



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

February 25, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

2nd Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Job 1:13-22](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 22 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Romans 5:1-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 8:31-38](#)

Rethinking Religion: Rethinking Suffering under the Cross What Does Suffering Mean?

1. Christ's suffering _____ who _____ is
 - a. Christ's suffering means _____ for us
2. Our view of _____ defines our _____
 - a. We are _____ and _____
3. The _____ of Christ sets us _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

There are many different conceptions and thoughts about who God is. The video that we showed at the beginning and our whole series is about **Rethinking Religion**. People have so many concepts about God. Have you ever thought what we think about God and our relationship with Him and who God is says a lot about who we are? Our search to find out and really learn who God is, is also defining who we are and what our lives mean.

A great example of this: we heard about Job and his suffering and how he was crying out to God. They discussed over and over again what was going on as his suffering was going on. Suffering brings this out as we wonder who God is and who we are.

Another interesting person that you can think about who suffered and was saying "God, who are you and who am I? What is my purpose?" is Moses. He was this guy who was saved. The Egyptians were killing the Israelites, but he was saved and raised in the house of Pharaoh even though he was an Israelite. That must have torn him up. He was wondering who he was, an Egyptian or an Israelite. How did that boil over? He ended up killing an Egyptian. Was he then welcomed into the Israelites? "Hey, our savior is here!" No. In fact, they said "You're going to cause more trouble for us." The Egyptians

didn't seem like they wanted to cover it up, so he runs away. As he was away from Egypt wondering what his purpose was and saying "Who am I," God comes to him. God comes to Moses and says, "Go to Egypt and help bring my people out." Do you know what he asks? He says, "Who are you? What am I supposed to say to them when they ask who you are?" As he was going through this suffering and then being asked to do this, he was saying "God, who are you? And who am I?"

When we understand who God is and who we are, it shows a lot about who we are. I think many people in this world are struggling with their purpose and meaning in life because they don't know who God is and what His relationship is with us. Then they struggle to know what our lives are about. They struggle with what comes in our lives. One of the biggest things of that is suffering. So today, we look at the meaning of suffering. **What does suffering mean?**

As Paul writes to the Romans, we know that life for the Christians in Rome and in a culture which did not like Christianity, it wasn't easy. We know later in Rome there is going to be some of the greatest persecutions against Christians, so Paul is going to write to the Romans and talk about who God is and what we can do with suffering and what it means for us.

As we look here though, it's not just about our suffering. There is more to it. As Paul writes in Chapter 5, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."*** He says we are justified by faith through Jesus. But how did this happen? Later, in Verse 9: ***"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"*** How are we justified? That big word "justified" that the rest of the world really doesn't understand but here, we use it in church a lot. Just as if I had not sinned. To be declared "not guilty." How do we receive that? We receive that through the blood of Christ. And we are rescued from God's wrath. How are we rescued from God's wrath? We are rescued through the suffering of Christ.

What does that mean? It means *Christ's suffering reveals who God is*; that God loves you so much to send His Son; to not only send His Son to live among us, but He didn't come to be a king and to sit on the throne but to suffer. And if you want to know who God is, people are searching for God and they wonder what does He look like? What does He want to do? What does He want or care about us? Look at the cross. That is your God, who loves you and that is what we need to know about God. God came to live a perfect life for you and as He tells us in the Gospel Lesson, to have these horrible things happen to Him; things that the disciples and Peter said "No way!" That's your God. So people are looking for God, but the truth is, in Christ's suffering, God is revealed to us. You see His love, His mercy. It's there.

What else does it mean for us? In that first verse, it said, ***“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God...”*** What does it mean to have peace with God? Christ’s suffering means we have peace. *Christ’s suffering means peace for us*, between God and man. The world is searching for peace. The world wants peace in so many ways. In wars, in relationships, and there is sin everywhere. There is sin in the world, sin you do, sin that other people do to you, and it’s so hard to find peace. You might be restless at night, worried about the future, worried about what has happened, stressed about all the things of this world. It’s hard to find peace. But in Christ, through His suffering, it says you have peace; not just a little bit of an emotion or even just a temporary pause to a war, but a true peace—an objective reality that you are forgiven and nothing can take that away.

If you can have peace with God and you know that He loves you so much to do this, then what do you have to fear? What do you have to worry about if God has loved you so much? Do you have to worry if God will provide for this or that or that? In the Gospel Lesson, Jesus talks about how we get so focused on the world and the things we see, but He says the most important is the spiritual thing. The spiritual war that is going on and Jesus has won and fought that battle for you. If you understand that, then you can understand suffering in your life as well.

