



Worship Service Theme: Suffering

Helpful elements:

Green table covering (Ordinary Time)

White board and pens

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, suffering is not the end of the story.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to 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 that passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

⁴Yea, 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.

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

⁶Surely 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: Isaiah 53:4-5. This is considered a prophecy about Jesus:

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ...

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵But 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.

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

²Through 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. ³Not only that, but we
rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and
endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and 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 a bit 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, death, emotional pain, lost jobs, natural disasters (flood, hurricanes, fires) ...
- When you were in a hard place, what helped you through it? In other words, what and who does God give us to help us when we're suffering?
 - Family and friends
 - Prayer, meditation, being quiet
 - Taking advantage of every tool God has given us (talking with someone, exercise, sleep, medications from a doctor)
 - Grieving – letting ourselves feel the sadness as it comes, not denying it or pushing it away; like riding ocean waves, not going under
 - Persevering: continuing to go on in hope
 - Helping others who may be worse off than we are
- 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 persevere through suffering? (*Encourage discussion; write on a white board if available*)
 - Strength
 - Courage
 - Patience
 - Hope
 - Endurance
 - Faith

- Love
- How do these 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!
 - We remind ourselves and each other of what God has done in the past: the victories and blessings we've seen in our lives.
 - And we lean on others when we don't have enough hope, joy, love, etc. that we need on any given day, to encourage us forward.
- *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 of hope in hardship is that of Jesus. His suffering was real and hard, but with an ultimate purpose for our good. As we read in Isaiah earlier, "upon him was the chastisement **that brought us peace**, and with his wounds **we are healed**."

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: “The Weaver” by Grant Colfax Tullar, American minister, composer, and hymn writer

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Oft’ times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not ’til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver’s skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

Suggested Hymns:
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
Shall We Gather at the River

Fourth Reading: Quotes on Suffering

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. –American author and lecturer Helen Keller, who was both deaf and blind

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

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. –American writer James Baldwin

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

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

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. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

Extra Material:

"Today," by Shauna Niequist¹

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 I worry about the world we're creating for [our children].

¹ from *Savor* (Zondervan, 2015), p. 276

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.

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.