



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 never 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 often 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: 2 Corinthians 4:7-10. Just before this passage, Paul has talked
about having in our hearts “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the
face of Jesus Christ.”

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power
belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down,

but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

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) ...
- In the passage I read earlier, Paul says we as human beings are like jars of clay. What is a jar of clay like?
 - Strong and fragile at the same time. (Does that sound like your experience of life? It does mine!)
- Paul goes on to vividly describe how we experience suffering as people of faith. Let's read these again: What's the repeated word in these descriptions?
 - Afflicted, **but not** crushed
 - Perplexed, **but not** despairing
 - Persecuted, **but not** forsaken
 - Struck down, **but not** destroyed
 - Facing death, **but** given life in Christ
 - "But"! Suffering is real, BUT suffering cannot and will not destroy us, because Jesus' life is in us.
- When you're in a hard place, what helps 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.

- Helping others who may be worse off than we are.
- What character qualities help us and grow in us as we walk through suffering? (*Generate examples; write suggestions on a white board if available, e.g.:*)
 - Strength
 - Courage
 - Patience, perseverance
 - Hope
 - Faith
 - Love
- How do these qualities [*repeat suggestions*] help us endure suffering?
 - We look to God to provide those life-affirming qualities day by day, minute by minute.
 - We remind ourselves and each other of what God has done in the past: the victories and blessings we've seen in our lives.
 - We lean on others to encourage us forward.
- There's no easy answer to why there's suffering. We live in the tension of bad things *and* beautiful things happening to and around us, all the time.
- But with memories of and faith in God's goodness, the hardship is never the end of the story. "We are afflicted, but not crushed ... we are facing death, but given life in Christ."
 - God helps us to bear and grow through the suffering.

The ultimate example of hope in hardship is Jesus. His suffering was real, but with an ultimate purpose for our good. As we read in Isaiah, "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].

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.

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.

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