

Media and Graphics Notes

Sermon Starter Video?	Yes
Sermon Notes?	There are no graphics on screen during the sermon.
Other Notes	We will consecrate our capital campaign leadership team before the Joys and Concerns. This will include scripture and a responsive reading which will be on the screen.

Key Questions

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about how God is present during the times that we face evil and suffering in our life and world.



Why is this sermon important?

This sermon is important because difficult times of life can challenge our faith in significant ways.

What is the context of this sermon?

This is the second to last sermon in the FAQ series. It is an adaptation of the chapter "Why do the innocent suffer?" from the book *Why* by Adam Hamilton.

What are the next action steps?

When you find yourself in the face of evil and suffering in your own life, invite God to be your strength and hope. Keep going, with the assurance that God walks with you through everything that we face in life.

What is the good news (bottom line)?

The good news is that evil and suffering never has the final word in the Christian faith.

Metadata

Topic(s)

1. Changing Lives
2. Grow
3. Making Disciples
4. Share

3rd Sunday after the Epiphany
FAQ - Why does God allow evil and suffering?
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado
Text Online at <http://j.mp/1mrTK3l>

January 24, 2016
Psalm 13:1-6
Preaching Target Word Count: 2,000
Audio Online at <http://j.mp/1KDRWKh>

Sermon Books of the Bible

1. Psalm
2. Romans

Tags

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, Eldorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, suffering, evil, theodicy, pain, providence

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3rd Sunday after the Epiphany
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Psalm 13:1-6, CEB

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

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.

Series Review

We all have questions. Sometimes the answers are easy. But, sometimes, our questions are complicated and the answers are difficult to see and even harder to articulate. Join us for worship at First United Methodist Church in January as we address some of the most frequently asked questions about the Christian faith.

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.

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.

Introduction

As we continue our FAQ series, we want to think carefully about one of the great dilemmas of faith - Why does God allow evil and suffering? How do we reconcile the idea of a good, loving and all powerful God with the horrible things that happen on our planet sometimes? This question has pushed many people away from faith and left others questioning their faith. Maybe you have found yourself in that position.

Theodicy

When theologians talk about the issue of God and suffering they have a word for it – they call it theodicy. This comes from two Greek words - theo meaning God and dike meaning justice. How is God just when all of these horrible things happen?

Sometimes you hear it stated in this way:

If God is God, then God is not good.

If God is good, then God is not God.

If God were all powerful, just and loving, God would not allow these horrible things to happen.

Choose your Example

You can choose your own example:

- Mass shooting
- Genocide
- Disease
- Infertility
- Accidents

Where is God in the midst of this?

Why didn't God stop it? Was it actually God's will that this would take place? Is God working out some grand purpose that no one could see in this happening? Is there even a God at all?

Transition

As we begin, I want to recognize that this is a vast topic and today we will touch just briefly on the subject. Today we will focus on three different categories of suffering and how we might think about how God relates to our world.

Natural Disaster and Widespread Human Suffering¹

Each year seems to bring with it some kind of terrible natural disaster – earthquake, flooding, hurricanes.

Act of God and Forces of Nature

"Throughout most of human history people have seen such disasters as acts of God. How else could people explain such destruction before we learned about their cause?"

Earthquake

"But today we understand that earthquakes are the result of the movement of the earth's plates, a process designed to keep the core of our planet from superheating. It is an amazing feat of engineering and physics. Without it the earth could not support life."

Hurricane

"Likewise the [hurricanes] that bring terrible flooding are part of the earth's system for cooling our atmosphere. These two processes allow our planet to support life. When human beings get caught in these giant forces of nature, there is death and devastation, but the forces themselves are essential to life on our planet."

God's Intervention and Human Adaptation

"We are no longer bound to believe that God sends earthquakes or floods. Likewise we understand why God does not intervene and stop these things from occurring; to do so would be to ensure the destruction of our planet. Knowing that we live on a planet where earthquakes and tsunamis are essential to the planet, our task as human beings is to adapt to these conditions, either by avoiding living in areas prone to the affects of earthquakes and monsoons or by engineering our buildings to withstand these forces."

God's Provision

"God's provision for human beings who face these natural disasters is to send others to provide care. As human beings we are meant to hear the call of God to provide food and clothing and shelter for those in need. We wrap our arms around those who survive and help them put the pieces of their lives back together again."

"When God wants to bring hope and help to others, God sends people. Much of the suffering in our world is because God's people have yet to hear or answer God's call to go and to be God's hands and voice to help children in need. Natural disasters and widespread poverty that affect so many in our world are a call to action. The question is, will God's people heed the call?"

¹ Excerpt From: Adam Hamilton. "Why?." iBooks. <https://itun.es/us/iADsD.l>

Transition

"But let's consider God's relationship to a second category of human suffering: suffering caused by our own decisions or the misuse of our freedom or by others' misuse of their freedom."

Suffering Caused by Human Decisions²

Example: Rules in our Household

We have rules in our house. We are trying to teach them to our children and from time to time they need to be reminded of what type of behavior is acceptable. The truth is, from time to time, the adults need to be reminded of about what type of behavior is acceptable.

