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Rose Hill Church
Sermon: “The Problem of Pain”
8.16.20

This summer our weekly sermons have focused on the Person and Presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Last week Paul Hudson, our Director of Youth Ministries and Modern Music, spoke quite eloquently on the subject of the Holy Spirit, the historical truth about the Tower of Babel and how he sees this event tied into the events of the first Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit literally fell on about 120 followers of Christ, including the disciples.

Today I want to address the presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer as an active participant in comforting us, helping us to have a deeper understanding of our personal struggles, pain and life challenges, and to be present to help each of us gain wisdom so we can learn how to comfort and encourage others.

To do so we need to take a look at our Scripture reading for today:

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NIV)

Praise to the God of All Comfort

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, **4**who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. **5**For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. **6**If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. **7**And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

One of the first things we may notice in reading this passage is the repetitive nature of the message here;

The Apostle Paul uses “comfort” or “compassion” 10 times here

Now, when we see this redundancy in Scripture it behooves us to sit up and take note, because the writer, in this case Paul, is saying, “Hey! This is really important!”

And to add clarity to this passage, let us just briefly go over to the

Gospel of John Chapter 14:16-18:

This is Jesus talking to His disciples as He prepares them not only for His impending arrest, trial and execution, but for how He will take care of them after He rises from the dead and ascends to Heaven. In the Amplified Version, Jesus says,

¹⁶“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another ^[a]Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengthener), to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot

receive because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He (the Holy Spirit) remains with you *continually* and will be in you.” He goes on in verse 18 to say;

¹⁸“I will not leave you as orphans [comfortless, bereaved, and helpless]; I will come [back] to you.”

I want you to note something here:

The words that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians when He talks about “the God of all Comfort” is the same wording in the Ancient Greek that the writer of John’s Gospel has Jesus use when Jesus tells the disciples He will give them “a helper”, “a comforter”, an “advocate”. In other words, in both passages the Person being referred to is One and the same. The Greek word is *parakaleho* or *paraclete*. In verse 17 the word used by Jesus is “the Spirit of Truth”, the Holy Spirit.

So, what we see from both John’s Gospel and the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is the same message. As a believer you are given the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus to do Jesus’ work

in the believer, to indwell the believer, to affirm the believer, to comfort and guide and be with the believer, and help equip them for service.

But we might ask, “How does this work?” Jesus left, sent His Holy Spirit to us, as we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives, accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior, we then have the Holy Spirit resident in us.

But is that all Paul is talking about here? I don’t think so. And I think this is part of the problem with modern western Christianity. I think we have been short-changed. Many have come to tell us about salvation.

Many have said, “We are all sinners and need a Savior”. I agree! Amen to that. But then many of us don’t realize how vital it is that we focus on the “in between time”. What is supposed to be happening here on earth for the person who at some point made a pronouncement of faith in Jesus Christ but has not gone on to heaven? What are we supposed to be doing and being? Presbyterians by and large hold that when Christian parents bring their children (often as infants or toddlers) forward to be baptized, that that is “the thing”. The child is given to God and brought up in a Christian home. The hope and prayer is that this child will one

day make their own profession of faith in Christ. In the meantime the family is to live out their faith in Christ on earth, to model Christian living for their family and others. Many would believe, whether they say it out loud or not, but they might be thinking, “I am safe now. I am ‘in’ now”. God is going to bless me; I will live according to basic rules of Christianity and try to do my very best. And God will do His part and keep “the bad stuff” away. Right?

But, as I titled my message today; “The problem of Pain”; what happens if the child goes sideways? What if the cozy marriage breaks apart? The next child is born with a debilitating illness or condition? What if the husband or wife is unfaithful? And on and on.

Wait a minute you may say! Doesn’t the list of “good stuff” in Christianity include Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control? The Fruit of the Spirit? There is no fruit of PAIN listed here; no cancer, no early onset dementia! No bankruptcy! Where did all those things come from? And Why?? Why me God? Are you mad at me? Are you even real? Or perhaps you just

say, “No thanks God! If this is how you treat Your friends then I am outta here.”

Stop a minute; earlier we noted how many times Paul mentioned “comfort”, “compassion” or their derivatives. 10 times in 9 lines!