As He says that we stand in peace, we stand in that because of the grace He has given us through Jesus, and we then have a hope. But where does that hope come from and why do you need hope? If things are going well, do you need hope? Do you have anything to hope for if everything is smooth and dandy? No, because you are enjoying what you have and you’re not thinking about the future. You’re basking in all the great things right now, but what about in suffering?

He explains then. ***“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*** When you understand God’s love for you and that He has everything taken care of, especially your spiritual life, your eternity, then we can see suffering in a different way. I think what you can say is *our view of suffering defines our lives*. What do we see here that tells us suffering is good? ***Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame.*** So this suffering is good because it leads to the hope that we have no reason to shame, but to trust in Jesus.

Does the rest of the world think that about suffering, that suffering is a good thing? If you don’t believe in God, what does it mean about you and your life and your purpose here? Look a little bit at evolution. If God doesn’t exist, if we just came about by accident and our purpose is to eat, drink and be merry, to enjoy life, then is suffering

any good? Does anything good come from suffering? If there is no God, is there any afterlife? If a loved one dies, what hope is there? It's just this life. Where are the answers for that sadness and pain? There is no point. There is no purpose for that suffering for a disease, something that you deal with your whole life or all these things. People will just run from that. They will be angry and say "Why does this have to happen?"

What about you and me, as Christians? How can we view the suffering and the difficulties in our lives? God still has us and He has a purpose and a plan. Suffering is not to be avoided because Christ came to suffer. If our God, our Savior suffered, then suffering has a purpose. In our lives we see that purpose. We can grow in our understanding of what this life is about. It's not all about this life. We can persevere through difficulties. Life is not easy, but God will be with us in that. That perseverance builds character to not be so angry or bitter. We can trust and have a joy when all others would say "How can you have joy at this?" Finally, a hope; a hope not like the rest of the world, "I wish this will happen," but we know a certainty because God's words and promises ring true, even in the midst of suffering.

As we look at that suffering, we see our lives. What do we know about our lives? Sometimes the things we deal with are our fault. That doesn't mean all suffering, but we know this also shows the love of Christ for us. He says, ***"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** That's one of the most beautiful passages around. ***While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** We need to remember that *we are saints and sinners*. God loved you and redeemed you and saves you and forgives you even though you are a sinner, even though you don't deserve it. That's the whole point of grace, that we don't deserve any of this. But notice it's not that you have to make up or try to be good or do a certain amount for God to love you.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Maybe one of the best pictures of this is the prodigal son. The prodigal son comes back and says to his father, "Make me a servant. I don't even deserve to be a part of your house." Does the father then say, "You're right. You need to earn your way back in. For about a year, you can work out in the fields and then maybe we can welcome you back into the family"? No! He didn't do that! He forgives him and welcomes him back into the house and throws a party. This shows the love of God that is based off of grace and mercy. It's not about us having to do things for God to love us. God loves us in spite of who we are. In spite of the sins we commit and the consequences they may bring, God loves us and He redeems us and He forgives us and helps us in our difficulties; in our sins, in our crosses we carry, in those things that are not because of sins we've done but we still suffer. Those times when we cry out and say "God, why," our Lord is there.

Notice then what this really means for us. ***“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*** We’re at peace. We know what suffering means, so what does that do for us? *The suffering of Christ sets us free.* It sets us free because as we see that we’re loved and redeemed, not by what we do, I don’t have to look at my works and say “God needs this for me to get to heaven.” Instead, I can serve and love others. God uses my works, my good deeds, to love those around me. We’re free to love and serve because God loves us. We can be motivated and compelled by His love. We are free from the burden of the Law and that I must do this, I must earn God’s love, but no, I can go and serve and love and share that love with others.

How else does that free us? It frees us from the greatest fears and worries of this life. The words of our hymn, the last verse, “And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on, I’ll sing on; And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on.” We are also freed to not fear death, that thing that so many people have no answers to and fear their whole life. They want to avoid death at all costs. Even though there is sadness and tears, we can rejoice and know what it means. We are loved and redeemed. If our Savior died and rose again, that means for us that though we will die, we will live forever. Knowing that, knowing we are loved and redeemed and have eternal life ahead, we again are freed to live this life in suffering, in difficulty, in good times, in bad times, free, because we know God has a purpose. It’s a purpose not just for a short time in this life. It’s a purpose for eternity. God loves you so much He sent His Son to die for you and to bring you to heaven. This suffering that you go through, that we go through, that Christ has suffered for you, and that love means we are forgiven and set free now and into eternity. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.