While we do our best as a family, the truth is that we can't really control each other. I can't force John, Anne or Nicole, for that matter, to do what I think is best every moment of the day. My guess is that this will become more and more true as they grow up.

God and Freedom

When we consider our freedom in life, what we know is that "God does not take away our freedom, nor does God miraculously deliver us from the consequences of our actions or the actions of others. God does promise to deliver us, and God promises to sustain us and [work to bring] good to come from the painful things we experience in this life."

Consequences for Ourselves

Example: Poor Investment

Sometimes our anger at God is really anger at ourselves about the decisions that we have made. Imagine "a man who made a poor investment, and put nearly all of his money into a business when everyone else advised against it. He's angry with God because his business failed and he comes to talk to his pastor.

His pastor ask, "Are you a capitalist?"

He says, "Yes, I believe in capitalism and the power of markets."

His pastor says, "Let's take God out of the equation for a minute. How would you explain the failure of your business from a business perspective?"

He replies, "Well, I was probably slightly undercapitalized—I wasn't able to do the marketing I needed to do. I had a hard time competing on price, and customers didn't seem to see the value of my product."

His pastor asks, "Now, what role did God play in this?"

God doesn't manipulate the markets or force customers to buy products they don't need or want just because Christians open a business."

² Excerpt From: Adam Hamilton. "Why?." iBooks. <https://itun.es/us/iADsD.l>

Consequences for Others

"God gives us freedom to make our own decisions, and sometimes we make the wrong decisions, and sometimes those decisions have painful consequences for us. But our God-given freedom also means that we can make decisions that have painful consequences for others."

Example: Drunk Driving

Over the past year, just over 100 people have been killed in Kansas as a result of drunk driving.³ One way to respond to the death of a family member or friend from drunk driving is that it could wreck someone's faith. One could feel anger and disappointment toward God.

Another way to respond is not to blame God for a someone who chose to drink and drive. Instead, you might recognize that the death is a result of the terrible choices the drunk driver chose to make.

Restrict Freedom?

What would it look like if God restricted our freedom so that such tragedies didn't happen? What would your life look like if God made it impossible for you to ever do the wrong thing? As much as we might wish for this, so that human beings would not hurt one another, would we really like the results?

Ability to Choose Right and Wrong

Part of what makes us human is the ability to choose right from wrong (which, as we saw above, seems to be the point of God planting a tree in the garden of Eden from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat). If we have no choices, and we only always do God's will, we cease to be human and become puppets.

Part of the risk God took in giving us freedom is that we might and probably will misuse that freedom to do the very things that would break God's heart.

Transition

Let's look at one last category of human suffering: sickness.

Suffering Caused by Sickness⁴

When we become ill, many of us ask, "Why me, God?" as though human sickness is a punishment from on high.

³ <http://www.madd.org/drunk-driving/state-stats/Kansas.html>

⁴ Excerpt From: Adam Hamilton. "Why?." iBooks. <https://itun.es/us/iADsD.l>

Example: Leslie Weatherhead and Cholera

Leslie Weatherhead, the author of the book *The Will of God*, which I mentioned last week was one of the great preachers of the twentieth century and tells told about his time as a missionary in India.

A young Indian man he was ministering with had a daughter who had just died of cholera. The young man, with great resignation and grief, said, "It must have been the will of God."

Weatherhead stopped him and said, "John, what would you think if someone had crept into your veranda by night and held a cholera germ-covered cloth over your daughter's mouth?"

The man became indignant, "Such a man would be a monster!"

Weatherhead replied, "But John, is that not what you've just accused God of doing?"

Healing is God's Way

"Sickness is not God's way. When Jesus walked this earth, he devoted much of his time to healing the sick, not to making people sicker.

Example: Our Bodies vs. Cars

Our bodies are amazingly resilient. If a car lasts ten years and 200,000 miles, we think it is an amazing vehicle. But consider that the average human being's body will last nearly eighty years or more, and some as long as one hundred five, maybe longer. Yes, our bodies are amazingly resilient.

Our bodies also have the amazing capacity to repair themselves. Try that with a car. You will wait a long time before a scratch in your door heals itself or the motor repairs itself. But this is precisely what our bodies do."

"Yet despite these amazing capabilities, your body is not indestructible; it is susceptible to certain common problems. Disease and sickness, injury and death are all a part of having flesh-and-blood bodies. This is part of life. Part of the risk of living is that we might get sick and we will die. This is not God's doing, it is simply part of the having bodies like ours in a world like ours."

Conclusion

Over the years, I have many members of our congregation during serious illness or as they near the final days of their life. One of the things that I have found striking is that, for some, the greatest times of suffering are the greatest opportunity to connect with God as the source of hope, help, comfort and strength.

Good News

The good news is that evil and suffering never has the final word in the Christian faith.

The Israelites were set free from slavery.

David found deliverance from his affliction.

And on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead.
God does not bring unjust suffering upon God's children. But God will, however, force such things to serve God's good purposes.

Call to Action

When you find yourself in the face of evil and suffering in your own life, invite God to be your strength and hope. Keep going, with the assurance that God walks with you through everything that we face in life.

Invitation

Remember the promise "the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us."⁵

Closing Prayer

[Text here]
Amen.

⁵ Romans 8:18, CEB.