

**Got to Go Through It**

*“The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward ...” Matthew 10:41a*

Can’t go over it; can’t go under it; can’t go around it; got to go through it! Some of you might recognize this refrain from a childhood nursery rhyme, *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*. This refrain is chanted every time an obstacle, like wavy grass or a river, etc., is introduced in the rhyme. Not only are these phrases pretty catchy, they also are really applicable to many more things than just the obstacles in the nursery rhyme.

For example, in these summer days in Fort Wayne, construction is very much this way. Can’t go over it; can’t go under it; can’t go around it; got to go through it! Whether it’s right here with our church and school buildings or even on the roads, construction seems impossible to avoid! How many of us have tried to avoid construction on the roads in town only to get caught in construction on the highways? Unfortunately, right now, we’re just in this time with construction where we’ve got to go through it!

Honestly, I think the same can be said about suffering in this life. Every person in this world will endure suffering. Not to make light of this reality, but these phrases still fit when it comes to suffering. Try as we might, we can’t really go over suffering; can’t really go under it; can’t really go around it; eventually, we’ve got to go through it. While none of us willingly like to face this difficult truth, I don’t think we’d deny it.

Our Bible readings for this weekend also highlight this truth. Suffering is something that people are going to face, yes, even God’s people. And our third reading, the Gospel reading from Matthew, adds another challenging dimension. We are met with a dilemma that as we endure suffering in this world, a relationship with Jesus isn’t likely going to bring immediate relief from our suffering. In fact, Jesus’ own words in our Gospel reading, make it very clear that following Him will actually add to our suffering on this earth.

Hearing these words of Jesus this weekend and recalling His words from the past couple of weekends, makes following Jesus on top of our suffering a really hard sell. Two weekends ago, He shared that His followers would be persecuted by governing authorities. Last weekend, we heard that His followers will be hated by all. Now this weekend, we discover how divisive Jesus truly will be. Do we really need all this added to the challenges and burdens we are already carrying?

With the sufferings we have faced, are facing or will face in our earthly lives, our natural tendency is to try and avoid as much suffering as possible rather than go through it. We become stubbornly determined to find a way over, under or around the suffering that faces us instead of going through it. As we fight and claw to find another way, we still likely find ourselves facing some version of suffering and worse yet we find ourselves trying to go over, under or around God instead of through Him. So then, in these challenging moments of suffering, our sinful selves find God to be more of the obstacle than even the experience we’re suffering through!

My fellow partners in sin and suffering, I know that these words are difficult to hear. And I don’t pretend to fully know or understand all the sufferings that consume your life. What I do know is that our walk through suffering doesn’t need to come at the expense of our walk with God. Yes, we may at times question God’s plan in the midst of our suffering. We may even become upset, frustrated and even angry at Him. But thanks be to God, He can handle our raw emotions. And when things have boiled over, He doesn’t leave but instead leads us back to confess our sinful struggles and follow Him.

Yes, we need our God in the sufferings we face. Even when following Him doesn’t look like much and certainly doesn’t sound like much this side of heaven, this relationship is everything for us.

Our God is the answer to our suffering and sin. He is the One who chose to go through this world's suffering, to face hell upon the cross, to endure the wages of sin, death, for our sake. He is the One who rose for our sake so that we might know real hope in the midst of our suffering. He is victorious over sin and this world's suffering. Yes, that includes your suffering and mine. And by His mercy and grace, His victory is our victory.

While we wait for this victory to be fully made known, we aren't left to endure our suffering alone. He is with us. He calms and anchors us with His Word. He comforts and assures us through His ongoing and active promises made to us in our Baptism. He sustains and strengthens us with His Body and Blood. He cares and listens to us in prayer. He encourages and supports us through other Christians who come alongside us recognizing the burdens we're carrying. Yes, we need our God in the sufferings we face so that we can stop endlessly searching for ways to go over, under or around our suffering and instead by His grace, humbly go through them.

And these words and promises from our Lord aren't merely empty and hollow distractions for our times of suffering. No, they are words of power, conviction and hope to see us through the hardships that will come. Our evidence of this, is Peter, who was one of the disciples who first heard Jesus speak these challenging words in our Gospel reading this weekend. Yes, the same Peter who tried to prevent Jesus from suffering the pain and torture of the cross. The same Peter who denied his connection to Jesus in the face of his own potential persecution. The same Peter whom Jesus forgave and restored. The same Peter whom Jesus told that he would die for His name's sake. This Peter, Jesus led to go through suffering – not over, under or around it.

Listen now to how our God emboldened His servant Peter to write about the Christian's suffering, years after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension: **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed ... let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”** (1 Peter 4:12-13, 19)

The Lord sustained Peter through his suffering. The Lord led Peter to a perspective of suffering that didn't come at the expense of his relationship with the Lord. Peter understood what it meant to receive Jesus and His reward in this life. There would be suffering and yet it was something that Peter could endure because He knew that Jesus had suffered for him. And because Jesus had suffered for him, Peter knew that his earthly suffering would give way to the glorious victory that Jesus had won for him.

What our God did for Peter, He is doing for us today. He is the One who will sustain you in your suffering. He is the One who will lead you to know and understand that your relationship with Him can handle the suffering you endure. Our Lord has been through suffering Himself and He will see you through your suffering just like He did for Peter. Even in the midst of our suffering, we can cling to our God who is faithful and will deliver us.

May our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith in the midst of suffering so that we might be assured that facing our suffering through Him is far better than facing suffering by going over, under or around Him! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan