

Media and Graphics Notes

Word of Witness Video?	Yes
Sermon Starter Video?	Yes
Sermon Notes?	There are no sermon notes.
Other Notes	

Key Questions, Metadata and Outline

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about Christianity and suicide. It has sections for those that may be considering suicide, those close to persons who take their own life and biblical examples of people who wished their life would end.

Why is this sermon important?

This sermon is important because we do not often talk about suicide in church and it is an important issue which has direct connections with our faith.

What is the context of this sermon?

This is the first sermon in the *Good Grief* series. It has been developed using the sermon series by the same name which was preached at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in 2012. You can find more information about that series at <http://j.mp/1A0iBvF>. The service of Jason Brown from August 28, 2007 was also used to develop this sermon.

What are the next action steps?

When you walk through the dark places, believe that God will not let you go.
If you feel like you are struggling with suicide, let others help you.

What is the good news (bottom line)?

The good news is that God loves us, even when we stray.
Even when we do things that are not God's will.

Metadata

1. Topic(s)
 1. Changing Lives
2. Sermon Books of the Bible



4th Sunday of Easter
Good Grief - Christianity and Suicide
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado
Text Online at <http://j.mp/1G20HKU>

April 26, 2015
Psalm 13:1-6 and Job 7:13-16
Preaching Target Word Count: 1,975
Video is not available online

1. Numbers
2. Job
3. Psalm
4. Romans
3. Series
 1. Good Grief - Facing Death with Hope
4. Speaker
 1. Andrew Conard
5. Tags
 1. sermon, worship, church, Methodist, United Methodist, United Methodist Church, First United Methodist Church, El Dorado, Kansas, Great Plains Annual Conference, Suicide, death, life, hope, grief, guilt, depression, providence, God

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Psalm 13:1-6, CEB

1 How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
2 How long will I be left to my own wits, agony filling my heart? Daily?
How long will my enemy keep defeating me?
3 Look at me!
Answer me, Lord my God!
Restore sight to my eyes!
Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death, 4 and my enemy will say, "I won!"
My foes will rejoice over my downfall.
5 But I have trusted in your faithful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
6 Yes, I will sing to the Lord because he has been good to me.

Job 7:13-16, CEB

13 If I say, "My couch will comfort me," my bed will diminish my murmuring. 14
You scare me with dreams, frighten me with visions. 15 I would choose strangling and
death instead of my bones. 16 I reject life; I don't want to live long; leave me alone, for
my days are empty.

Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.
All: Thanks be to God!

Introduction

Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

*** Start Sermon Timer ***

Series Review

Today we begin a new four week sermon series, focused on the issue of death and how we face it with hope. Each week, we are going to be focusing on a different dimension of death.

April 26 - Christianity and Suicide

Today, what we will consider is suicide in light of our faith.

May 3 - Faith and Hope for Life and the Afterlife (UMW Sunday)

Next week, what we are going to talk about is the afterlife. We are going to ask the question “Why do we believe about the afterlife?”

What does the afterlife look like?

What does the Bible say about the afterlife?

How does our belief about the afterlife affect how we face our own mortality?

May 10 - Comforting those Who Mourn (Mother’s Day)

The following week we are going to talk about how to care for people who are dying.

How do you care for people with a terminal illness?

What is helpful for someone facing their own death?

How do we comfort our friends who have just lost a loved one?

May 17 - The Art of Dying and Living Well (Graduation Sunday)

The last sermon, we are going to talk about how to have a good death yourself. Early Methodists talked about what it would be like to die a good death.

What do you hope your last days or hours might look like?

Have you planned your funeral yet?

Transition

My hope is that this series will really help all of us together face something that every single human being has to face at multiple times during their life – the death of a loved one and ultimately our own mortality.

Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Perspective on your life or something in your life that gives additional meaning to the message today.
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

Opening

Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Adam Keefer

Three years ago, yesterday, my seminary roommate, Adam Keefer took his life.

After I graduated from college, I attended Wesley Seminary in Washington, DC. I was one of about 20 students who were right out of college and living on campus. When I arrived in DC, I moved in to a room on the lower level of Straughn Hall and met my roommate, Adam Keefer.

Adam was from Pennsylvania. We both enjoyed computers. We were both Eagle Scouts. We shared a lot of the same classes. He was my roommate all three years while I was at Wesley. After graduation, he moved back to Pennsylvania. Nicole and I were married and moved to Kansas. We each headed off to the next place in life.

Three years ago, I received a message from a staff member from Wesley Seminary who just asked for a call back. When I was able to call later that day, he shared with me that Adam had taken his own life and his funeral was going to be in a few days.

