

Southside Worship Online

13 December 2020, David Fender

Please go to ssuc.org.au to access our worship service. **Families with children are encouraged to use faith materials Ps Richard Moors has made available.**

Gathering with God

Lord of Love and Light, shine through our darkness, bring us hope. Open our hearts for the journey, our eyes for the light, our spirits for the peace which you bring. Fill our mouths with laughter and speech with shouts of joy that we shall reveal the love with which you surround us. We offer this prayer in the name of the One who is coming into the world bringing your hope. AMEN.



Song

Come people of the risen king

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord Jesus, you call people to come to you. And we joyfully respond to your call.

You call to the poor and most vulnerable. You call to the rich who seemingly have no need. You call to those who have no hope.

We come to you, to receive your help to heal and restore the poverty of our souls

We come to you, to be refreshed and inspired.

We come even through the weakness of our faith.

God of mercy, light and love, we confess that we have not been people who are quick to pray. When an emergency befalls us, we turn to pleas and prayers which usually begin with the heart-wrenching cry, "Why?". Help us to remember that you are always ready to hear and respond to all our prayers. Remind us that even though we have often failed to witness to your love and live as people of compassion and faith, you love us unconditionally. Forgive our stubbornness and willfulness. Cleanse our souls and spirits and make us truly ready to receive your light. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

Psalm 16:5 – 11

Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.' (Psalm 16:5-11)

Song

Anchor

Bible Reading

1 Peter 1:3-9

Sermon

Offering

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that you have plans for us that are for my good and your glory. We give to you today as a response to your goodness to us. We ask that you receive our offerings and continue to supply all our needs. May your peace be in our hearts, your grace be in our words, your love be in our hands and your joy be in our souls. In your mighty name, Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord of time and hope, we are rushing headlong into the holidays to come. We look at our calendars and our day planners and wonder how we will get everything done in the time allotted to us before the "big Day" arrives.

We begin to panic at the thought of projects still to be finished, contacts that need to be made, preparations for festivities that have only just begun. And the darkness of obsessive holiday planning overtakes us and clouds our minds and spirits. But you are a God of time and Light. You bring hope to us, as you always have through the voices of the great prophets, and now through the One who is to come, Jesus Christ. Remind us again what this season is truly about.....love, hope, peace and joy.

Calm us down. Slow us down. Help us remember that it is in loving relationship that you gave your Son to us and it is in loving relationship that your Word is carried into the hearts of the people. No tinsel, ribbons, tape, cards and convey the eternal message adequately. You have given us the Light, to shine in our path and cut through our darkness.

Shine in the hearts of your people today. Bless those dear ones whom we have named before you today with your healing, reconciling, comforting presence and love. Give strength to all who face difficult situations and let your compassionate light shine on them guiding their decisions and their steps.

Bring us at last to your presence, where the light of hope and love continually pour out on us. These prayers and hopes we offer in confidence and gratitude for your love and presence. AMEN.

Song

Cornerstone

Affirmation / Blessing

May the hope of this Advent season shine in your heart, on your path, and beckon you to God's Love and service to the world. Go in peace. May the God of peace go with you. AMEN

Hope in pain

1 Peter 1:3-9

We are all different. Gender, height, hair, eye and skin colour. Our age, life experiences, state of health, family situations. Interests, hobbies, abilities. There are no 2 of us who are here who are a clone of others. And that would apply across the 6 billion people who live on this planet. You are an individual and the person sitting next to you is an individual.

Yet despite that there are many things that we experience, and one of those is pain and suffering. None of us are exempt from it. Suffering is a universal language that we will all express in different ways.

Suffering has been part of our world since the time when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden. Read Genesis 3:17-19.

Whilst pain is a reality, it is an unpleasant reality that we wish would just go away. And aren't there so many people who are willing to say that. "Things will get better." "You'll get past this." "At least you're not as bad off as so and so." Things that well meaning, loving and caring people say in an effort to help. But those types of words don't help do they? Emotionally, psychologically, physically we can carry the scars of our suffering for the rest of the world.

Yet, there is something worse than living with pain and the effects of our pain. It is to live with pain and its effects without hope.

There's a story told of a POW from the second world war. He was a model prisoner, keeping himself fit and healthy and encouraging the other POWs. He did this mainly because the camp commandant had promised release to those who cooperated. As time passed, however, the marine gradually discerned that his captors had lied. To him. When the full realisation of this fact sunk in, he became a zombie, refusing all work and rejecting all offers of food and encouragement. He simply lay on his cot sucking his thumb. In a matter of weeks he had died.

