

Third Sunday of Lent



Suffering

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 13)

How long, O LORD?
Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart? All day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Answer me, O LORD, my God!
Let me understand
I trust in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

And/Or

Our Loving Creator God,
we bring before you this day
the burden the whole world carries
as it endures extreme poverty and hunger
in every land.

Stretch out your loving arms, we pray,
to embrace the suffering adults and children
whose bodies, minds and spirits are shrinking
before our very eyes.

Help us to look, really look,
with clear eyes and open hearts,
to see the pain and hopelessness
in their bewildered eyes.

Kindle within each one of us
a flame of love and purpose,
and then

Enable us to channel our love into action
in every way possible
and impossible.
For this we pray. Amen.

(From Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Adapted from
Mimi A. Simson, "Lifting Women's Voices: Prayers to
Change the World," quoted in "Overflowing: Prayers
for a More Sustainable, Compassionate and Just
World," Presbyterian World Service & Development.)



Thoughts to Ponder...

What does it mean to suffer? How have you experienced suffering in your own life?

Suffering

When Jesus said the words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he uttered not only the pain of the present moment, but the suffering of experiencing forsakenness. The words he is quoting are from Psalm 22 would have been well known at the time as a Psalm of Lament.

Lament is the form of prayer that was common in the old testament practice in moments of suffering. The Old Testament is filled with laments to God from God's people—raw cries of anxiety and turmoil in the midst of suffering. They are not tidy, polite prayers, but real emotional pleas with God. Cole Arthur Riley, author and creator of *Black Liturgies* writes, "Lament is not anti-hope [...] Lament itself is a form of hope. It's an innate awareness that what is should not be. As if something is written on our hearts that tells us exactly what we are meant for, and whenever confronted with something contrary to this, we experience a crumbling. And in the rubble, we say, *God, you promised.*"⁸

When Jesus says the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he is in great pain. This is not only the pain of the cross, the torture, the betrayal by friends and alienation from followers. Jesus' pain was in part about feeling a sense of abandonment and forlornness—the ultimate form of suffering. And then at the end of Psalm 22, there is a turn at the end toward finding hope in God. Because Jesus knew human suffering we can turn to God in the midst of our own sufferings in confidence of God's care, understanding and love.

Read the Story: Matthew 27:45-46 and Psalm 22 (optional)

Questions for Reflection

1. Has there been a time in life where you have suffered in some way? How were you able to overcome that suffering? What tools did you use to cope with the suffering?
2. What insights have you learned in times of suffering?
3. What is something you can do that would lessen suffering and show love in action?

Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider the topic of suffering.

A lament for today: write a psalm of lament using psalms like Psalm 5-7, 13, 22, 25-28, 39, 42, 54-57 and 140-143 as a guide. Lay out all of the grievances, plead your case to God, and follow up with a statement of trust in God's goodness. What might Psalm 13 sound like if David or someone else wrote it today? Put it in your own words, and relate it to current events/sufferings (whether personal or global).

⁸ "This Here Flesh," 101





Finger painting: Try making a painting with your hands that allows you to express something that you are presently struggling with. Use different colours for different emotions. Do not try to create a masterpiece, rather, allow your fingers to portray your own suffering.

Clay: Use clay to push, smash and rework the clay and form it into a shape of your grief and then reform it again and again in new shapes after rolling and flattening the clay.

Visit the sick: Sometimes people find it difficult to spend time with people who are suffering in some way or another. But God asks us to be with those who are sick or hurting, just as God is with us in our pain. Think of someone who is sick, in the hospital, or a long-term care home to visit. Spend some time talking with them and trying to be present for them in the midst of their pain.

Donate a toy: Many children's hospitals use toys or stuffed animals to hand out to children who are sick. As a family, look up an organization that takes children's toys to kids at hospitals. Then, either choose one of yours to share with someone who is sick, or go shopping to buy a stuffed animal for a child who is in the hospital.

Solitude: Spend some time alone in silence and contemplate what it feels like to be alone or lonely. Write down your thoughts, write a poem or draw a picture based on what you feel. What might Jesus have felt on the cross when he was separated from God? (The amount of time should be age-appropriate and dependent on individual choice.)

Closing Prayer

Pray out loud the prayer you wrote together—a lament for today.

