

Psalm 6; Hebrews 12.3-11; 2 Samuel 12.11-23
In Suffering Be Thy Love My Peace
The Wednesday after *Oculi*
20 March 2019
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

There two major themes to take up tonight on suffering. The first is suffering for sin—how the Christian should think about it and what it's for. The second is a particular *kind* of suffering—suffering at the loss of loved ones.

You all know how we got to this point in David's life. It was a fine spring day, and David was King of Israel by now. Near the palace stood another house—the house of one of David's army officers, Uriah the Hittite. He had married a Jewess whose name was Bathsheba. Bathsheba was beautiful.

According to the Law of Moses the flow of her blood during her menstruation had made her unclean—for the life is in the blood, and here blood was spilt.

Now, this is full of ironies. To undergo the rites of purification from her uncleanness, Bathsheba bathed herself on her own roof—in the sight of the king's house. And the king, seeing her, in turn seduced her, profaning her with the sin of adultery who had just gotten done purifying herself. A great irony.

But then, again, sin is always ironic, isn't it? Suppose you'd been given a wonderful gift. Using the gift according to its directions would make amazing things happen. But using it contrary to its directions would bring disaster. But then, even after reading the directions and understanding the good that came by following them and the disaster that came by not following them, you promptly turned around and used that gift exactly as the directions said *not* to use the gift.

That's how sin is. The gift? Your body, soul, and life. The directions? God's Holy Law.

That's exactly what David had. The Lord had given him body, soul, and life. Even the gift of sex. And His Holy Law. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." What does this mean? "We should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed and husband and wife love and honor each other." Use body, soul, life, sex well, and great blessing is yours. Use it poorly and nothing but sorrow, tragedy, and curse can follow. It's nothing more than a destructive misuse of the gift.

But that's always how sin goes. We know what's for our blessing. The Lord has given us great and many gifts. Body, soul, life. Friends, spouse, children, neighbor. Our house and home and the job and money that supports it all. Those are the gifts. Use them well, and they will be a blessing. Use them poorly—which is to say, don't follow the directions the Lord has given for their use in the 10 Commandments—and nothing but disaster follows. You know this.

And yet you sin.

As did David. And it brought the destruction of Bathsheba's marriage. The murder of her husband Uriah. Lies, lies, and more lies.

And David all the while—keeping face "out there," to be sure—but David all the while suffering under the scowl of God. "Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in Your wrath....My bones are troubled."

But then finally a break: God sent him a prophet. His prophet's finger stuck in the King's face with the words fuming out of his mouth: "You are the man. You, David. You are the sinner. For your sin you shall die! And for your sin against another man's family your own son will rise up against you!"

Unpleasant words. Painful words, in fact. Words that portend and promise suffering. And suffering not, as we heard last week, for righteous deeds, but suffering for sin.

But even so, it's suffering for sin as a Christian! As a believer in Christ. As one whom God Himself has chosen to be His own child. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? It's unpleasant. But it's fatherly love. It's painful now, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

And so when this comes upon us, what are we to do but exactly what Hebrews tells us to do? #1: "Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself." Why? #2: "so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted in your struggle against sin."

When the Lord's chastisement comes, don't flee it. For in fleeing it you flee your Father who is in heaven, who loves you. And when the Lord's discipline comes, don't give up: fix your eyes on Christ who endured not righteous judgement, but the unrighteous judgement of sinners. Who, in fact, endured the unrighteous judgment of sinners so that you, a sinner, might be declared and made righteous by His own blood. Who was put to death to lift from you the death sentence hanging over your head.

Just as He did for David, too.

But here we have to make some important distinctions. Before God and in heaven, we plead and know nothing but Christ's death for our sins. The eternal death-sentence that's lifted by the blood of Christ. The lifting of the curse—that's how you must think of yourself *before God*.

But before men and on this earth, we must know nothing but God's Law and be subject to it. That's simply how it works. Before men you still live and are under the Law. And in this life, the Law will have its consequences. A murderer forgiven before God in heaven through faith in Christ must still serve his life sentence. But even that life sentence, through faith in Christ, he takes for what it is: the loving discipline of a God in heaven who disciplines for our good.

That's what we see with King David, too. Through the forgiveness pronounced over him by the prophet in the blood of Christ, he's acquitted before God in heaven and has eternal life.

But on earth sin still has its consequences. And in David's case, it's the death of the child born out of the unholy relationship he had with Bathsheba.

That's stunning, isn't it. David's punishment for his sin is the death of his child.

And now we're driven to the heart of another kind of suffering: suffering at the death of another.

The whole thing seems totally unjust to us. But isn't that how death always seems? Unjust? A mother with young children dies. And it seems...unjust. An unborn child dies—whether by the sin of abortion perpetrated by another or for some other reason. And it seems...unjust. Our spouse dies. Right in the prime of life, and before you can enjoy the retirement you had planned with him. And it seems...unjust.

But faith does not and cannot see it that way. Neither did David.

Because David, through faith in Christ—just like you—has fallen into the hands of a God who forgives sin, who raises the dead, who replaces your sin, death, and hell with His holiness, life, and salvation. And not by some inscrutable fiat, but by the blood of His own Son, Jesus Christ. And faith doesn't trust what it sees—sin and death—but Him who conquers sin and death. Faith looks at the grave even of a loved one and declares that Christ is Victor even over that.

And here we are once again. This is what suffering does. It opens up the gulf between God's promises in Christ and the sinful, moribund reality you live and sticks you right in the middle of that gulf. But it does that to exercise and increase your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And as true as Nathan's words were that David's child would die—equally true were the prophet's words, "The Lord has also put your sin away."

But that last word—that word of forgiveness—that's a gracious word, full of blessing and hope and life.

And that, finally, is where faith remains anchored, even in the midst of suffering: in the sweet word of the Gospel.

May God, for the sake of Christ, grant you all such faith. In the darkness of your suffering may you see the light of Christ. In your sorrow may your faith live on the joy of your promised heaven. And in the face of death—even of those nearest and dearest to you—may you cling to Christ, who is your life and the life of all believers.

+ In nomine Iesu +

Amen.

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