

Worship Service for April 18th: 3rd Sunday of Easter

- **New Testament:** Acts 3:12-19
- **New Testament:** Luke 24:36b-48
- **Psalms:** Psalm 4

Announcements:

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- We maintain a minute of silence as we pray for the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip whose funeral was yesterday at St. George's Chapel in Windsor Castle and all those who were killed in the mass shooting in Portapique as this Sunday marks one year since they were killed. May the souls of the faithful departed continue to rest in peace in the Lord's bosom.
- Our next Bible study is on April 21st. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 3.

Sermon Title: Only The Suffering God Can Help!

"Only the suffering God can help." These words were written in a letter to a friend by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a Nazi cell towards the end of WW2. He was a German theologian and minister of the Gospel during the reign of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was a charismatic individual, but he was as evil as they come. After the defeat of the Germans in WW1 and the economic depression that came with it, most of the German people looked up to him. Sadly, many Christians considered him as one who was sent by God to the Germans. In their eyes, he looked like Christ's replacement.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the few Christians who were against Hitler. He was determined not only to oppose this idea but if possible, to kill Hitler. He was imprisoned for participating in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler and he was executed a few weeks before the end of the war.

While in prison, Bonhoeffer didn't stop teaching about Christ. He wrote that "God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. The Bible makes quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help."

Jesus Christ did exactly that while he was on earth – he suffered, died and was buried. He became our suffering Sovereign so that we could be set free from our own prison of sufferings. When he appeared to his disciples as we see in our passage in Luke, he shows the proof of his suffering in his hands and his side.

Are you going through a challenge right now and wondering why you? Well Bonhoeffer taught that sufferings come even to God's children. He himself experienced it to the point of imprisonment and death. A camp doctor who was present at his execution had this to say about him,

"The prisoners were taken from their cells, and the verdicts of court martial read out to them. Through the half-open door in one room of the huts, I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued in a few seconds. In the almost 50 years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

"Only the suffering God can help." When we go through trials and challenges, we sometimes feel like God has abandoned us. Lord, why am I going through so much pain? Why is my loved one suffering so much, why are they causing me so much pain, why are things not working for me, why did I have to lose my job or my loved one, why, why, why.

In our earthly sufferings we sometimes lose all hope, and even lose interest in life. In Psalms 39, the Psalmist cries out in despair. According to him, even when he decided to stay silent, his anguish increased. And he cried unto God, *"hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were. Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again before I depart and am no more."*

"Only the suffering God can help." The Bible says Jesus Christ understands us and easily empathizes with us because he himself experienced suffering on the earth to the point of death. Let us go back to God's words and hold on tightly to every promise that God has given to us.

Our suffering Sovereign is inviting us to come to him. He says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And in case you are wondering if he is able to help you, he presents to you his hands and feet and his side. The proof of his own share of sufferings and he is telling you that I conquered, and I can help you to conquer. If only you will trust in me, come to me and let me take over that situation.

It is time for us to bring our burdens to Jesus and truly surrender them at his feet. Let us stop getting in the way of God and allow Him to do his good work in our lives. Jesus loves with those who love, weeps with those who weep and sorrows with the sorrowful. Whatever you are going through today, remember that the suffering Sovereign is journeying with you.

“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Jesus ended the passage in Luke by reminding his disciples that they were witnesses of these things. As Jesus’ disciples today, in case we are thinking that we are not witnesses to these things because we were not present when Jesus suffered and died, let us remember this passage in Isaiah. We were not physically present, but we have been partakers of that experience. Our transgressions, pains and sufferings were with Jesus on the cross. Therefore, we too are commissioned to bear witness to his salvation, forgiveness and healing. Let us surrender to Jesus today, let go and let God have His way. Amen.

Prayers

God our Maker, Source of Easter power and hope, You have walked with your faithful people through many generations, people facing challenge and uncertainty, people seeking your purpose and promise. We still face challenges and uncertainty,

even with Easter in our hearts. Walk with us and with those for whom we pray for this day, so that your resurrecting power may lead us in lives of faithfulness. In the name of Christ our Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, the light of your love shines on, illuminating the places where you are present. As the bewildered disciples pondered the stories of your appearance, you penetrated the darkness of their fear and doubt with your word of peace. You showed them the appalling marks of evil pierced on your hands and feet. You opened their minds to understand why you had to die to defeat such evil and death. Increase our understanding, we pray, and open our minds and hearts to receive you.

Bring to us O God, the sense of your living presence as we go into this new week. Renew in us the faith you want us to have, the faith that is not afraid to reach out in your name and to share the treasure you have given us, that treasure which is greater than silver and gold

We pray for children and young people who must think about the future in uncertain times facing threats new to this generation like the pandemic and climate change. Give them hope rooted in the knowledge that their lives matter to you. Show them how to make a difference in the world, whatever threats they face as they grow. In the name of Christ our Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for people for whom age or experience, illness or disability create barriers to full participation in your world. Surround each one in pain or despair with your comfort and renew in each one a sense of dignity and purpose. Show them how much they matter to you and to us. In the name of Christ our Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those facing grief and loss in these difficult days when it is still so hard to gather for support. Stay with those who must rearrange their lives without their beloved. Give them strength and comfort through your promise of resurrection. We pray for communities challenged by forces beyond their control—natural disaster, political strife and the economic consequence of the pandemic. Give courage to those facing challenges, and wisdom to those who lead, so that

well-being may be restored soon and hope for the future prevail. In the name of Christ our Risen Lord, hear our prayer.

As Earth Day approaches this week, we remember before you the struggles within your creation, creatures losing habitat, unique species dying out, oceans filled with plastic, the climate warming and the havoc that results for all of us. Jesus, you are the firstborn of all creation; Help us to honour you by caring for the earth and its fragile balances in the ways we live and the priorities we set.

We remember the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip whose funeral was yesterday and those who were brutally killed in the mass shootings in Portapique, and we pray that your comfort will continue to be with their grieving families.

God our Maker, you have given us life in a world filled with so much abundance. In Christ you have given us new life and abundant hope. We offer our gifts to you, knowing they are part of your abundance. Bless them and bless us, that we may bring hope and new life in Christ's name to a world that so badly needs these gifts.

Finally, O Lord, we ask that you would bless us in our congregation with vision for the future and reverence for the past. Guide us each day as we minister to one another and to world for which you gave yourself. Help us each day to bear witness to your name and to do that which you would have us do. In these ways, too, we would be your disciples and so we pray the words you taught us saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you this coming week, you and your loved ones. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance on you and grant to you and yours His wonderful Shalom, wholeness and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.