

Buddhism

Christianity and the Religions of the World

Romans 8:18, 28, Philippians 4:6-7

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later... And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

I. The Story of the Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama – 563 B.C. – 483 B.C.

What was Siddhartha troubled by?

What does the word, "Buddha" mean?

II. Essential Buddhist Beliefs

A. Non-Theism

B. The Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering is an integral part of life
2. Suffering is caused by attachment, craving or desire
3. Craving or attachment, and thus suffering, can be overcome
4. The Holy Eight-Fold Path is the way to overcoming suffering

C. The Eight-Fold Path –

Right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

D. Nirvana

III. Essential Differences Between Christianity and Buddhism

A. God

B. The Human Condition and its Solution

C. Life After Death

This week we will examine various Bible passages related to peace and comfort in the face of the anxiety, suffering and difficulties of life which the Buddha noted were a part of the human condition. Christians acknowledge this suffering but find our peace and comfort in God through faith and prayer.

Monday, January 22 – Review your notes from yesterday’s sermon. The Buddha challenges each of us with regard to the things we are attached to. He is right in noting that our attachments, clinging and desires can lead to suffering. We noted that Christians believe some attachments are given by God and are good. But some are not attachments God would want us to foster. Among these are the craving, desire and attachment to our possessions, power, or an unhealthy obsession with even good desires. Let’s begin our study this week with a study of what Jesus said about these kinds of desires – their words echo some of the positive ideas of Buddhism. Read Matthew 6:24-34. Now read Luke 12:13-21. What is the point of this last story? The Buddha taught non-attachment through meditation. Jesus calls us to keep our minds focused on the most important things first (6:33), to trust in God for the rest, and to not be obsessed with wealth. Invite the Lord to give you a heart of contentment, and to help you trust him, and to help you to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.

Tuesday, January 23 – Trusting in God, and committing our ways to him offers us peace. King David knew this and experienced peace in the midst of turmoil through prayer and worship. The Psalms are a collection of the prayers and praises of God’s people through which they found, or expressed, peace. Today we turn to the most famous of these: Read Psalm 23. How does this picture of God and the relationship the psalmist had with God bring peace in the face of anxiety and suffering?

Wednesday, January 24 – Buddhism, like Hinduism, teaches reincarnation through multiple lifetimes. Furthermore, Buddhism teaches that there is no soul – there is no “you” that goes on after this life – only karmic energy which is transferred to another life being born. In addition when nirvana is finally achieved, this karmic energy is snuffed out, dissipated throughout all creation. Christianity teaches resurrection – that we live this life only once, and then our soul lives on after our body, and is given a new heavenly body. Read I Corinthians 15, the entire chapter. Re-read the last verse – a powerful “therefore” in response to the teaching regarding the resurrection. Thank God today for the promise and hope we have in Christ.

Thursday, January 25 – Let’s look once again at the concept of karma – a concept we also found in Hinduism. The key idea is that your deeds and thoughts in past lives, and in this life, will determine your future here and your future lives. The way out of this cycle is to try harder to do more good deeds than bad. But few if any ever attain perfection in this life. Christianity also affirms that we reap what we sow. But among the central tenants of the Christian faith is that God chose to help us by sending his perfect son to suffer on our behalf, taking upon himself our bad karma while crediting to our account his good karma, thus offering grace instead of endless judgment. Read II Corinthians 5:19-21. As those who have received Christ we now pursue a life of love in response to what God has done for us, not seeking to win salvation, but in gratitude for it.

Friday, January 26 – Christians find their peace, guidance and comfort in prayer, trust and the work of the Holy Spirit. Read Philippians 4:6-7 and Romans 8:18-39.

“Buddhism”

Theme: Christianity and Religions of the World

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

January 20 and 21, 2007 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Romans 8:18, 28, Philippians 4:6-7

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SLIDE Christianity and World Religions – Buddhism.

As you are seated, please take out of your bulletin your sermon notes and your study guide. The sermon notes are a chance for you to follow along and write down things you would like to remember. The study guide is a chance for you to do some reading of the Bible on your own and to explore some of the themes that we will be talking about today in the sermon.

Today we continue our series of sermons on Christianity and religions of the world by focusing on Buddhism. I want to start by giving the same disclaimer this morning that I gave at last week. I have studied for each of these sermons around 20 to 30 hours and spent time with persons from these different religious traditions, most of it in the last week. I have explored Buddhism through several books that I have read, the various websites about Buddhism that abound, and meeting with two leaders of the Buddhist community here in Durango. As I said last week, one of my professors in seminary in my philosophy of religion course was Buddhist, and we even attended a Buddhist temple for worship. All of that together and does not make me an expert on Buddhism. I am a novice and am barely understanding Buddhism and the basic beliefs of this religion. What I am going to attempt to do today is to share with you and summarize what I have learned.

