



## **Worship Service Theme: Suffering**

**Welcome:** Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is \_\_\_\_ and I'll be leading our worship time today. I've been reminded lately that the world has so much brokenness and pain, so I thought we'd look at a very real and universal topic: **suffering**.

I often tell people that the Bible could be described as one long story of people in trouble ... and God's help and desire to save them. There's obviously a lot of hardship in the world, but with faith, that's not the end of the story.

Thank you for joining us, and please pray with me as we open our time together.

**Opening Prayer:** Great and loving God, we ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

### **Opening Hymn: Doxology**

**Statement of Faith:** Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23 together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**For the Beauty of the Earth  
Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us  
Amazing Grace**

**First reading:** Psalm 116: 5-10

<sup>5</sup> Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;  
our God is merciful.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord preserves the simple;  
when I was brought low, he saved me.

<sup>7</sup> Return, O my soul, to your rest;  
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

<sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling;

<sup>9</sup> I will walk before the Lord  
in the land of the living.

<sup>10</sup> I believed, even when I said,  
“I am greatly afflicted.”

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**Holy, Holy, Holy  
Jesus Loves Me**

**Second reading:** Romans 5: 2-5

<sup>2</sup> Through Christ we have also obtained access, by faith, into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**Softy and Tenderly**

**Leaning on the Everlasting Arms**

**Interactive Homily:** Let's talk more about suffering.

- Who here has experienced something hard in their life? (show of hands) – Yes, *everyone!* So how universal is suffering?
- What kinds of hard things happen in this world?
  - Disappointments, disease, hurts from family or people, lost jobs
- When you were in a hard place, what helped you through it? What / who does God give us in our suffering?
  - Family, friends, prayer, quiet, grieving, persevering
- How do you feel about that Bible verse I read earlier that says: “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”?
  - Gives encouragement; there are good things that come
  - *But* also could have a feeling of, “well, thanks a lot...” because it sounds hard! And it is – endurance is hard, character building is hard.
- What character qualities do we need to get through suffering?
  - Strength
  - Courage
  - Patience
  - Hope
  - Endurance
  - Faith
  - Love
- How do those qualities [repeat them] help us live in the moment, rather than fixating on the past or future?
  - We use each and every one of those qualities right now, day by day, minute by minute, as we work through hardship. That's what produces more of those qualities!
  - And we lean on others when we don't have enough of those qualities.

- *When we have faith in God's goodness, the hardship is never the end of the story.* There is always something beyond it: more faith, more endurance, more character, more love.
  - God helps us grow and endure through the suffering.
  - And: Just as others help us while we go through hardship, we are called to help others when they go through hardship.

Of course, the ultimate example is that of Jesus: His suffering was real, and hard, but with an ultimate purpose for our good. Hear this from the prophet Isaiah:

- Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement **that brought us peace,**  
and with his wounds **we are healed.** (Isaiah 53:4-5)

As Jesus said to his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

... Let's take a moment to silently pray and reflect on how God helps us through suffering, and that we would be aware of helping others through their hardships as well.

**(Silent Prayer)** ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

**Lord's Prayer:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

**Suggested Hymns:**

**This is My Father's World**  
**It is Well with My Soul**  
**Standing on the Promises**

**Third Reading:** “Today,” by Shauna Niequist<sup>1</sup>

“I know that the world is several versions of mad right now. Pessimism and grimness sometimes seem like the only responsible choices. I wake up at night and think about pesticides and politics and fundamentalism and disease and bombs. I worry about the world we’re creating for [our children].

That’s why I’m making a shameless appeal for celebration. I need optimism and celebration and hope [in God] in the face of violence, despair, and anxiety. Despair is a slow death, and a lifetime of anger is like a lifetime of hard drinking: it shows in your face and your eyes and your words even when you think it doesn’t.

The only option [in life], as I see it, is a delicate weaving of action and celebration. Let’s act, read, protest, protect, picket, learn, advocate for, fight against, but let’s be careful that in [doing] all that, we don’t [miss] a world that’s teeming with beauty and hope and God’s redemption all around us, right now, today.”

**Suggested Hymns:**

**Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing**  
**Shall We Gather at the River**

**Fourth Reading:** Quotes on Suffering

God is too good to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. When you cannot trace God’s hand, you can trust God’s heart. –English preacher Charles Spurgeon

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars. –Lebanese-American writer and poet Kahlil Gibran

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved. –Helen Keller

Like the Good Samaritan, may we not be ashamed of touching the wounds of those who suffer, but try to heal them with concrete acts of love. –Pope Francis

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<sup>1</sup> from *Savor*, by Shauna Niequist (Zondervan, 2015), p. 276

**Suggested Hymns:**

**Blest Be the Tie that Binds**

**I Need Thee Every Hour**

**Closing Blessing:** (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)**