I could not believe it. I had been his roommate for three years. We talked about all kinds of things - theology, life, what was next. It had been six years since I had seen him, but he was always so upbeat and positive about life.

Transition

Over the years, many of you have lost a family member or friend to suicide. There have been members of this congregation who have taken their own life. We hardly ever have a sermon focused on suicide and even in town, among our family and friends we don't talk about it very much. Yet this topic is so important for us to consider in light of our faith. So, today we are going to talk about it.

Statistics

Suicide is a serious issue in the United States. "In 2013 (the most recent year for which full data are available), 41,149 suicides were reported, making suicide the 10th leading cause of death for Americans. In that year, someone in the country died by suicide every 12.8 minutes."¹

Suicide Rates over Time

"From 1986 to 2000, suicide rates in the U.S. dropped, ... yet over the next 12 years, however, the rate generally increased and by 2013 stood at 12.6 deaths per 100,000."²

At this rate there would be 1 or 2 deaths by suicide every year in El Dorado.

¹ <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

² <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

Suicide Rates by Gender

“... The suicide rate has been about 4 times higher among men than women.”³

“While males are 4 times more likely than females to die by suicide, females attempt suicide 3 times as often as males.”⁴

Suicide Rates by Age

“Younger groups have had consistently lower suicide rates than middle-aged and older adults. ...

In 2013, the highest suicide rate was among people 45 to 64 years old.

The second highest rate occurred in those 85 years and older.”⁵

What is the most frequent cause of suicide?

“At least 90 percent of all people who died by suicide were suffering from a mental illness at the time, most often depression.

Among people who are depressed, intense emotional states such as desperation, hopelessness, anxiety, or rage increase the risk of suicide.

People who are impulsive, or who use alcohol and drugs, are also at higher risk.”⁶

Transition

There may be someone here in worship today who is struggling with depression and have considered, even briefly, that others would be better off without them and their pain is never going to get better.

If you are one of those people, you are not alone.

There are many people in the Bible who had seasons of their lives where they prayed that God would take their life.

Biblical Characters with a Desire to Die

Moses

Moses was the great lawgiver. He led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and through the Red Sea. While they were wandering in the wilderness, it became almost unbearable for Moses to lead the people. Some of them came to hate him. He is physically and emotionally exhausted. In the midst of his despair we read these words in Numbers 11:14-15

³ <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

⁴ <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

⁵ <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/facts-and-figures>

⁶ <https://www.afsp.org/understanding-suicide/frequently-asked-questions>

"I can't bear this people on my own. They're too heavy for me. If you're going to treat me like this, please kill me. If I've found favor in your eyes, then don't let me endure this wretched situation."

Moses is describing the despair and anguish he was feeling.
He was asking God to take his life.
God did not answer his prayer.

David

King David was the greatest king that Israel ever knew. Many of the Psalms that he wrote are called lament or complaint Psalms. The writer seems to be deeply depressed, overwhelmed by the circumstances that surround them. This is where we find the verse before us today from Psalm 13:1-2:

1 How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long will I be left to my own wits, agony filling my heart? Daily? How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

Clearly, the psalmist is wrestling with the feeling of overwhelming despair.
It seems that God is nowhere to be found.

Job

Then, there is Job. You remember that he had lost his children, farm, property, animals and his health. It was his wife that comes to him and says,

"Job, I don't know what you have done, but it must have been bad for God to punish you this way. ... Curse God and die, Job."

Not really helpful from his wife.

Then, Job's friends come along, "Job, whatever you did must have been horrible because otherwise these terrible thing would not have happened to you."

Part of the point of the book of Job is to teach us that when horrible things happen it is not God who is doing it to us.

Job didn't do anything wrong.

The time comes when he is so overwhelmed he says in Job 7:15

15 I would choose strangling and death instead of my bones.⁷

Transition

Have you ever felt that way?
That is how Job felt.

⁷ Job 7:15, CEB.

Those Considering Suicide

You are Not Alone

We see in these biblical characters the same thing we see today here in El Dorado and Butler County.

People struggle when life feels utterly hopeless.

Even those who were closest to God.

Even those who were heroes of the faith struggled at times with depression.

At times, people feel pain that seems so hard that they want their life to end.

So if you ever feel that way, you are not alone.

Find Help

And if you have ever found yourself wrestling with these thoughts, hear this:

Keep going.

Don't give up.

Even when we can't feel God's presence, God is with us.

The pain may feel like hell on earth, but you will come out on the other side.

Lamentations

Lamentations is a book in the Old Testament that is filled with dark places. Yet the writer says this:

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."⁸

God promises to walk with us through the darkest places of our lives.

There are no hopeless causes with God.

