church on the 10th Sunday after Pentecost, July 23, 1989. Scripture Lessons: 2 Kings 4:8-17; Psalm 139:13-18; Colossians 1:21-229; Luke 10:38-42.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

P.42 "And now I am happy about my sufferings for you, for by means of my physical sufferings I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church."

Colossians 1:24

This is one of the most amazing things that Paul ever said. It's shocking in it's boldness. Paul implies that the sufferings of Christ weren't completed on the cross... that the sufferings of Christ are ongoing... that Christ continues to suffer. "I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church." Remember, this is the same Paul who says that the death of Jesus was sufficient to save the whole world. Everything that needed to be done for our salvation was accomplished by Jesus on the cross. And yet Paul says that Christ's sufferings haven't been completed. He continues to suffer... even after the resurrection... after the ascension... after the giving of the Holy Spirit... Christ continues to suffer even today. When we, God's people, suffer on behalf of someone else we're completing the sufferings of Christ. We, the Church, are the Body of Christ and when we suffer on behalf of others, Christ also suffers.

Most of us think of suffering as something we should avoid at all costs. But Paul writes, "I am happy about my sufferings for you." If we're truly a Christian, if we have faith in Christ, then we'll choose to suffer on behalf of others.

Think for a moment about what suffering is. To suffer is to put up with things you'd rather not put up with. If you badly want to be rid of something and it won't go away, you're suffering. It may be only a nuisance- like a fly buzzing around your head in your bedroom when you

want to sleep, never landing anywhere long enough for you to get him. That's a kind of suffering. Or the suffering you experience may be a guilt whose sting you feel until you die. Suffering can be a physical pain, like a headache or bone cancer. It can be mental anguish, like the loneliness that sets in when a loved one dies. What marks any human experience as suffering is a powerful desire that our pain, our grief, our hurt go away, and we have no power to make it go.

But there are two ways to suffer. We can suffer *from* something or we can suffer *with* someone. Suffering *from* and suffering *with*.

We suffer *from* something when pain comes to us against our will. We can suffer from a headache. We don't choose the headache, it just comes. We can suffer from people when we're cheated by a crook or betrayed by a friend or neglected by a lover. They're a pain in the neck but they're aren't pains that we choose. When we suffer *from* something we're being victimized. It's uninvited, unwanted. We bear this kind of suffering only because we have to. Nobody gets through life without suffering from something. But the kind of suffering that completes the suffering of Christ is not that kind of suffering.

We, the Church, help to complete Christ's suffering when we choose to suffer with and on behalf of others. "I am happy about my sufferings for you" Paul says, "for I am helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church." We suffer on behalf of people when we choose, freely, to let their hurts hurt us. We're not a victim in this kind of suffering. We decide for ourself whether we want to be hurt or not. We're free in this suffering, free to suffer or to run, free to take on pain, and free to say NO to it. We suffer because we choose to share the hurt that someone else is suffering. Suffering with someone

hurts every bit as much as suffering from something.

Jesus willingly took upon himself the suffering of the world. What was special about the sufferings of Jesus is not how much he suffered *from* others, but how he suffered *with* others and on behalf of others. And Jesus continues to suffer. He hasn't completed his sufferings. Jesus still puts himself into the shoes of anyone who suffers. Jesus is found where people are putting up with things they want to go away, trying to cope when everything is all wrong. Jesus points to suffering people and says, "There I am." He feels their hurt and shares their pain... our pain. Jesus is your hurting neighbor. He's your hurting child. He's your hurting enemy. He's anyone who's suffering from anything not of his or her own choosing.

Where do we find someone to suffer with? We never have to look far.

1. If you're married you can begin with your marriage partner. A marriage vow is a vow to suffer. I don't mean that we should suffer *from* our marriage partner. I mean we choose to suffer *with* them. When your husband or wife loses his or her job you've chosen to suffer with them. When your spouse is put down and humiliated by someone you've chosen to suffer with them. When your spouse is suffering from physical illness, you've chosen to suffer with them. And whenever you suffer with someone you're completely what still remains of Christ's sufferings and Christ is suffering with you.

2. Then there are our children. I know we sometimes suffer *from* our children. Children can sometimes drive us out of our minds. But every parent also freely chooses to suffer *with* their children. When everybody but your child is invited to the party, you suffer with your child. When your son or daughter comes home crying because they failed to make the team, you suffer with them. When your best friend waves his kids straight

A report card in the face of your child who has brought home Cs and Ds you choose to suffer with your child. When you conceive a child or father a child, you covenant to suffer with them.

3. Then there are our neighbors. So many of our neighbors, people who aren't members of our church, have chosen to suffer with us in our loss of our church. They're helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings on behalf of his body, the church. Many of us have suffered with Ashley Duncan. She's not a member of this particular church but many of you have chosen to really get involved in her suffering through your contributions and prayers. Whenever we choose to suffer on behalf of our neighbors we're helping to complete what still remains of Christ's sufferings.

4. Then there's the whole world. A Christian has a global vision. We see beyond our town and nation. We see the whole world because we know and believe that Jesus suffered and died for the whole world. Jesus continues to suffer with the world. Jesus gave the apostle Paul a global vision. Paul Borthwick, in his book *A Mind for Missions*, tells of his own experience and suggests how we can acquire a global vision which helps us to suffer with the whole world. He writes,

"While a seminary student, I tried to build my world vision through a missions prayer group I attended. The participants in this group encouraged personal prayer in an assigned prayer room, so one day I decided to try it out. I was surprised to find a copy of that day's newspaper next to a copy of the Bible and a printed prayer list in the prayer room... To me, the newspaper was a distraction to prayer.

In an effort to find out who had 'corrupted' the prayer room by putting a newspaper in it, I discovered that the newspaper was there by the instruction of the missions professor- J. Christy Wilson- who was one of the school's leading advocates of prayer. When I asked him about the newspaper, he explained, 'The Bible tells us what God wants to do in the world; the newspaper tells us where He needs to do it and where we need to be involved through our prayers.' From that day on, I have taken a greater interest in local and world news.

When I pick up a copy of Time magazine, I look to the world news first. As I do this, God directs my thinking and enlarges my vision.

Feeding our vision for the world through current events means that we are interested in what is happening in the Middle East, that we respond in prayer when a typhoon hits Thailand..."

Where do we get the power to feel another person's hurt and keep feeling it for a long time, especially when we have enough pains of our own? Paul writes, "I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me." We need more love than we have all by ourselves if we're going to willingly choose to suffer with others. God is love. So we need God. We need God if we want to move beyond our own pain and suffering and move into the life of another... to take the sufferings of someone else upon ourselves. We can't do it without the God whom we know in Christ.

God's answer to suffering is to join it, feel it, hurt with it. A sufferer screams to God in their suffering, "Why have you abandoned me?" God answers by joining him or her in suffering. Jesus hangs on a cross, and somehow, God hangs with him. When I choose to suffer with someone else I've joined Jesus.