

SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY 27.07.25

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The Path of Suffering

BECOMING CHRISTLIKE

BEING [HEART], THINKING [MIND] & DOING [BODY]

[A PERSONAL REFLECTION]

Conviction of a Disciple:

A resilient disciple of Jesus is full of the Spirit and learns to walk through suffering without losing heart. Rather than hiding our weakness, we let Christ's power be revealed through it—showing that the treasure we carry is from God, not from us.

OVERVIEW

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul defends a gospel that doesn't sparkle by worldly standards. His life, marked by hardship and weakness, is not a failure of faith, but the very place God's glory is revealed. As disciples, we are not immune from pain—but in the cracks, the light shines.

ACTION

Step 1: What parts of your life feel too broken or weak to be useful to God? Could it be that Christ wants to shine through those very places?

Step 2: Have you been tempted lately by a version of the gospel that promises ease, comfort, or control?

Step 3: How might you respond differently to suffering this week—seeing it not as failure, but as a space of transformation?

THOUGHT

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

In our Christian and church life, we tend to like showing people the “good parts” - the clean, polished, faith-filled versions of ourselves. But what if it's the difficult, cracked, and vulnerable parts where Christ actually shines most clearly?

That's what Paul is teaching the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 4. He's responding to a church community that had begun to question whether he could really be trusted, since his life was marked by such immense suffering. Other leaders had come along preaching a “shinier” gospel—one that seemed more successful, more spiritual, and more impressive. But Paul doesn't try to compete with that. Instead, he shows that the gospel he is faithfully preaching goes in the exact opposite direction. Rather than hiding it away, he leans into his pain.

He talks about being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Not as evidence that he's doing something wrong—but as the very evidence that he's walking the way of Jesus. For Paul, suffering isn't a disqualifier. It's the indicator he's actually on the path of discipleship. The crucified life wasn't only something that Jesus walked through, but the pattern he set for us to follow. And that's what we're invited into as disciples.

Paul says we have this treasure in jars of clay—not in fine porcelain or ornate materials, but in common, everyday, easily breakable containers. That image would have been offensive to his First-Century audience. These kinds of jars were far from impressive. However, it's precisely the lack of “shine” that prompts Paul to use this imagery. A fancy jar would serve only to draw attention to itself, not the treasure that is hidden within.

Paul understands the upside-down nature of this path we're called to. He sees that the outside is important, but for an entirely different reason. He sees that it is in our broken areas - the cracks, the suffering - that Christ is actually revealed.

And then Paul flips the image again. Referencing the story of Creation in Genesis 1, he says, “Let light shine out of darkness,” Interestingly, Paul also says that the light shines *out of* the darkness. We would expect him to say *into* the darkness, but he doesn't. Why? Because new creation always starts in places of darkness. God isn't sitting far off waiting to be summoned into our story - our brokenness. Instead, even in our most difficult moments, He has been right here with us all along.

It's so important that we learn to engage with our suffering - to see it, name it, bring it to the surface and let God's light shine through it. When we don't, we risk missing mercy, compassion, and empathy—both from God and for others. But when we let Christ meet us in our pain, something holy happens. We become carriers of life, even when death is at work in us. We learn to walk through the fire with the Spirit, letting it burn away everything that isn't Christ.

As the body of Christ in the world (and with each other), we don't need to pretend everything is fine. Our wounds aren't an opposition to our faith. The risen Christ still carried his wounds - and for Thomas, they were the entry point. The life of Christ will be revealed through His Church—not through our glossiness or our perfection, but through our honest and faithful vulnerability. Knowing that no matter what we're facing, even in our most difficult moments, His light shines through.

DISCUSSION

[A GROUP REFLECTION]

1. How do we as a group tend to talk about weakness and suffering? Are we creating space for vulnerability?
2. In what ways can we model Paul's posture of Spirit-filled resilience—personally and collectively?
3. What would it look like to build a community that doesn't chase after a "shiny" gospel, but embraces the crucified and risen Jesus in everyday life?

PRAYER

Jesus, shape us into a people who don't hide our suffering, but offer it to you and each other as holy ground. May our community become a place where vulnerability is seen as strength, where no one walks hidden or alone, and where your light is allowed to shine through every bit of our darkness. Make us a people of compassion, courage, and cruciform love.

Amen.