

## 1 Sermon, April 28, 2013

Texts: Isaiah 53:3-6, 2 Timothy 1:6-10, Mark 8:34-35

Title: "The Bible in Song: Despised and Rejected"

1. Suffering is a part of life
2. Do we run from suffering?
3. Can we embrace suffering?
4. Can suffering be redemptive?

Intro: Play selection from Handel's messiah

### 1. Suffering is a part of life

Have you ever heard the hymn:

Suff'ring for Jesus, I'm steady and sure -  
Hurting and crying, I'll always stay pure.  
Lord, I am thankful, the pain that I gain,  
Suff'ring for Jesus, for the sake of his name.

You've never heard that hymn because I made it up on Thursday.

There are plenty of scripture verses that talk about suffering, but I don't think there are many hymns about it. There are a lot of country western songs about suffering, and in some ways, country songs are more real than religious songs that way — because suffering's a part of life.

In The Message translation of the Bible, Jesus says:

You're not in the driver's seat; *I* am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self.

### 2. Do we run from suffering?

Now, Jesus' words about suffering don't please us.

Many of us have the silly idea that people shouldn't suffer. Where do we get that idea – that we can avoid suffering? Suffering is just a part of life.

Some people have more of it than others, but all of us are carrying a burden that no one else quite understands.

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We can put on a happy face, we can smile and the whole world smiles with us, we can brighten the corner where we are, we can walk on the sunny side of the street.

But sooner or later, we experience suffering. We encounter something we can't fix.

And that's where our faith really kicks in.

### 3. Can we embrace suffering?

In the Second Timothy reading, it says:

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

The Scriptures tell us that our suffering can be a positive thing, if we are suffering for the sake of the gospel.

If we follow Christ, we should expect to carry a cross – and that's Christian shorthand for suffering for the sake of the gospel.

When we suffer, it deepens our spiritual lives in a way that just isn't possible in the happier times. When we suffer, we have an empathy for other people's troubles that can be transforming.

Suffering can change us for the better.

In fact, a common suffering can bring people together. I've heard older people tell about how, during World War 2, there was rationing of things like gasoline and sugar, Victory Gardens, collecting iron and scrap. You could buy war bonds, and people willingly sacrificed together for the cause. People were brought together.

You may or may not favor the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But one thing that is clear – our political leaders judged that we as a nation were not ready to suffer together for a war in Afghanistan or Iraq. So we were told to go about life normally, and keep buying stuff. There was no sacrifice demanded of us, unless you were in the military, and the military has paid a big price. We don't readily feel the impact of the national debt.

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Because we did not really feel the impact of these wars, we weren't brought together as we were in World War 2. The lack of suffering on our part left us more divided.

I'm not saying that suffering is good, but I am saying that God can use suffering in some surprisingly good ways.

#### 4. Can suffering be redemptive?

Which brings us to the music we heard from Handel's messiah, which quotes Isaiah 53:

"He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity...  
Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises  
we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Isaiah tells us of a figure who suffers for the sake of others – this person has taken upon himself our sicknesses and sorrows, to the point where he looks repulsive. He is wounded, crushed, punished and bruised – all for our sake.

We Christians see this figure portrayed in Isaiah as Jesus himself, even though it was written hundreds of years before Jesus.

In this picture of Christ in Isaiah, we see someone who willingly suffered for others, and that suffering was redemptive. That suffering made a difference. That suffering servant lifted a curse from most people by absorbing the curse himself.

God used the suffering of Jesus to make a difference in the world.

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And here it gets to be a little like the national debt. We can't readily feel Jesus' suffering any more than we can feel the national debt. But we know that we are affected now and in the future by both of them. The national debt hangs like a weight around our children's future, but the redemptive suffering of Christ lifts from us the weight of sin, and gives us hope.

Christ's suffering gives us hope because we see that Christ himself suffered, and we are like him in that. He joins us in our suffering. His suffering lets us know that we are loved. Greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends.

We feel supported because Christ has taken on our burden.

Christ's suffering is an answer to abusive power. Abusive power cannot defeat us.

Even though Christ suffered, he was not defeated. No, he rose victorious and even death holds no power over the grace of God.

Christ's suffering reminds us that **nothing** can separate us from the love of God.

Thanks be to God.

Isaiah 53:3-6 - Contemporary English Version (CEV)

He was hated and rejected; his life was filled with sorrow and terrible suffering. No one wanted to look at him. We despised him and said, "He is a nobody!" He suffered and endured great pain for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God. He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well. All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the Lord gave him the punishment we deserved.

Isaiah 53:3-6 - The Message (MSG)

The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was *our* pains he carried— *our* disfigurements, all the things wrong with *us*. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—*our sins!* He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.

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We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.

2 Timothy 1:6-10 - The Message (MSG)

And the special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze! God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.

So don't be embarrassed to speak up for our Master or for me, his prisoner. Take your share of suffering for the Message along with the rest of us. We can only keep on going, after all, by the power of God, who first saved us and then called us to this holy work. We had nothing to do with it. It was all *his* idea, a gift prepared for us in Jesus long before we knew anything about it. But we know it now. Since the appearance of our Savior, nothing could be plainer: death defeated, life vindicated in a steady blaze of light, all through the work of Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:6-10 - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Mark 8:34-35 - Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Jesus then told the crowd and the disciples to come closer, and he said: If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me and for the good news, you will save it.

Mark 8:34-37 - The Message (MSG)

Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; *I* am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?