

GROWING Together

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WHEN GOD IS ENOUGH

The Struggle of Suffering

"I don't want to go through with this. I want it to be finished."

"No one wants me. What's the point of going on?"

"The agony of watching her die is awful. I don't want to be here."

Jesus voices his response to suffering when he weeps in sorrow and prays in the Garden. Like us, he doesn't want to suffer either. He agonizes with God, whom he knows intimately: "Please take this away..." Jesus prays so hard that his sweat becomes "like great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). He knows he has done nothing to deserve arrest, imprisonment, or even death, that he will be accused unjustly. He prays and prays again. Accepting pain, betrayal, and grief takes time. It is hard work.

Jesus walks to the cross. That is, he walks into his pain and agony, neither avoiding nor hiding from it. At moments he even fears that God whom he loves with all his being has abandoned him. From the cross he calls out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The story of Job in the Bible is another story of a good man who suffers unjustly. Job loves God and is loved by God. Having lost everything of value and in great physical pain, he pleads for healing. But God is silent. Becoming angry Job challenges God, asking "Why?" Repeatedly he demands an explanation, and finally receives a response. But God answers none of Job's questions. Instead, God speaks to Job from a whirlwind –reminding him that Job is human and God is God. Strangely, Job is comforted; answers no longer seem so important. It is not only in God's message that Job's healing comes – it is in Job's deep encounter with God. Being with God is enough.

Being a Christ follower has never meant walking only on the sunny side of the street. We cannot escape suffering; pain is part of our lives. We try to avoid it. Or, like Job, we become angry, strike out at God, at others, at our own helplessness. We demand a miracle and ask to be made whole. Sometimes our worst fears become reality because God seems silent, hidden, ineffective. Our questions are endless and our fears huge. We struggle deeply and cry out for God to explain.

Being a Christ follower means that to deal with these struggles we need to be in a growing relationship with God, one that allows us to become angry, to weep and to agonize, to ask for miracles. This relationship is all-important. And, it becomes ever more intimate as we continue to pray again and again, listen to the Word, draw nourishment from the Sacraments, and allow God to enter our daily life more deeply. When we face difficult times, often we can only walk into the pain and then through it, as Jesus did. Being fully aware of God's closeness brings enormous strength.

Being a Christ follower, we know that we never walk alone. Christ knows what pain is – Christ died on the cross. Even there God did not forsake him. Christ's own deep relationship with God is revealed in his final words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When we walk through pain, God is with us. Because of that Presence we can find an inner peace that passes all understanding. We can bear our suffering with grace and find rest in God's embrace. Living deeply with God is enough.



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