

Sermon for February 8, 2015 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Job 7:1-7 (NIV84)

Theme: Where is Jesus . . .

- 1) *While his saints suffer?*
- 2) *When they cry out for mercy?*

*"Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? <sup>2</sup> Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, <sup>3</sup> so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. <sup>4</sup> When I lie down I think, 'How long before I get up?' The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. <sup>5</sup> My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. <sup>6</sup> 'My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. <sup>7</sup> Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.*

Whenever Christians suffer – be it from, sickness, financial problems, persecution, the loss of a loved one or whatever else – they find themselves asking two questions: “why”, and “where’s Jesus”?

As to the first question (why) there is no easy answer. Each situation is unique. Sometimes God allows us to know the answer, but, more often than not, he keeps it from us – wanting us to simply trust Him and His promises in absence of any good answer.

But this is extremely difficult to do. Why? Because we never perceive suffering as a sign of God’s love, but are convinced that it is a result of either his anger or abandonment. “What did you do to tick God off”, we might ask the man in the mirror. And when we receive no answer, we find ourselves asking: “Why, then is God so angry with me? Why is He making me endure such great sorrow? Didn’t Jesus say: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”*? (Mat 11:28 NIV84) I keep coming to him in prayer, but he is not giving me rest! Where is Jesus and why isn’t He answering me?”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this last question is the one we will attempt to answer this morning, under the theme: **Where is Jesus . . .** 1) *While his saints suffer?* 2) *When they cry out for mercy?*

Part One: Where is Jesus while his saints suffer?

You know the story of Job, don’t you? The Bible describes him as a man who *“feared God and shunned evil.”* (Job 1:1 NIV84) No, Job wasn’t perfect, but he did trust in the LORD for the forgiveness of sin and, in the peace of this forgiveness, Job dedicated his life to the LORD. How? He worshipped God openly, shared his faith with others and helped those who were in need. Job did not take his faith lightly. He prayed for his children, reminded them of their LORD and encouraged them to repent whenever they sinned. No, Job was not perfect, but he certainly was righteous – the same way you and I are righteous: through faith in Christ Jesus our LORD.

Job enjoyed the daily blessings God richly showered upon him. One day, however, Job lost everything: all his animals, his servants and, worst of all, his children. A short time after this, Job lost his health - inflicted with a painful disease that left him so disfigured that his friends and family could not bear looking at him. Listen to how Job describes his miserable state:

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Constant pain and sorrow compounded with sleepless misery left Job feeling utterly hopeless and depressed. His friends, instead of offering comfort and encouragement, accused Job of being unrighteous, saying: "Job, you must have done something to earn God's anger? God doesn't punish the righteous!"

Job, on the other hand, defended his integrity – and rightfully so. Sadly, he went too far – claiming that God had no reason or right to be angry with him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you notice the mistaken assumption both Job and his friends made regarding his suffering? They all considered it a result of God's righteous anger with Job. This, however, was not the case. If anything, the Bible actually points to Job's righteousness (and the love God had for him) as the reason behind his severe suffering.

"What?" you might be thinking. "Job's suffering is a result of God's love? That doesn't make any sense. Are you trying to tell me that if God allows great suffering in my life – it might actually be a sign of God's love for me?" Well, yes – this is what the account of Job teaches, and the rest of the Bible confirms it.

Quoting the Proverbs and alluding to Deuteronomy, the author of Hebrews writes: *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." <sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. . . . God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.* (Heb 12:5-7, 10 NIV84)

Now, it must be understood that the "discipline" to which the author of Hebrews refers doesn't just mean the "discipline" a child might get when he does wrong. No, it refers to any hardship that is used for training purposes – sort of like a father coaching his son to run "harder, faster, stronger" so that he can succeed in his athletic dreams. In a similar way, our heavenly Father cares for us. The sufferings he sends into a Christian's life – no matter how severe they may feel – are never a result of his wrathful anger or abandonment. They are always an act of love, something meant to make us stronger and let our faith shine – all to the glory of his name!