I will also say that there are several major forms of Buddhism, and many minor expressions of this faith tradition as well. The two major expressions of Buddhism are Theravada and Mahayana and they see the world in different ways. They answer questions about Buddhism a bit differently. Within Mahayana we find Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism and many other paths. If you were to ask any one of them a question about Buddhism you might get a slightly different answer each of them. Just as if you asked a Roman Catholic or United Methodist or Southern Baptist questions about Christianity you might get different responses from each one of them. So I am

going to try and summarize for you as best as I can the essence of Buddhist teaching.

SLIDE 2 The Story of the Buddha

Buddhism as a religion or philosophy has its beginning point with a man whose name was Siddhartha Gautama who lived from 563 B.C. to 483 B.C. He lived about 80 years. On the screen you will see a timeline that we have been using that is helpful.

SLIDE 3 Time-line of the Hebrews

Abraham	Slaves in Egypt	Moses	David	Exile	Jesus
2000 B.C.	1600 B.C.	1200 B.C.	1000 B.C.	586 B.C.	5 B.C.

Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha, was born about the time that the Jews were in exile in Babylon. While he was alive the Jews returned to Jerusalem. From four BC to 29 AD was the development of the Pali Canon. This is the body of the Buddhist teachings as well as the stories that developed about the Buddha. Those of began to be written down about 150 years after the time of the Buddha, but were really not pulled together until around the time of Christ. Then Tibetan Buddhism began to develop around 700.

Siddhartha (Buddha) was born around 563 B.C. in the town of Kapilavastu (located in today's Nepal). Siddhartha's parents were King Shuddhodana and Queen Maya, who ruled the Sakyas. His history is a miraculous one... One night, Queen Maya dreamed that an elephant with six tusks, carrying a lotus flower in its trunk, touched her right side. At that moment her son was conceived. Brahmins (learned men) came and interpreted the dream. The child would be either the greatest king in the world or the greatest ascetic (a holy man who practices self-denial). The future child would be named Siddhartha, which means "he whose aim is accomplished."

Later when Queen Maya was going to her father's home to prepare for the birth, she stepped off her chariot in the Lumbini Gardens and held the branch of a sal tree to rest. In that instant, Siddhartha emerged from her right side without any help. The infant walked seven steps each in four directions of the compass, and lotus flowers sprouted from where his foot touched the earth. Then the infant said, "No further births have I to endure, for this is my last body. Now shall I destroy and pluck out by the roots the sorrow that is caused by birth and death." Seven days later Queen Maya died. Mahaprajapati, Maya's sister, looked after Siddhartha. King Shuddhodana

shielded Siddhartha from all kinds of suffering and hardship. When Siddhartha was about 20, he married Yasodhara, daughter of one of the King's ministers, and one year later they had a child named Rahula (meaning "fetter" or "impediment").

Siddhartha grew up in the lap of luxury. He was the son of the King of a small city state. So Siddhartha was the Prince. He had everything that a young could man possibly want. At the age of 16 he was married and he had a son. He had riches and wealth beyond or to be measured. But he was also young man that found none of that seemed to satisfy the deep needs and yearnings in his heart.

He grew up in Nepal, which is modern-day India, and the primary religion there was Hinduism. In the Hinduism of Siddhartha's day it was difficult a fork, and adherents of that faith to have a connection with God. We learned last week in studying Hinduism that even Anand who had been interviewed said that only those who were farther in the face could have a relationship with God. The same was true in Siddhartha's day. The Hinduism of that day was basically a religion of the priestly caste. Remember that there are forecasts in Hinduism and the priestly or the Brahmin caste was the highest caste and they controlled the religion of the day and access to the deity who reflected the God who was beyond description or Brahmin. There was no personal relationship for a common Hindu with God. They would go to priest and offer their sacrifice or their offering and then the priest would perform a ritual on behalf of the worshiper towards one of the deities in the hopes of giving something acceptable to Brahmin.

By the age of 29 Siddhartha Gautama is struggling. He wants to explore the world and be set free the confines of his father's kingdom. He has been protected and sheltered from suffering his whole life because his mother died when he was young and his father did not want to subject him to the cruelty of the world. But Siddhartha wants to see what life is really like so he leaves his father's palace and he goes out into the world exploring the city.

