

A Word on Wednesday from Pastor Tonia

"God IS With Us" 9/14/22

*I have told you these things,
so, in Me you may have peace.
In this world you will have trouble.*

But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

We learn through the obstacles we face in life. Tough times, difficult situations make us stronger. The obstacles are the way. We don't like it. Do not want to deal with. Would rather turn around and go back to a more comfortable place. But by facing difficulties we become more resilient, we come to know ourselves and what we can accomplish. We surprise others, we surprise ourselves. By not freezing, by deciding not to flee, we face our challenges, and, with God's help, we make our way through the trials, and we discover who we were created to be.

The Greek Stoic, Epicurus, put it this way, *"The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it." Of course, we know the glory is God's, but it is OK to go "Whew" and feel good or relieved about having conquered that fear, gone through that fire, faced that foe, survived that storm. It's not easy, but "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."* (Ps 46:1)

When we are faced with difficulties, hard decisions, a bad diagnosis, a loss, an unimaginable hurdle, we turn to God for strength. We have to decide if we will freeze, flee, or fight. Can I go on? I don't want to. I'd rather not. Can't I just go back to bed? Back to the porch on a sunny day. Back to when all was right with my life. But that's not reality.

We each face our own struggles. We each have plenty enough of them. We can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we react. We can turn to God, accept His strength and wisdom. We can turn to a friend and ask for help. We can find a way over, around, or through. It may seem unsurmountable, but is it really?

I wish I could tell you, with a straight face, everything is OK. Only good things happen to those who love the Lord. I wish everybody's life read like a Facebook post or a Christmas letter. But bad stuff happens to all of us. But good things happen, also. Sometimes we don't recognize them because they're overshadowed by the tragedy, the things which were unexpected, uninvited, and unwanted.

This isn't a downer tale. It's life. And life IS good. God IS present. In James we are told, *"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."* (James 1:12)

The Lord loves each of us and knows our future, and it is one with hope. Hang on to this. Have hope. Keep the faith. God is present, today, tomorrow, and always. Go ahead, face the difficulties. God has overcome the world, God is with us, and He's got this.

Please pray with me.

Lord of the journey, as we travel through this life, as we grow tired and weary, as we stumble and fall, may our hope be in You and allow You to renew our strength. May we mount up with wings as an eagle, walk and not faint. Thank You, Lord, for Your continued presence in our lives, for Your victory over the obstacles in our way.

Amen.