So, if you find yourself in this place, talk to someone, turn to God, find the help that you need.

What Happens Next for these Biblical Characters

Let me remind you of what happened next for those biblical characters who prayed that God would take their life.

God doesn't answer that prayer.

God doesn't take their life.

⁸ Lamentations 3:19-23, NIV.

Moses

Moses prays in the wilderness for God to take his life.

God doesn't answer that prayer.

For the next 30 years, God leads him with a pillar of fire and smoke through the wilderness to the promised land. There is a new generation of Israelites who look to Moses as their great leader. On the final day of his life, he is able to look into the Promised Land. These experiences all happened after he prayed, "God, please take me now."

David

The Psalms are filled with words of sorrow and utter despair. Yet, King David went on to be the greatest king Israel would ever know. There were moments of sorrow in his life and also moments of unbelievable joy.

Job

Then, the story of Job.

Job refuses to give up on God and after a few years things begin to get better.

The scripture tells us that God blessed Job in later life, even more than in the beginning. He saw his children and his children's children - four generations and died old and full of days.

Transition

A few years ago, country singer Rodney Atkins, wrote a song that sums it up – "If you're going through hell, keep on going."

Don't give up.

Close to those who Have Died by Suicide

We turn now to those who have survived the loss of someone else.

It is likely that you or someone you know has been directly affected by suicide.

Guilt

It is very common that those who are closest to someone who takes their own life will feel guilt. You may feel that you have failed in some way.

How did I not say the right thing or do the right thing?

How could I have somehow given them hope?

What if I had been there?

What if you had known when this person was going to take their life, that they were really going to do it and you knew the exact time and place?

You would have been there to stop them.

We don't know

The thing is, we don't know.

If we would have known exactly what to say, we would have, but we didn't know.

We didn't know where to go or when it was going to happen.
None of us are perfect and we can't know all about someone else.
In all of this, there is grace.

You are not responsible

You are not the one that is responsible for the person that took their life.
It was not your fault.

Where is God?

You may also find yourself asking, Where is God?
If God is good, why did this happen?

God does not cause everything to happen that happens in our lives.
Some people believe this. That God is pushing buttons and pulling levers.

Methodists don't tend to believe that.
Methodists believe that God gives us freedom to make choices.
We can even choose choices that are harmful for us.
We believe that in the midst of our choices, even the bad ones, God is at work
redeeming them, redeeming us and the world.

Good things can come from evil, tragedy and the darkest pain.

How do we Respond?

Part of this comes in how we choose to respond. When someone takes their life,
we can try to see something good come out of tragedy or we can allow it to destroy us.
We can pray, "God please help something good come from this. I don't have any
idea how it may happen, yet please God, please. Help something good come."
Somehow God is able to wrench something good from tragedy.

Transition

Finally, we have questions about the person who has taken their life.

Conclusion

What hope is there for those who have taken their life?

When it comes to those who have taken their lives, there are many questions.
What happened to my loved one? Will I ever see them again?
What hope is there for those who have taken their life?

Through the ages, the church has taught that if you take your own life you have
committed murder. You usurped God's authority and there was no chance to repent
after you had taken your life.

Nature and Character of God

Yet, when we read the scriptures, we find that God searches for the strays and seeks out the lost. Jesus spends his time with those who are outcast – eating with them, casting out their demons, healing them and painting a picture for them of the love of God in stories like this one:

Lost Sheep

There was a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them wandered away. The shepherd left behind the ninety-nine and went searching for the one lost sheep until he found it. He brought it home. There was great rejoicing because he found the sheep who was lost.

Jesus said that he came to seek and save those who are lost.

He said, come to me all you who labor and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Hope

Based on the nature and character of God, I have hope for people who have taken their life.

Do I know that for certain?

No.

Jesus calls us to repent and to follow him.

To trust in him and walk with him all of our days.

Good News

The good news is that God loves us, even when we stray.

Even when we do things that are not God's will.

Call to Action

When you walk through the dark places, believe that God will not let you go.

If you feel like you are struggling with suicide, let others help you.

This is not God's way.

Invitation

Finally, I invite you to remember the words of the Apostle Paul, in Romans 8:

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁹

There is hope with God.

There is always hope.

⁹ Romans 8:38-39, NIV.

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April 26, 2015
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Closing Prayer

Will you pray with me?
I trust you, O God with my life.
Help me in my dark moments to remember that you are there.
Help me to listen for your voice.
Help me to trust that there is always hope.
Help me to reach out to those I know who struggle with pain,
to love, comfort and encourage them.
We offer our lives to you.
In your Holy Name,
Amen.

8:30 AM			11:00 AM		
Sermon Time					