

3/7/11

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS

(The Blessing of helping others) 2 cor 1:3-7

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that **just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.**

The Passion Reading

Matthew 26:57 – 27:10

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward 61 and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" 62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said. 70 But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. 71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!" 73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." 74 Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

NIV Matthew 27:1 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. 2 They bound him, led him away and

handed him over to Pilate, the governor. 3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

THE MEDITATION “The Blessings of Suffering – Helping Others” 2
Corinthians 1:3-7

(Malinda sitting at the table with a cup of coffee as Hamilton walks in.)

HAMILTON: Hi Malinda, how’s the coffee?

MALINDA: Pretty good. I’m having a mocha. . . .(Pause) OO, Hamilton! What’s that? What’s wrong with your hands?

HAMILTON: Uh. O that? Well, my brakes went out on my car. It was going to cost a lot of money to have them fixed. I didn’t have the money it would cost, so I decided to try to fix my brakes myself.

MALINDA: I didn’t know you were a mechanic, Hamilton.

HAMILTON: I’m not. In fact, Malinda, that’s the last thing I am. I really don’t know what I’m doing. I always get stuck when I try to fix something. See my knuckles have sores on them. Doing mechanic work is like torture to me.

MALINDA: So, why did you do it?

HAMILTON: I’m not sure I had a choice. I can’t drive my car without brakes, and I couldn’t afford for someone else to put new ones on for me. But, I needed my car to go to work.

MALINDA: Did you get it done, then?

HAMILTON: Yeah, I stayed up all night. I thought I had it, but I just couldn’t get it right. I had to take out the directions and read them real carefully to see the part I was missing. But, I finally got it . . . after about 6 ½ hours. But, my car does stop now when I press the brake pedal.

MALINDA: That’s good. So you learned something.

HAMILTON: Yeah, I guess. You know what else I learned? It’s hard to get grease off your hands once it is rubbed in.

MALINDA: Well, maybe you can use what you learned.

HAMILTON: I don’t see how. What good is the torture or suffering of doing something you don’t like?

One of the worst diagnoses of illness a person can get is cancer. Unfortunately, we have had our share of cancer at St. John. But, there is a phenomenon I have watched that includes faith, and love, and blessings. When someone gets a cancer diagnosis, often some of the first to talk to them are those who have had cancer themselves and made it through. No one would ever choose to have such a diagnosis. But, when God helps a person through that illness, they have knowledge through suffering and experience that can help others. So, through the bad of the disease some good comes, the ability to help others in the same situation.

Our Bible verse for tonight tells us that one of the blessings that comes through suffering, is the ability to help others. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says, **3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.**

You have seen it happen before, someone who has a problem can be helped by others who faced that problem. That is part of the reason for the success of Alcoholics Anonymous. People who have faced a problem can help those facing it now. That often happens in time of grief. No one can bring back a loved one. But it is a comfort to know that someone else who has suffered loss is there just caring about you. People who have experienced suffering can help others as they face it.

But, if you read this verse, it is not just strength, or knowledge, or comfort we develop in ourselves when we become tough on our own through suffering. We share, according to verse 4, **the comfort we ourselves have received from God.** It is God who helps us when life is hard. It is God who loves and forgives us when we get ourselves in trouble. It is God who gives us strength and direction when our troubles confuse us. In fact, during Lent, it is good to remember that our best help for our suffering, comes from Jesus who suffered himself. Hebrews 2:17-18 says, **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.** Jesus not only helps us because He suffered to forgive us. But, because Jesus suffered he knows what we go through, and He is there to help, to comfort, and to guide when we are tempted and suffer.

You may not have received a diagnosis of cancer, or struggled with a substance, or you may not have recently lost a loved one. But I am sure you are going through some kind of struggle, and it is a struggle you wish you didn't have to face. First of all, your best help is Jesus who suffered and was tempted and can help those who are tempted. Maybe you've had help from others. But, in addition, God can use your current struggle in the future when you see others facing the same thing. God can use your struggle for good. God can use your suffering as a blessing.

What a gracious God we have.

(Hamilton sitting at the table as Malinda walks in shaking her head.)

HAMILTON: Hi Malinda, come and join me. I'll buy you one of your mochas.

MALINDA: (Distracted as she sits down) O thanks. (Silence)

HAMILTON: What's wrong, Malinda, I've never seen you so quiet.

MALINDA: O (sigh) Nothing.

HAMILTON: Come on Malinda, I know something is wrong.

MALINDA: You don't want to know.

HAMILTON: Yes I do, Malinda. You're my friend. I do want to know what your problem is.

MALINDA: You'll be sorry.

HAMILTON: What do you mean?

MALINDA: Well, remember when we were in here a couple of weeks ago, and your hands were all dirty, and all banged up. Remember what you hated doing?

HAMILTON: Sure, I had to replace the brakes on my car.

MALINDA: Well, my brakes went out. I skidded through a stop sign and almost got hit. But, I don't have the money to get mine fixed.

HAMILTON: I'll help you. You have a Ford like I do. It should be easy.

MALINDA: Easy? I thought doing mechanic work was torture for you. You got all bruised from the work on your car.

HAMILTON: Well, I did. But, after doing the brakes for the first time, I also learned what tools I need. I learned how the brakes fit in there. The second one went a lot faster than the first. I bet yours will be easy. Besides. . . .

MALINDA: Besides what?

HAMILTON: Well, you told me maybe something good could come out of my trouble.

I think you're right. I think what I learned can help me help you. Thank you Lord!