

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

"The Passion of the Christ"

Scripture: 52:13-53:5

Hymns: "Beneath the cross of Jesus" 238; "Twas on that night" 537 (vv. 1-4); Go to dark Gethsemane 230 (vv. 1-2) Ah! Holy Jesu how hast thou offended 234; Were you there 233 (vv. 1-5); "Man of Sorrows" 210; "Alas and did my Saviour bleed" 235

March 3, 2015

Rev. Steve Filyk

Life is full of suffering.

Sometimes we can prepare for it.

Sometimes we can endure it.

Sometimes our suffering can be managed.

We feel a head-ache coming on,

So we pop some Advil,

chase it down with water

And pretty soon we are as good as gold.

But not all of our pains

Can be managed that easily.

Sometimes we are blind-sided,

knocked right off our feet.

We knew the company

was going through some restructuring.

But when our manager approached us

Handed us an empty cardboard box

And asked us to step away from our computer...

A mix of sorrow and anger and helplessness

Washed right over us.

Life is full of suffering.

Of course those who have suffering a little

Soon realise there is plenty more to be had.

Some of you may recall the tragedy

That hit Newtown, Connecticut, back in 2012.

"Adam Lanza was a lonely twenty-year-old

who lived with his mother in Newtown...

On the morning of December 14, 2012,

Lanza retrieved two pistols and a semiautomatic rifle

from his mother's gun collection...

[he] walked into her bedroom

[and] proceeded to fire four bullets into her

as she lay in bed.

Then he drove to his old elementary school,

shot his way through the locked door,

and began a rampage that would shock the world.

The principal and a school psychologist,

who rushed from a conference room

when they heard shattering glass...

were his first victims...

Lanza passed one first-grade classroom

and entered that of Lauren Rousseau,

a substitute for a teacher on maternity leave.

He shot Rousseau and her fourteen students

as well as a special education teacher

who had been employed for just over a week.

In that classroom the police would find fourteen small bodies

huddled together, each shot at least twice...

Incredibly, one six-year-old girl had survived by playing dead.

She walked out of the school covered in her classmates' blood.

"Mommy , I'm okay, but all my friends are dead,"

she said..."¹

I could tell you more of the account.
 It's narrated by Philip Yancy in his book
 "The Question that Never Goes Away".

But you have probably heard enough.
 You get the picture.
 Life is full of suffering.

Most of us have never been part of great catastrophes
 The likes of which occurred at Newtown.

We've never had children cut down in a school shooting.
 We haven't lost a home in an earthquake or tsunami.
 Few of us have lived as refugees
 Or faced the ravages of war.

And yet we all know something of suffering, don't we.
 We've lost loved-ones.
 We've battled illnesses.
 We've endured mistreatment or abuse.

In those times we often start asking questions.
 Why me?
 Why did this have to happen?
 Will I make it through this?
 Has God forsaken me?

And where is God in this mess?
 Where is God in this mess?

Our Bibles don't answer all these questions.
 But they do give a pretty clear picture
 Of where God is, in times of suffering.

Just consider the story of Jesus.
 If you've spent any time in Sunday School
 You know a little about him.

In Jesus' birth there is a bold statement
 That God has come near.

Listen to the commentary of Matthew
 After Joseph is told about the significance
 of Mary's pregnancy, in a dream.

"All this took place to fulfill
 what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:
 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
 and they shall name him Emmanuel,"
 which means, "God is with us."ⁱⁱ

Or consider the introduction
 That John uses to begin his Gospel:
 "The Word became flesh and blood,
 and moved into the neighborhood."ⁱⁱⁱ

What the Gospels tell us
 Is that God hasn't abandoned God's creation.

No, God cares so much about the world,
 God cares so much about humanity,
 That God is born as one of us.

Of course Jesus didn't show up,
 Full grown at the Temple; carried in on the wings of angels.
 Jesus was born in a stable,
 To a young teenager.

Jesus lived and loved and labored under the same hot sun
 We live and love and labor under.
 He depended on others
 Just as we depend on others.
 He endured the sort of suffering
 That is common to every human being.

God walked among us
 as a vulnerable, weak, human being.

Of course Jesus faced much more.
 We heard about this, this morning.

In obedience to God
He faced his opponents,
While his closest friends scattered.

He was falsely accused.
Put through a sham of a trial.
Then cruelly tortured and executed.

Jesus endured this
Without expressing any desire for retribution.
The words he offered to his executioners
Were words of forgiveness.

The story of Jesus' life
Teaches us of a God who comes near us
In vulnerability.

The story of Jesus' death
Reveals the willingness of God
To endure the worst of human experience
To face life's greatest injustices and tragedies.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah:
"Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases".^{iv}

Now to some of us this may offer little solace.
I mean in the midst our suffering
We want deliverance not solidarity.

And yet there is something to be said
About the gift of solidarity.

Philip Yancy, that writer
Who described for us the horrors of that school shooting
was on the ground in Newtown
In the wake of that disaster.

He had the opportunity to observe
Some of the kindnesses that were shown
To those in the midst of their grief.

He notes that:
"One of the most touching gestures
came from other schoolchildren.

At the suggestion of a [school] parent,
the president of Connecticut's Parent Teacher Student Association
sent an email to Connecticut schools
asking them to cut snowflakes out of paper

[snowflakes] to help decorate the new school
where [the students of the shooting] would attend.

The request went viral.
Within two days the first box of snowflakes arrived at his office,
and soon brown UPS trucks
and semi-trailers from the Postal Service
were arriving daily
to unload thousands upon thousands of
boxes

from every state and fifty foreign countries...

After decorating every school in the district,
they still had millions left over.
Many of the snowflakes
came with handwritten notes from children.

Some included piggy bank collections
in plastic Ziploc bags,
or football and baseball cards.

[Of course you can guess the underlying message.]
The underlying message is simple:
You are not alone."^v

Today is GOOD Friday

It is good because today we hear that same message.

Jesus' lonely death teaches us,

No screams to us,

That we are not alone

In whatever suffering we bear.

"Christ is God crying I am here."^{vi}

ⁱ Yancey, Philip (2014-01-07). The Question That Never Goes Away (pp. 111-112). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 1:22-23 NRSV

ⁱⁱⁱ John 1:14 MSG

^{iv} Isaiah 53:4 RSV

Of course God's solidarity with us

Isn't the entire story.

There is suffering,

And there is a redeeming of that suffering

That comes with resurrection.

But that's Sunday morning. Amen.

^v Yancey, Philip (2014-01-07). The Question That Never Goes Away (pp. 56-57). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

^{vi} Yancey, Philip (2014-01-07). The Question That Never Goes Away (pp. 91-92). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.