SLIDE 4 Mural in Thailand

The mural on the video screen is a picture of the story I am about to describe to you. This story is fundamental and the foundational for understanding Buddhism. Some consider it legendary and some consider it in historical. Siddhartha asked his charioteer, Channa, to take him out of the city two times without the consent of the king. During these two trips, Siddhartha saw "Four Sights" that changed his life. On the first trip, he saw old age,

sickness, and death. The second trip, he saw a wandering holy man, an ascetic, with no possessions. Siddhartha started questioning the holy man, who had a shaved head, wore only a ragged yellow robe, and carried a walking-staff. The man said, ***"I am... terrified by birth and death and therefore have adopted a homeless life to win salvation... I search for the most blessed state in which suffering, old age, and death are unknown."***

These two trips that Siddhartha to caused him a great deal of anxiety and he began to feel something that many of us have felt. It is what German theologians call "angst." It's universal part of the human condition. How do we live with despair in the knowledge that we will grow old, and get sick, and eventually die?

I remember the first time I went to the funeral of a family member, and I saw my last name on the tombstone and I realized that one day they would bury me in the ground too. It took my breath away and maybe stop for a moment even though I was only in my mid-20s. I began to wonder what the meaning of life was what our purpose here on earth is.

My daughter likes to grab my beard and point out all of the new gray hairs I have gotten the last year! My son likes to point out the fact that my hair is getting thinner on my temples and he told me the other day he was concerned about where all my hair was going. I realize as they point these things out to me that if I ever have grandchildren they will never know me as someone who had a reddish brown beard or a full head of hair. They'll never know that their grandfather used to have brown hair that went all over his head. If my mother's side of the family is any indication as people tell me it is, I will just be known as the bald grandfather who is shrinking! We laugh about that but underneath it is the sense that I am growing older.

Then we stand by the bedside of someone we love who is dying and we feel that angst of saying goodbye. This is what Siddhartha is experiencing as he tries to find a way to live with the anxiety. He sees a web of suffering everywhere. There is disappointment and transience and he wonders, "what do you do about that?"

He goes back to his father's palace and his dad and throws him a party to try to cheer him up. They celebrate with lots of drink and food and wealth and women in but he finds that none of those things can drown out the angst that he felt inside. There is a picture on that same mural of what happens next.

SLIDE 5 Mural of Siddhartha cutting off his hair.

That night, Siddhartha silently kissed his sleeping wife and son, and ordered Channa to drive him out to the forest. At the edge of the forest, Siddhartha took off his jeweled sword, and cut off his hair and beard. He then took off all his princely garments and put on a yellow robe of a holy man. He then ordered Channa to take his possessions back to his father.

He wanted to learn from the wise sages of Hinduism and so he decided to pursue their lifestyle. But Siddhartha found no peace in religion especially since the religion of his day did not offer a connection for the common person to God. Finally he pursued the course of an aesthetic. He began to starve himself and he would eat only one grain of rice a day thinking that he might starve out this angst. But on the verge of starvation he realized that he still felt the same despair. How do you live in a world like that?

Six years go by and one day he is in meditation under a fig tree, often referred to as the Bo Tree or the Tree of Enlightenment. While meditating, Mara (an evil god) sent his three sons and daughters to tempt Siddhartha with thirst, lust, discontent, and distractions of pleasure. Siddhartha, un-swayed, entered a deep meditation, and recalled all his previous rebirths, gained knowledge of the cycle of births and deaths, and with certainty, cast off the ignorance and passion of his ego which bound him to the world. Thereupon, Siddhartha had attained enlightenment and became enlightened.

SLIDE 6 Mural of Buddha under the tree

The Pali word for enlightened is Budh. The word also means “to wake up out of a sleepiness or fog.” He became the Buddha (enlightened one). His own desire and suffering were over and, as the Buddha, he experienced Nirvana... ***“There is a sphere which is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air...which is neither this world nor the other world, neither sun nor moon. I deny that it is coming or going, enduring, death or birth. It is only the end of suffering.”*** Instead of casting off his body and his existence, however, Buddha made a great act of self-sacrifice. He turned back, determined to share his enlightenment with others so that all living souls could end the cycles of their own rebirth and suffering.

So he spends the next 45 years of his life teaching people what he learned in his enlightenment. He offered them a path to overcome the angst they were feeling in their lives. Some were confused by what he taught and some follow him. He was a gentle and a just man who developed a monastic

community.

