

Ash Wednesday

The Blessings of Suffering

**Hebrews 2 (Jesus' suffering – saves everyone, helps us with suffering)**

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he **suffered** death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through **suffering**. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, **he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--** that is, the devil-- 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself **suffered** when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**Isaiah 52:13-53** 13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him--his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness--15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

53:1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with **suffering**. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.**

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; **for the transgression of my people he was stricken.** 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet **it was the LORD's will to crush him and** cause him to **suffer**, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After the **suffering** of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; 11 He will see the result of the

suffering of his soul and be satisfied **by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.** 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because **he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

**SKIT - PART 1 (Before Sermon)**

HAMILTON: I hate this!

MALINDA: Hate what?

HAMILTON: Malinda, why is life so tough?

MALINDA: What do you mean, Hamilton?

HAMILTON: O, Malinda, I'm just complaining to myself. But, it seems no matter what I do, there is trouble.

MALINDA: Explain.

HAMILTON: You know Darian. He came to me for help. I care about Him. I want to help. *As a Christian* I want to help.

MALINDA: And?

HAMILTON: Well, Darian has been making some bad choices. So, he sort of brought his troubles on himself. But, he's been hounded by his boss and really doesn't want to hear that the only way to help himself is to face his issues.

MALINDA: And

HAMILTON: Well, if I ignore him and don't tell him the truth and help him, he'll be mad, and I'll be upset with myself. But, if I point out what he has been working to deny, he'll get angry, at first at least. So, do I want him to be mad at me for ignoring him, or angry with me for telling him the truth?

MALINDA: I see.

HAMILTON: So, why is life like this? Why is there pain and hurt and suffering. And I know these are really just little things compared to the big problems we all face.

MALINDA: You answered your own question.

HAMILTON: I did?

MALINDA: We've brought it on our-self. We want to make our own choices, do our own thing, ignore the truth of God's love and direction even though He is our creator. Hamilton, did you ever say, "Leave me alone, I want to live life my way."?

HAMILTON: Sometimes. . . .

MALINDA: The world really does belong to God, even though we would like to forget that at times. His guidance and direction are really the way of righteousness, and wisdom, and peace, and health. But, rebellion is part of who we are as sinners. Suffering is part of life. We can't escape it. We do it to ourselves. . . . So, what are you going to do?

HAMILTON: Do about what?

MALINDA: About helping Darian?

HAMILTON: I don't know. I don't want to face it, really . . . sort of like Darian.

In 1986 we lived in Jacksonville, and both our boys got ill, and became more ill, and more ill. You know how you try not to go to the doctor right away every time there is a little snuffle, we were trying to save some money. But 5 year old Josh, and 3 year old Andrew were really sick, with high temperatures. Finally Kathy took them to the doctor and found out both had pneumonia. The doctor had a solution, a shot of penicillin. Actually a shot of 1 million units of penicillin one day, and a similar shot the next day. You've got to do it, right? Pneumonia is dangerous, and children are susceptible, and parents want what is best for their children.

But, a shot **hurts**. You don't want your children to hurt. To cry. To suffer. But, the pneumonia is a real illness. It is a fact that cannot be ignored. The penicillin is the surest way to help. If you want to really help, you have to face facts, right?

We have a real problem, a real crisis. We are selfish people who have rebelled and sinned against the Lord and God of the universe. Our sin causes all sorts of pain, all sorts of trouble, all sorts of suffering in our lives and in the lives of others. Suffering is an inescapable part of life.

God, our heavenly Father, a parent more loving than we ever are, loves us and worked to save us from our suffering. But, there is only one way to deal with the suffering and death, and that is not to ignore the source, our sin. But facing sin is not only something we don't want to do, it is beyond *our* ability.

Hebrews tells us, there was no other way. **17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.** **18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** "He HAD to be made like his brother . . . to make atonement"

Jesus' suffering and death saves us from eternal death and punishment. Jesus' suffering and death helps us in our suffering to know God's love and salvation in the midst of life's worst moments. There was no other way. **He HAD TO BE LIKE HIS BROTHERS**, even in suffering and dying. And He suffered so we are blessed. He was punished so we are forgiven. He died so we are saved. Jesus is the medicine to deal with our sin.

We have no choice in life about suffering. We've brought it on ourselves. But, we do have a choice how we react when trouble and suffering come. Will we complain about how life is unfair, deny our part in life's trouble? Or, are we going to face our suffering know that by His suffering Jesus brings us love and life. When we face suffering with Jesus He confronts our sin, that forgives us and saves us. If we choose real help, we choose Jesus.

**SKIT - PART 2 (After Sermon)**

HAMILTON: Hi, Malinda. Well, Darian came over last night,

MALINDA: And?

HAMILTON: Well, he was complaining again about how life was unfair.

MALINDA: What did you say, Hamilton?

HAMILTON: I listened a little. Then I asked him a question. I asked him, **“Darian, do you really want help, or do you just want to complain?”**

MALINDA: What did he say?

HAMILTON: What *could* he say? How can someone say they just want to complain? Anyway, he was angry at first. But we talked and I pointed out that the problems he was dealing with were the result of his choices.

MALINDA: I’m proud of you, Hamilton, you didn’t want to confront him, just like Darian didn’t want to admit his troubles. What caused the change?

HAMILTON: Well, I knew that if I really care about Darian I had to help him face the truth. There was no other way!

MALINDA: Just like, if Jesus wanted to save us, there was no way other than taking our suffering.

HAMILTON: That’s what I was thinking, Malinda. While the truth hurts, for all of us, God’s love and forgiveness can help us admit our weaknesses. We know we are forgiven. So we can admit our sin. We know we’re loved so we can face trouble knowing we are helped.

MALINDA: So, Jesus’ love helped you be a friend to Darian.

HAMILTON: I wouldn’t have done it on my own.

MALINDA: But, with Jesus help you faced Darian’s troubles and your fears, and now maybe Darian can get some new direction. Did you tell Darian why you were telling him the truth?

HAMILTON: Not right way, but, when he asked me why I hadn’t told him this earlier, I admitted my fear. I told him, if Jesus faced suffering for me, I could face life with Jesus for him.

MALINDA: There was no other way.