Do you want some more Biblical proof that this is true? Consider Jesus himself, and what God the Father had him endure. Was Jesus' suffering all a result of God's anger with him? No, rather it was a result of God's anger over our sins. God never stopped loving his Son. And yet, he allowed his Son to suffer for our sake, to win our salvation – considering His Son's suffering His greatest glory.

Why does God allow his children to suffer? Only he knows the specific reasons: for some it may be a call to repentance, for others it may be to strengthen them for some future event, and for still others that they might see the awesome power our God has to save. There are countless individual reasons as to why God allows suffering – reasons that we may never know this side of the grave - but one thing is absolutely certain: when God allows the Christian to suffer, it is always out of love - for His glory and our good.

This is why the Apostle Paul could say: *we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to*

*shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:3-5 ESV)*

So, where is Jesus when his saints suffer? Jesus is in the background (just as he was for Job) allowing the pain and heartache – but only to the limits He has set. Jesus is the one who is allowing the suffering – not as a sign of anger or abandonment, but out of love. How do I know? Because of the promise He had St. Paul record: *in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28 NIV84).*

### Part Two: Where is Jesus when his saints cry out for mercy?

Still, this is an incredibly hard truth for us to accept, isn't it? Just as a child doesn't understand why a doctor sticking him with a giant needle is a "good" thing, so we can't always see the "good" God intends for us through our pain. Jesus asks us to trust him, but it is so hard and we are so weak. Even Job (who probably had a stronger faith than anyone we will ever know) struggled.

Job knew God's promises. He knew that he should "rejoice" in the LORD – confessing like he did the day his children died: *The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*" (Job 1:21 NIV84) – but his suffering kept lingering. There was no sign of relief anywhere. He felt the incessant temptations of the devil, coupled with pain, sorrow and sleeplessness. The only thing he had was the LORD's promise. This led him to cry out: *Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.*

The term "Remember" means more in the Bible than what we normally associate with this word. When Job asked God to remember, he is asking God to act – to save him according to the love and compassion He promised. Even though Job thinks that he will die – that his physical eyes may never again see earthly happiness - he still asks the LORD to save him, much like the thief on the cross did, when He said: *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* (Luk 23:42 NIV84)

Where was Jesus as Job cried out for mercy? Right there, listening to Job cry - already implementing his plan to rescue him. Even though Job's words were often a jumbled mess - even going so far as to accuse God of being unjust - the LORD, in his mercy, saw Job's faith and heard his cry for help. Job might not have known what to pray for, but that's OK, because the Holy Spirit was praying alongside of him, making Job's prayer acceptable to God. How do I know? Because of what God told St. Paul to write in his letter to the Romans: *The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.* <sup>27</sup> *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-27 NIV 84)*

Where is Jesus when we cry out in our suffering? He, together with the Holy Spirit, is listening to our prayers, asking His Father to preserve and rescue us. Jesus is with us, strengthening our faith as we hold God to his promise to save us and work in all things for our eternal good. He is with us, comforting us with His Gospel and reassuring us that, just as He rose from the dead, so He too will raise us up to live in the perfect, pain-free paradise He is even now preparing for us. And until the day comes when He will take us home, he will keep us safe – both working in us and rescuing us from all the suffering we face in life, so we can confess with the apostle Paul: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. (2Ti 4:18 NIV4)*

Brothers and sisters in Christ. If ever the LORD allows great suffering in your life, don't torment yourself trying to figure out why God is punishing you. Understand, rather, that God is treating you like a son – disciplining you for his purposes. Everything He does, he does out of love. Where is Jesus when

you suffer? He is right there with you – setting exact limits as to how far the devil can test you, in order that his gracious purpose might be accomplished in your life. Where is Jesus when we cry out for mercy? He is right next to you, listening to your plea, already having your rescue and relief in mind, and the glory He will share with you at the end of time, to which the apostle Paul says *our present sufferings are not even worth comparing*. This makes us cry out: Amen, come soon Lord Jesus to take us home to be with you forever. Amen.