Similar observations have been made about patients in long term care facilities. They tend to divide into 2 categories, the hopers who endeavour to beat back their affliction and return to normal life, and the defeatists.

Each one of us suffer. But our suffering, and the causes of that will be different for each of us. But there is also one thing all sufferers have in common, and that is the need for hope.

It is terrible enough to lose a child. It is another thing entirely to believe that death is the end of the story and that nothing good can come out of it.

It is a terrible thing to go through a divorce. It is another thing to have no hope of experiencing love and the experience of being desired again.

It is terrible to lose a job. It is another thing to feel that there is no hope of ever being hired again.

It is terrible to have an affliction or illness. It is another thing to see no hope of ever living without that affliction or illness.

It is one thing to struggle with an addiction or besetting sin. It is another thing to feel that there is no hope of it every overcoming it. If we are going to endure or overcome suffering, we desperately need hope, a belief that things can or will get better, that this is not the end of our story.

I have struggled this week in what to say in this sermon. Because I don't want this sermon to come across with a mix of platitudes, and easy self help answers. Nor do I want to point to quickly to the end of the story and the hope that we find in our being reunited in Jesus. Because there is a life to be lived here.

When we experience pain, we know that we love and that we are alive. One of my guilty pleasures is watching podiatrist videos on YouTube. One thing that do is to take a scalpel and scrape calluses off the bottom of people's feet. When I first watched them, I'd wince, expecting the person to erupt in pain. But then I learnt that the skin is dead and therefore has no pain.

We experience pain because we are alive. We experience pain because we love. We experience pain because it affects us. And there is hope. Because it is a fundamental aspect of our humanity that in grief, love and humanity collide.

There is hope in this because it propels us into action to eliminate or reduce the pain in our world. The pursuit of cures for all types of diseases, the ways in which we treat others, seek reconciliation, pursue justice, bring an end to conflict, are birthed out of love and a desire to relieve that pain of others.

“While other worldviews lead us to sit in the midst of life’s joys, foreseeing the coming sorrows, Christianity empowers its people to sit in the midst of this world’s sorrows, tasting the coming joy.” Tim Keller

“Nothing irredeemable has happened or can happen to us on our way to our destiny in God’s full world.” Dallas Willard. Both these quotes point to the writing of Paul in Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

When you look at the life of Paul, we find the good that God brought from his suffering. Paul endured shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonment and rejection. And yet through this suffering he was able to write the major portion of the new testament and to provide the theological grounding for our faith.

We look to the life of Jesus. Jesus, who also endured rejection, betrayal, beatings and death. And yet through his obedience, he brought life to all who believe in him. We would not be here without the pain that Jesus endured.

I read a story about a man named Stuart. He was a musician, but more interested in studying the history, theory and theology of music, as well as playing. Out of the blue, he developed an unpleasant form of cancer. He spent weeks in hospital, receiving the full gamut of intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy. His hair fell out. He became emaciated. The cancer retreated, then came back in a more aggressive form. The oncologists were talking about ‘one more push’ with a new experimental treatment. He was in pain, weak and distressed.

During his illness he was asked, “if you had 3 months of pain-free, useful life followed by death, how would you want to spend those months?” Instead of giving the reply that others expected, of completing his thesis and wrapping up his research, he said that he would tell people about his faith. That he would write letters to his friends, family and contacts. He would tell people what was happening to him and about his faith.

And that is exactly what he spent the rest of his life doing. Not in 3 months of pain free life but wracked by the pain of cancer.

At his funeral there were many people there who had received a special letter from Stuart: a letter in which he poured out his heart to them, in an unusually open and forthright way. The last 3 months of his life were described by his friends as a wonderfully rich, profound experience for him, as well as for his many friends and contacts.

A recurring theme of human experience is the strange but wonderful way that suffering and pain can be transformed by God’s grace into something of beauty and lasting significance.

Originally, the title of this sermon was to be hope beyond pain. But as I’ve sat and thought this week, I’ve realised that there is hope in pain. It is the very story of God in this world. Creation is good. Creation is fallen. Creation is redeemed. This wonderful mystery doesn’t happen automatically. Suffering can be destructive, instead of redemptive. It seems that it requires our consent, our willingness to submit and, in some sense, to accept and then to let go of our suffering before it can be redeemed.

But we do not accept suffering in a fatalistic sense, as merely capricious or malevolent, the ‘clumsy, wasteful, blundering low and horridly cruel works of nature’.

We accept it from the hand of a loving God. And the hallmark of Christian suffering, redemptive suffering, is that instead of leading to despair, it is penetrated through with hope. For suffering is not the end of the story. Amen.