

Date: February 15, 2026

Texts: Isaiah 53. 1-5 / Philippians 3. 7-11

Title: “Suffering Prayer”

Intro -

re: a curious topic with which to wrap up our look at “prayer”

- using Richard Foster’s book as a guide...

a topic that is... - per Foster (but, do we really need an outside authority to confirm...?)

- ... “not at all popular”

but here we have it - “Suffering Prayer”

in which we “give to God the various difficulties and trials we face, asking him to use them redemptively.

We also voluntarily take into ourselves the griefs and sorrows of others in order to set them free.

so that - in our sufferings...

those who suffer...

come to see the face of the suffering God

why...?

as we read in scripture -

Christ has invited us to share in his sufferings, and so -
participate with him in the redemption of the world.

(it’s kind of a package deal...)

note - not that something is missing in the sufferings of Christ

as if there were some deficiency in his substitutionary atonement
for the salvation of the world

(and lucky Jesus - we just happened to come along...)

far from it...

rather - it is that we are invited to be partners with Christ by sharing in
the “fellowship of his sufferings” (per Phil 3...)

I) Let's Back Up a Bit...

so...

let's back up a bit and try and get a clearer picture of this
(since it is likely not something we have spent a lot of time
reflecting on...)

Foster, in outlining this as a form of prayer, is intentional about making sure
we don't get so lost in the idea of "suffering"
(because who wants that...?)
and ignore that this is not pointless suffering...
this is not needless suffering...

but - as with Jesus -

this is redemptive suffering
this is suffering that has a purpose... that has meaning...
the kind that enriches the lives of others, and brings healing
to the world

Foster notes that on a purely human level, we understand this instinctively
when it comes to our children -
we are glad to... we regularly... deprive ourselves of things
so that they may have a better chance in life
(starting with sleep, in many early instances...)

and - if anyone has watched any of the Olympics these past weeks,
the back stories of the athletes are all about "suffering"
with a goal in mind... hardships "gladly" undertaken
because they have a purpose...

cf. - per Breezy Johnson - winner of Women's Downhill:

"People are jealous of people with Olympic Gold Medals. They're not necessarily jealous of the journey it took to get those medals..."
she talks about her own journey (at 30 years old, she missed the previous games due to an injury suffered at Cortina - the mountain where she just won gold...)
- it was a tough road, but sometimes, you just have to keep going...

... because, there is a purpose... there is an end...
to it all

relate - as it is with the suffering of Jesus (to which we are called)
it is not some random experience, but rather -

it is purposeful... it is for our redemption...

it is to do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves

Foster notes that it's hard for us to grasp this idea of "redemptive suffering"
because our culture mitigates against any form of discomfort or
inconvenience

relate per (as long as we're talking major sporting events...)

the recent "He Gets Us" campaign ad during the Super Bowl
and the dominant push in our world for "more..."

more of this and more of that...

the one who dies with the most toys... wins!

winning is more fun...

more is just plain better...

but what if there's more to life than more...?

- what if Jesus shows us how to find it...?

cf. - he does...

but - it's not necessarily how we would dream up
rather - there is a recognition that life includes suffering
and that we can stand with people in all this messiness
(cf. - I still have more to go here, but when I read Lindsay Vonn's post
after her devastating fall in the downhill,

I kind of wondered why I bother...)

"While yesterday did not end the way I had hoped, and despite the intense physical pain it caused, I have no regrets... I... knew that racing was a risk. It always was and always will be an incredibly dangerous sport. And similar to ski racing, we take risks in life. We dream. We love. We jump. And sometimes we fall. Sometimes our hearts are broken. Sometimes we don't achieve the dreams we know we could have.

But that is also the beauty of life; we can try.

I tried. I dreamt. I jumped."

cf. - she can do that... we can do that...

because we are not alone

- that is the gift that suffering prayer entails...

that suffering prayer offers

II) Finding Value

... it serves as an implicit recognition that there is more to life than

superficial triumphalism

more to life than mere fluff...

especially - the fluff side of faith

(where we think all is serene and peaceful and

full of joy and hymns of praise...)

note - nothing wrong with that, mind you...

always nice to find ourselves in that place...

but -

we need to remember that we have a Savior who was "a man of sorrows,

and acquainted with grief..."

we need to remember that yes - there is a triumph in Christ, but -

it goes through suffering...

not around it

and - this suffering is not for nothing

- God takes it and uses it for something beautiful...

something far beyond anything we can imagine

right now -

we see as through a faint reflection

God promises -

that we will see a glory in our sufferings that will blaze

like the noonday sun

in this world, Jesus tells us, you will have trouble.

Take heart, he continues - I have overcome the world!
and it is in this shared victory...
experienced out of a shared suffering...
that we have something to offer those around us
in that -

we understand, (because we have experienced it) -
that life is most fully lived...
when it is lived from the depths
(as opposed to the trite offering of pat responses
to where people really are... and -
what people really experience...)

III) The “What” of It...

so...

what does this mean for us...?
what is the “what?” of it, in terms of a practical response...?
from the Bible (always a good place to go when looking for “the what...”)
we could draw from the example of Moses
in Exodus we read that after leading the people out of Egypt, they rebel...
and making a golden calf to worship
(because where was God...?)
Moses could have given up on them, but he doesn’t
rather - he goes back up to meet with God, saying:
“perhaps I can make atonement for your sin...”
- he bears their burden before God...
... who accepts his offer of grace

or...

we follow in Daniel’s footsteps -
who had lived a life of privilege in the Babylonian courts, but comes upon
the book of Jeremiah - who had prophesied during the fall of Jerusalem...

... a fall that was due to their sin, and which led to their exile in Babylon
and he prays a prayer of corporate repentance
(not that he had done anything, but that he saw his connection
he saw that he was a part of a body that had sinned...
that was not whole...)

he sees that you cannot stand at arms length, but rather -
you must identify with the people, if you are a part of
the people... part of the community...

there is no shortage of biblical models in this -

Joseph and his exile in Egypt...

Mary and her vigil at the cross...

Stephen and his stoning for his faithful witness...

Paul and his many trials...

none of them enter into this merely for the sake of suffering...

as if they had some masochistic troubled soul

rather - there is a redemptive understanding of what they go through -
that it is for the healing... the comforting...

the strengthening... of others

that others might have a glimpse of, and - discover
an invitation to - new life

cf. - the bottom line:

when we suffer (not if, but when...) -

will we endure patiently, putting our trust in God...?

looking for redemptive purpose...?

seeing “through” to the glory that awaits...?

or - will we despair?

Jesus has shown what the better path is, and has born the weight of our
sufferings, so that we might live in the light of his joy

may we - in our praying and in our living - find that same gift that brings
light and life out of darkness and despair