When Buddha was about eighty, a blacksmith named Cuanda gave him a meal that caused him to become ill. Buddha forced himself to travel to Kushinagar, and laid down on his right side to rest in a grove of shala trees. As a crowd of followers gathered, the trees sprouted blossoms and showered them on Buddha. Buddha told Ananda,

SLIDE 7 *"I am old and my journey is near its end. My body is like a worn-out cart held together only by the help of leather straps."*

Three times, Buddha asked the people if they had any questions, but they all remained silent. Finally Buddha said,

SLIDE 8 *"Everything that has been created is subject to decay and death. Everything is transitory. Work out your own salvation with diligence."*

After passing through several states of meditation, the Buddha died, reaching Parinirvana (the cessation of suffering, perception and sensation).

That's just a thumbnail sketch of what motivated the Buddha and how he achieved his enlightenment. Let's turn our attention now to essential Buddhist teachings.

SLIDE 9 Essential Buddhist Teachings

You will notice in your sermon notes that I used the words, "essential Buddhist BELIEFS" for this part of the sermon. As I visited with leaders of the Buddhist community here in Durango this past week I discovered that "belief" is not a helpful word. Buddhism sees itself not as a religion with beliefs, but as a philosophy with teachings that help its adherents achieve enlightenment through meditative experience and knowledge.

The first teaching we must start with is the reality that Buddhism is non-theistic.

SLIDE 10 Non-Theism

It is not an atheistic religion. It does not say there is no God. It does not say that there is a God. It is the only of the major world religions we are covering that does not have as one of its core beliefs of faith in God. This is understandable.

When Siddhartha tried to find peace he could not find it in the religion of his day, so this is what he said. "I don't know if there is a God or is not a God.

The question is irrelevant because I could not find peace with her my religion or faith in God. I had to find peace through my own mind.” The idea of God in Buddhism is really a mute point that has nothing to do or say to the suffering we experience in our lives. Everything else is then based on what we might do to control our thoughts to ease this anxiety or angst and feel in our lives.

On the night that he experienced enlightenment, the Buddha came to an understanding of the four Noble truths. This week I had an opportunity to sit down with Bruce Cressman and Katherine Barr, leaders in the Buddhist community here in Durango and active at the Dharma center which is just down off of Colorado Avenue and for Florida Road. Bruce is a Tibetan Buddhist and was taught “Contemplative Practice” at the Naropa Institute in Boulder for 16 years before moving to Durango a year and half ago. Katherine is certified by the Community Dharma Leadership Program to lead this local Dharma Center, something like a local pastor in the United Methodist Church.

I asked them to give us an overview of Buddhism and to explain these four Noble truths to our congregation and here's what they said.

VIDEO Buddhism 1

I have included in your sermon notes these four Noble truths and they are important to understanding Buddhism. The first Noble truth is that suffering is a part of life. Now Siddhartha understood this because of the angst and anxiety he was feeling, but during his enlightenment he came to understand how it is that the suffering is caused and how to overcome it.

SLIDE 11 The Four Noble Truths:

1) Suffering is an integral part of life

2) Suffering is caused by attachment, craving or desire. Of the Buddhist perspective, the cause of your anxiety, despair or suffering is your attachment to things. It is your desire that things be permanent. It is your craving for things. It is your unwillingness to let go of your youth that causes you to despair about growing old. It is your unwillingness to let go of life that causes you to despair about death. It is your unwillingness to let go of your hopes for that promotion that causes you to be upset when the promotion does not come through. Your suffering and the feelings of despair or angst come as a result of your trying to cling to things.

3) Craving or attachment, and thus suffering, can be overcome. If you can not be attached to things and crave them that you wouldn't be hurt

or suffer when you didn't get them. Becoming unattached to things is possible through meditation. It is a state known as cessation.

- 4) The Holy Eight-Fold Path is the way to overcoming suffering.** I have put this eightfold Path in your sermon notes today and much of it we would agree to as Christians.

SLIDE 12 The Eight-Fold Path

- 1) Right views or thinking**
- 2) Right intention**
- 3) Right speech**
- 4) Right action**
- 5) Right livelihood**
- 6) Right effort**
- 7) Right mindfulness**
- 8) Right concentration**

Once more I want to ask Bruce and Katherine to explain this eightfold path.

VIDEO Buddhist 2

SLIDE 12 Eight Fold Path (repeat slide)

Katherine was very helpful in describing the first two as having to do with wisdom, the next three having to do with ethics and ethical behavior, and the last three having to do with meditation or mindfulness. Bruce and Katherine both shared that the word “right” is not always helpful, and the idea can be understood also as “**complete as it is**” or “**wise.**” A critical part of Buddhism is the ability to control the mind and the thoughts which lead to enlightenment.

Many philosophers have noted that Buddhism was really a reformation of Hinduism, much like the Protestant Reformation was an attempt to reform the Catholic Church. It is important to remember that Siddhartha was a Hindu at first and several of the ideas in Buddhism build upon the Hinduism of his day.

Karma and reincarnation are two important ideas in Buddhism as well as Hinduism. Remember that Karma is what you build up over your lifetime in Hinduism. In Buddhism this karmic force is all that your life is composed of. This force is made up of the good things you do and the bad things you do. The more good things you do the more that shape your future in a good way,

and the board of bad things you do the more it shape your future in a bad way. Karma is built up from the things you do and the things you say the things you think. This cycle of death and rebirth is called Samsara.

Then why in this life is over your karmic energy is transferred into a new human being be more if you have good karma. If you have bad karma, it's possible you would actually go into a place like hell where there are hungry ghosts living. All that you have is this karmic force and this is an important distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism. And Hinduism your soul is God within you, the Brahman atman which is God within you. In Buddhism you don't have a soul. There is no soul, just a karmic force that is a compilation of your past lives which carries forward into the next life.

One last word on reincarnation that Adam Hamilton mentions in the book we're reading. I too as a pastor have people come to me and tell me that they find reincarnation a neat idea. But in the religion that embrace reincarnation, reincarnation is seen as a prison. Those religions who embrace reincarnation want to be free from it because we are constantly trapped in being recycled again and again and again into this life and suffering. For those who embrace reincarnation of their religion the goal was to escape it, and not come back.

That escape from the cycle of suffering in life is Nirvana which happens at enlightenment. Nirvana is that moment in which whatever was left of the self, due to your the ability to let go of desire and attachment, is finally extinguished and absorbed. This is cessation of perception and sensation.

Once more let's listen to Bruce and Katherine as they describe as Nirvana and give us some closing thoughts on Buddhism.

VIDEO Buddhism 3

SLIDE 13 Nirvana

Nirvana is waking up to the present moment and seeing the present reality as it really is.

That is a thumbnail sketch of some of the essential teachings of Buddhism. I wish we had time to do more with this because I spent several hours with Bruce and Katherine and felt like I had just scratched the surface. But I want to shift years for the end of this sermon and look at some of the essential differences between Christianity and Buddhism.

SLIDE 14 Essential Differences Between Christianity and Buddhism

Before looking at differences I want to mention that I think there is much we would have to learn from the Buddha. Buddhism has many wonderful aspects and has something to teach us about being still and quiet and not letting this frenetic pace of life that most of us live. Many of Buddhist teachings sound much like the wisdom literature that was present throughout the ancient near East and biblical times. Much of the Buddha's teachings would fit easily in the book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Some of them sound like much of what Jesus said. I was especially struck by what Bruce and Katherine said about Buddhism being primarily about wisdom and compassion. It sounded an awful lot like our struggle with faith and works as Christians.

The Dhammapada is a small collection of teachings of the Buddha fellow human beings. Let me read you a few of them and see if they don't sound like some of what we find in our own Scriptures. Dhammapada verse five:

SLIDE 15 Hate is not overcome by hate; by Love alone is hate appeased. This is an eternal law.

That sounds to me like something that Jesus would say. I hear echoes of Paul in verse 100.

SLIDE 16 Better than a thousand useless words is one single word that gives peace.

That's just a basic piece of wisdom. The apostle Paul said I would rather speak one word of understanding of a thousand words in tongues that people don't understand, and certainly in the Proverbs we hear about the power of the tongue. Then in verse 133 we read these words.

SLIDE 17 Speak not harshly to anyone. Those thus addressed will retort. Painful, indeed, is vindictive speech. Blows in exchange may bruise you.

That sounds like something you might find in our New Testament letter that is like the book of Proverbs, and that is the book of James.

There are many wonderful things that we would read in Buddhism and be able to embrace. The idea of not clinging to things and being so attached to this world is powerful and has something to teach us. But there are also fundamental differences as well and I want to look at those in three areas today.

SLIDE 18 God

First let's talk about God. The fundamental difference between Buddhism and Christianity is our starting point. Siddhartha could not experience God through his religion so he said it's a non-issue and it is irrelevant to the issue of suffering and the human condition. Our beginning point in Christianity is the affirmation that there is a God who created the universe, and that everything in creation displays his glory. This God is personal, knowable, and longs to be known by his creation. God created us in his image. We have a soul but we are created in God's image. Our soul is not God but it is in the image of God.

