

## **A Suffering that Heals**

It's not easy for us to see anything redemptive in our present human suffering. Our culture far more easily goes to a place of seeing suffering and pain as a hindrance to profit or progress, an occasion to blame, perhaps something you deserve, or simply bad luck. Christians, from all over the world, are gathering today to say something different. On Good Friday, we are revealing through our prayers, presence, and music that there is something eternally good about this day. In the words of our beloved prayer book, we are here today "not mourning as those without hope, but in thankful remembrance of Gods great goodness demonstrated toward us."

Good Friday can only make sense if you believe God is truly Good and only wants the best for us. Buckle your seat belts as some of the readings from the scripture today, and even the prayers, can lead you away from knowing a loving God if you are not careful. God does not delight in our suffering—he only uses our suffering to bring us closer to him. His anger is a passionate love that only wants to liberate us from oppression—like his encounter with the money changers at the temple. Good Friday is good because this day, above all others, reveals how suffering can be powerfully redemptive and lead us to a deeper experience of love—love for ourselves, love for each other and love for God.

In today's reading from Isaiah God's wonderful plan of redemption is personified in the form of a Suffering Servant whose power is made perfect through vulnerability and humility and is able to transform something that is ugly and painful into something beautiful and even glorious. The ancient Israelites believed the Suffering Servant represented their nation, a chosen people—enduring persecution, slavery, and oppression—for the higher purpose of revealing God's great plan of deliverance from all suffering and oppression.

Christians came to believe that Isaiah was prophetically foreshadowing the arrival of Jesus Christ as a personal redeemer and messiah as well as one who would be a force of love, beauty, and transformation for all people. This message of finding a love that transforms couldn't be more important to us than at this time when we as

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individuals and as a nation are marred and scared by the emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic impact of Covid-19.

Some of our pain has nothing to do with human choices or sin. As far as we know, no one created this virus in some remote laboratory to unleash upon us. But nevertheless human sin has played a role in our suffering: stock-piling supplies, ignoring vulnerable populations in prisons, nursing homes, shelters, and immigration detention centers, and not taking adequate safety measures to prepare for and contain the virus. A lot of pain has been created but today we celebrate the arrival of a humble servant in the name of Jesus Christ who demonstrated by his dying on the Cross that he always provides a way for suffering to lead to redemption, healing, and even beauty.

In front of me is a Cross that reminds us of this pathway. If you look at it closely you can see that the artist has taken what we would consider as junk: rusty screws, a random horse shoe, scraps of metal, and creatively put them together to form something that is beautiful, powerful, and healing. I invite all of you, in your own way, to imagine laying down at the foot of this cross all that you regard as junk, excess baggage and pain that might hinder you on your road to Easter.

We all need the reminder of the Cross and Good Friday to resist the temptation to turn away from the suffering in our world that God's love and compassion within us requires us to feel. Like the Suffering Servant we are a people who are called to share in the misfortune, pain, and fear of others and point them to hope—that even in suffering there is a reason, a future, and a God who is willing to lay down his life so that we, too, might live and find a suffering that heals.        AMEN.