

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"Endurance" 4/26/23

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isa 43:2)*

Oh, how we wish we would never suffer. Of course, we know that's not possible. Because suffering and pain are part of life.

The stoic, Epictetus says, "Even though you have these powers free and entirely your own, you don't use them, because you still don't realize what you have or where it came from ... I am prepared to show you that you have resources and a character naturally strong and resilient."

The resource we have is God and is from God, given freely so we can face life and witness to the character and power of God. These resources help us to become who God created us to be, so we can love and serve others. This doesn't mean there won't be days we shout out, "Why me?" Times we cry. Times we are hurt by what is thrown at us or taken from us. Days we are angry. But we take a deep breath and turn to God, the source of strength, the giver of mercy, our comforter and guide.

God promises to be with us when we are overcome by the challenges we face. Even though it looks insurmountable, these trials will not overwhelm us. God is bigger than they are. In God we are stronger than - even we think.

James tells us, "Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, so you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4) Again, I cry out, "Didn't we already take this test? Did I flunk?" "Are you kidding?" "I think I've had enough. Thank you, very much."

Paul reminds the Romans, "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know suffering produces endurance." (Rms 5:3) Endurance is the ability or strength to continue or to last, especially in difficult or stressful situations or activities. Again, my reaction to suffering is "enough already." But I should try to see how it is making me stronger, what I'm learning about myself, about another, about life, about God. Someday, believe it or not, we will find ourselves in a situation where we realize past suffering prepared us for this current situation. I, too, wish there was an easier way.

When we face difficulties, as we suffer, we are reminded, "The God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ, after we have suffered a little while, will Himself restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast." (I Pet 5:10)

We can have peace in knowing we are not alone in our suffering, and we are becoming stronger. Like an athlete. Practice, practice, practice. Run, toss, faster, harder. Training is difficult, one may be all sweaty and suffer, but when the game is on - when it counts - all of it will prove itself worthwhile. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The athlete shows their ability on the court or on the field, and then they're thankful for the extra push they gave in practice, because it prepared them.

So, it is with the hiccups we face in life. They prepare us, strengthen us, give us character, form us into the person we were created to be. As Paul writes to the church in Corinth, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory which far outweighs them all." (II Cor 5:17) I guess, it will be worth it.

Be encouraged, "God comforts us in all our affliction, so we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (II Cor 1:4)

Please pray with me:

God of mercy, Your compassion is beyond our imagination. Thank You for Your presence in our tough times, for Your peace when we face obstacles larger than we think we can handle, for the strength You give to us when it looks like we will be overcome by the difficulties which rage around us. Thank You for Your comfort in the dark. Thank You for Your promise of presence. Help us to endure and to be witnesses to Your love, especially when we face adversities.

Amen.