Well, how many times did Paul talk about “those other things”; you know, the ones not on the “happy list”? Well, he mentions sufferings (plural), “troubles” (plural), distressed, suffer-7 times, but much of them in the plural.

I want to take a sideways glance for a moment, as this takes me back to my days as a young Christian in college, full of hopes and dreams and enthusiasm for my relatively new faith in Jesus Christ. Early in my senior year I hit the wall, so to speak. I had just returned from some of the toughest times in my life; summer had found me leading a team of four college students to West Africa, only to very quickly find ourselves entangled in the middle of a massive, violent coup and civil war.

Returning, I developed deep depression.

I could not feel God in this time;

I could not see God doing anything in my faith

I sought counseling, prayer to excise whatever was wrong with me

I decided to resign my position in the chaplains office, quit school, go home and throw the towel in.

But in going to my boss, the University Chaplain, Bob Stamps, he put the brakes on this whole process.

He shared honestly with me that he too had suffered greatly from a severe bout with depression. He knew what I was feeling. And he became tangible Jesus to me. He came alongside and helped me that year to eventually walk out of that dark and excruciatingly painful valley, and into the Light again.

And so, here is a perspective I want you to consider in this discussion; in this passage we have been looking at, Paul is bringing in both the comfort...the blessings of God who through the comfort of the Holy

Spirit, as well as the blessings of God that come through suffering, pain and discomfort, too. And guess what? And this is key here; the same Holy Spirit is with the believer in all of these situations! Not only with us, but in us. And not only in us, but capable of communicating with us and through us so that we learn from our struggles and we in turn are able to help our brothers and sisters in the very same ways the Holy Spirit has helped us, changed us, matured us, grown us up, and comforted us with a comfort that is deeper inside of us than our own DNA.

This, folks, is what is going on for each and every believer. Peter said we should not be alarmed at the fiery ordeal coming upon us (1 Peter 4:12). You see, God is preparing a people to be His People forever. What we are living in and through, Covid-19, declining health, ill parents, ill children, lost jobs and on and on; these are what the Bible calls momentary light afflictions (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

¹⁷For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

I believe God is using not only the seemingly positive and encouraging things in our lives, but also every single painful, hurtful, confusing, discouraging, damaging and demoralizing experience in our lives to bring each of us closer to Him via His Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit is resident in you as a believer, you have the opportunity to gain insight, knowledge, understanding, wisdom and clarity for not only yourself in your situations of life, but for the sake of your sisters and brothers in Christ. Literally every single day, every single challenge, every single opportunity is an open door for growth, maturity and transformation in God. And that Holy Spirit knows you. Knows you to the very deepest core of your being and loves and adores you.

So, what do we do with this understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in us? How do we, in essence, “take advantage” of the incredible opportunity to be so transformed in Christ?

To me, this is where several things come into play; **first**, Jesus said in Matthew Chapter 6, “Seek first the Kingdom of God”; today is the day of salvation, the day to turn toward instead of away from the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have never asked the Holy Spirit to come into your life, never told Jesus you accept that He died for your sins, today is the best day I know of to do this.

Second, Jesus said, Ask, seek, knock; Matthew 7:7-8 Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened; ask and you will receive; these are active actions; not a one-off; He is saying, Keep seeking, keep knocking, keep asking; keep going!

Third, if you have given your life to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit resident in you wants to commune with you, to talk with you, and wants to tell you God’s richest truths. Spend time with Him, not out of

obligation, but ask Him to give you a deep desire to know Him, to allow Him to transform you into the Image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Open your Bible or if you don't have one and need one contact the Rose Hill Office at Rosehill.org and we will get you a Bible. Anyway, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you from His Word, to open your eyes to His eternal truths of love, and give you all that He desires to be in your life.

Finally, even in this time of Covid-19, isolation and social distancing, I heartily suggest you reach out for support and answers to your questions about this faith life. No matter how we are coming to you, via Face Book, Twitter, You Tube, our website or even live, we care and want to help support you in your walk with Jesus Christ. Feel free to call the Rose Hill Church Office in Kirkland, Washington, or go to our website at Rosehill.org, and ask one of our pastoral staff to contact you. We can help you get connected with our church or even another church if you like. And finally, remember, you are loved, you are worth it, and you matter. Blessings. Let us pray: