

Trinity 16, 2015

Suffering in the Will of God

Ephesians 3:13-21

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR

By Rev. Mr. William Baker

Wasn't it a great relief when you came to accept Christ as your Savior and all your sufferings ended...life became so easy didn't it? And I think you would agree that one of the best parts is not having to suffer illness or experience pain; no creaks or aches for these aging bodies. And what about the part when the money came rolling in and all our financial burdens ended, good times? And then there's the miracle of the weather being perpetually perfect for whatever we feel like doing for the day. Nothing ever ruins our plans. Ah yes...being a Christian is an easy life.

Well those who don't understand the purpose of 'tribulation' may feel that that's how it should be if we are the sons and daughters of a good and loving God. But, of course this is all just tongue and cheek. We know better...much better than to think that we as Christians are protected from suffering the ills of a fallen world. But even today we still here the cries of those who wonder why God allows the faithful to suffer.

Last Sunday Chris took us down the road of the Passion in a unique way...he showed us that the passion, from Jesus' betrayal to His hanging on the cross, was something that Jesus 'desired' with all His might. It seemed strange to us to hear that Jesus would want to go through such agony. But, His desire for such a thing came from his deeper understanding that a greater good would be the outcome...and that greater good, of course, was our forgiveness and ultimate salvation. It was a desire that was willing to go sinlessly to the cross to accept the pain for our sins...all for the sake of love.

So my sermon today is like a 'part two' of the sermon Chris gave last week. If the Passion of Jesus was God's desire toward us, then we

should be able to see our Tribulations as our desires toward God. Our first verse this morning is from Ephesians 3:13...

"I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."

Here we see St. Paul in total acceptance of all tribulations that come his way and he sees them as paths to glory. And not just for himself but for all who have eyes to see. Those who are there, as witnesses visually or through the many letters, learn something from Paul's sufferings for Christ...they learn how to trust God and walk in faith...they learn the importance of prayer and a life lived in the Spirit...they learn that in following Christ, sacrifice will be required and they learn, in the end all that is lost in this life will be worth it in the next.

To many of us, if not all, tribulation is something we do not desire...and I'm with you. I don't desire the loss of a loved one; I don't like the thought of losing everything I own in a house fire, I would not like the embarrassment of being falsely accused. Can our tribulations really be an opportunity to glorify the brethren and even God Himself? Yes...it can when our suffering is done in the Will of God! I am also confident that Jesus did not like the thought of going through the pain of His Passion any more than we enjoy the pain of Tribulation.

But the pain is not the focus of the desire. The pain of tribulation is not the climax to His story or ours, but only a sign post to the climax. The desire for such pain comes from the deeper knowledge of the greater good that is in our future. And our willingness to accept the path put before us, no matter how daunting, is the ultimate expression of a love that is evidenced through us to our brothers and sisters in Christ. You see...our tribulations are not simply for our own benefit...no. It is through our sufferings that others can witness what they cannot see in themselves, that they may be transformed to a higher love, that others may be turned from sin and saved and as St. Paul prays in his epistle to the Ephesians; *"...that he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith..."*

And there it is! Our tribulations, while strengthening us personally, open the eyes of those around us by our response to those sufferings. And how is it that we are able to accept and respond properly to these tribulations? By Faith Paul tells us. Faith in knowing where our hope lies and resting in the remembrance of the sufferings of the many martyrs who have gone before us and those who still give their lives to this very day.

Faith is the foundation on which perfect love takes its stand. Listen once again to the Apostle Paul as he writes to the Romans:

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy ghost which is given unto us.” (Romans 5: 1-5)

C. S. Lewis (one of our Anglican divines) wrote: “Every disability conceals a vocation, if only we can find it, which will turn the necessity to glorious gain.”

If we think of our disability as any of the many tribulations we experience, then we can begin to understand that within these sufferings a greater good is waiting to be exposed for the good of ourselves and the brethren...a way of coming closer to the glory of God by relying more fully on his unlimited love and care. This is what brought me to seek ordination in this church and why I stand here before you today. God loved us so much that he was completely devoted in his suffering for us...and now we reciprocate that love by facing our trials in the same way.

Just like we learned that the Passion of Christ is God’s desire toward us so too can our Tribulations be an expression of our desires toward God. In our Tribulations we give glory to God by facing our sufferings in a positive way edifying the grace of our Lord, which strengthens and enriches our brethren. We are a continuation of Christ’s Passion! The FORGIVENESS is done!...The SALVATION is complete!...but the brining in

of the harvest is the hard work that we must remain faithful in...working the ground of this world is our tribulation experience! May this understanding transform our view of suffering and our calling within it.

It is the best within us that is exposed by Tribulation. We should, like Christ, desire the best outcome by embracing the test of our sufferings and in doing so we will experience ultimate joy.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.