

Theme: "Ouch it hurts! Why does God let us suffer?"

**Sunday 22 June 2014 Worship, Milson Combined Church
Silvia Purdie**

Verse for the day: We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:10

Prayer for the day

Lord Jesus, in your suffering we find strength, in your presence we find healing, in your Spirit we find comfort. Work in our pain as well as our joy, we pray, Amen.

Bible readings 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Luke 10: 25-37: The Good Samaritan

Sermon: 'Ouch it hurts'

Psalm 142: Brought Low

Suitable for prayers of Intercession

Let us pray ...

we pray for the needs of others and ourselves using the words of Psalm 142:

I cry out loud in anguish,
I cry out loud to God. 1
Is anyone out there?
Does anyone care? 4

Lord, we pray for those who are suffering -
for those who are lonely
for those who live alone,
and those who feel lost in a crowd.

Wherever I go I am attacked, 3
my own thoughts suck me down into dark traps.
No one knows me, no one cares. 4

Lord, we pray for those who are suffering -
for those with mental illness
and those struggling with addiction
for broken families and lonely marriages.

My spirit is faint, but you know the way out. 3
I long for the safety that can only be found in you, O God. 5
Listen, Lord! Help me, Lord,
for I am brought very low. 6

Lord, we pray for those who are suffering -
Give signs of hope to those who live in darkness.
Give strength and skill to those who work to help others.

Bring me out of captivity,
bring me into the land of the living.
Bring me out in gratitude and humility.
Bring me into the company of good people.
You will be gracious to me, I know it! 7

Lord, we pray for ourselves -
Thank you for all the ways you have restored us,
for your love and care and friendship.
You know our heart, you know our needs.
You will be gracious to us, we know it.

Sermon

Alright, yes, I know, you only just had the Good Samaritan story last month! Why are we having it again? You've heard it a hundred times. But normally we hear it from the point of view of the helper. The standard Good Samaritan sermon goes – helping other people in need is a core part of the job description for Christian people ... we are not holier than thou, we are not tied up in rules, we just reach out to people who are hurting, we go the extra mile, we are there for you!

I wonder, today, if we might hear the story again, but this time from the point of view of the man who got mugged. This is his story, after all, as much as it is the Good Samaritan's story.

He is a normal person. Jesus sets up his story with just a common Joe, a Jewish person, could be you or me, just a bloke out walking from one town to another, minding his own business on the road, just like you or I do every day, just doing what we do. Could have been Judy our social worker just out picking up someone for Friendship Centre.

And he is 'set upon by thieves'. pounced on. attacked. Beaten up. stripped of his purse, his clothes. stripped of his ID, his social status ... his Visa card, his keys, his cell phone, gone. He is beaten, randomly, and left semi-conscious, stripped even of his voice. Left to die. Someone somewhere is expecting him, someone will come looking for him, but for now he is simply a half-dead body on the side of the road. Somewhere else he has status, resources, community, but for now he is just a man in pain.

Pain does that to us. When the crises of life hit us they strip us of our pretensions. When illness or accident hit we are taken right back to the basic needs of our bodies, our basic instincts and demands, that we share with every other person on the planet. When someone we love dies we experience the battering of grief no matter what colour our skin or how much money is in the bank.

The man broken by the side of the road is not just someone we might help, it is also you, and me. Everybody hurts sometimes. Life happens to us. Despite our best efforts, we will trip over loss, failure, devastating grief, regrets, guilt, rejection ... for such is the stuff of human living. Oh, sure, we'd much rather be the Samaritan, with our donkey and pocket full of silver coins, our caring heart ... it feels good to help others.

Much harder when you are the one stripped and hurting. Much harder to be draped over the donkey's back fighting for breath.

And when we are in pain, we fight to understand why – why me? why not me? why my dear dear friend? It's not fair. It's too soon! Why does it hurt, Lord make it stop hurting!

Easy the temptation to try to dull the pain with alcohol or chocolate or leaving town or working all the time ... our whole Western civilization is dedicated to the task of numbing the pain, distracting our hearts from the sharp ache of loneliness and longing. We medicate for heart-ache and desperately try to banish illness and death into clean medical corners for people in crisp uniforms to contain for us.

Only, it doesn't work. We still find ourselves tasting our own blood by the side of the road with bruised bones. We just try harder to pretend that we're OK.

Why, Lord? Why me? Why does it hurt? Come rescue me, make the pain stop!

When we are in pain there's nothing worse than a trite answer, someone trying to cheer you up ... people tend to 'walk on the other side of the road' by avoiding you or avoiding the unpleasantness or avoiding the truth or telling you to look on the bright side.

But what can we say? What do we need to hear when we are hurting? What truth really does meet us in our point of need? What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ for you and for me when we are in pain?

It's not rocket science. It's not super spiritual or super complicated. Just three core truths ... that together keep us calm enough to not freak out, keep us safe enough to trust that we will come through to something better, and keep us held enough to trust and be grateful even through the worst of times.

Number one, if you will excuse me, Shit happens. Life on planet earth is wonderful but also deeply unfair. God promises us many things, but not protection from pain. Getting hurt is an inevitable partner to love. Sacrifice and suffering are not trivial ideas, they are real and thoroughly unpleasant at the time.

The majesty of the Psalms is how honest they are about life. Anything you and I might feel or go through is echoed in Psalms – anger, fear, anxiety, abandonment, wounding, exhaustion, attack, injustice, you name it, even the most unacceptable of all emotions - the desire for revenge, it's all there. All of it considered relevant to a true life of faith, all of it material for prayer and worship. Life happens, and it is not all pretty. I think that the more honest we can be about our emotions, about what is happening to us and how it touches us most deeply, the less likely we are to get stuck there.

Number two: Surprise, surprise, God got there before us! The second fundamental truth about pain is that nothing we can ever go through can separate us from God in Jesus Christ. Why? Because he has already lived it, to the cross, on the cross, through the grave, down to hell, busting the stone away, out into life, up into heaven ... Jesus, our friend and Lord has wept it and fought it and overcome it. He's a step ahead of us and he meets us right there in it. Don't be afraid. You are not alone. I am here with you.

That's the harshness of the priest and Levite, that they would not come close. The Samaritan "went to him". touch, presence, just being there ... these are the first and foremost gifts of God through other people when we are hurting, as other people become sacrament of Christ's presence. And, in our solitude and most hidden secrets we also can know Christ's presence there. You are not alone. I am here with you, says the crucified and risen one.

Number 3, Pain forms us. Honest courage in the face of pain shapes us. That is the 3rd deep truth. There is no other way to become fully who you are, to grow up in Christ. It just has to hurt, sorry.

Like the clay in the potter's hands we must be broken and smashed and worked over, and we just don't know at the time what it's all for but it makes the biggest difference to trust that it is all for something and that something will be something important, something good. The prophets liked this metaphor, like Isaiah 45:9

Does the clay say to the potter,

‘What are you making?’

Does your work say,

‘The potter has no hands’?

Actually, says God to the complaining pot-in-the-making, Actually, I did make the entire universe, and I did make you and I am making you and Actually I do know what I am doing here!

And so we do come out the other side of pain, and when we have walked through the suffering and loss with a sense (at least sometimes) of God's presence and sustaining care, and when we have been able to tell the truth to ourselves and God about what we have experienced there ... then we do emerge changed, we do become more spacious on the inside, we care more about the things that God cares about and less about some other stuff, we are carved out, hollowed out, in a way that increases our capacity to love others, and to love God. We emerge from pain with a sense of gratitude, despite what we have lost.