God longs for us to be his children and God created us to be recipients of his love. The God of Christianity speaks of a God who loves creation and loves his children. God looks at us and knows us. God weeps with us and sometimes is angered by us, and longs to be known by us and to be our heavenly father, Abba.

As Christians we believe in a God who longs to understand our eighth. Part of the heart of Christianity is that God understands all the things that Siddhartha experienced. So what did God do about that? God did not leave us here alone to be afraid, but instead he chose to walk among us as a human being and to experience the angst for himself.

God came in the person of Jesus to know what it is like to anticipate your death; to know what it's like to lose people who you love. That shortest passage of Scripture, "Jesus wept" is meant to tell us that through Jesus God experienced to the human condition. God chose to show us the way in the person of Jesus, and the way is not a holy eightfold path but it is two simple and profound Commandments: love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself. That is the path of Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught us the path by his life, and then by his death he took upon himself the bad karma of the world and then gave to us his good karma and his perfection in righteousness. He died in his late in the tomb and then finally on the third day he rose again. All of this is God's Word and gift to us in the face of our angst—in the face of what the Buddha calls suffering. This leads us to the issue of the human condition and its solution.

SLIDE 19 The Human Condition and its Solution

Christians also believe that we face this angst. The reason there is a Christianity is because we believe that this angst is a part of life. The

Buddha and many ways tees up for us the gospel. He recognizes that this is our condition as human beings—to experience suffering. But as Christians this is not our local point.

We do believe that suffering can come because we are inappropriately attached to the wrong things at times. We would agree not to love riches or power and wealth and positions and authority. We would agree that these things are transient and not to hold onto them. You remember what Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the other things that you worry about will be taking care of. Don't worry about those things. Consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and how God takes care of them. God loves you much more than knees and he will provide for you."

Yes we agree with that but there are some things we are meant to be attached to. You actually were designed for attachment to God. You were designed to be attached to creation. Does that mean there will be suffering? Yes. It's hard when you say goodbye to a loved one. Sometimes there is suffering because you love somebody almost too much. You are meant to have some attachments and that will produce suffering in your life sometimes. That's just a part of the deal for us as Christians as we think about how much we love our spouses or children or are close friends or even our pets.

Sometimes there is unmerited suffering because people do bad things in this world. But here's where the gospel of Jesus Christ is so powerful. The gospel of Christ teaches that God takes unmerited suffering and rings from it good out of evil, so the cross of Christ becomes the central means for our redemption and reconciliation with God. Last week we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday and one of his most famous sermons was when he preached about those four little girls who were killed in a bombing in Alabama. Dr. King proclaimed that day that God would bring good even out of that evil which produced unmerited suffering.

Christians sometimes even embrace suffering. Those early Christians when they were persecuted for their faith rejoiced and Katherine sells worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ. Suffering transforms our lives and sometimes. In your own life there are moments where suffering is what that has shaped you in the most profound ways and set you on a whole new trajectory. Suffering is not always to be

avoided but sometimes to be embraced. It's not that God sends suffering but that God works through suffering so that in Paul's epistle to the Romans he can say:

SLIDE 20 *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

That is part of the Christian answer to suffering. Another part of the answer to the problem of suffering is a word, "trust." You might call it faith. Faith in the person of Jesus Christ and the promises he made for us, which leads us to the last distinction that I want to raise today and that is what happens to us after we die.

SLIDE 21 **Life After Death**

We have mentioned already that for Buddhists you do not have a soul. You have energy and that energy is carried forward from the prior life into the next life. Upon your death that energy immediately passes from your last body and immediately is reborn into a new body in a mother's womb. You might think of as a candle passing one flame onto another. There are no memories or recollection necessarily. There is only the karmic force and what you did in your last life determines what your next life looks like. When this life time is over with that karmic energy is transferred into a new womb.

But at the end of all of this cycle of death and rebirth and death and rebirth, which is called Samsara. Loosely translated Samsara means confusion or cloudiness. When finally you've been set free from all of your desires through meditation and following the eightfold path and you no longer cling to anything or desire to hold on to life and you finally let go, then you finally enter Nirvana. Nirvana means clarity and liberation. It also means extinction and the reality that there is no more. Your energy is gone and whatever might have been is dissipated into the entire universe. There is no more you. There never really was a you, only karmic energy passed from life to life.

That's a very different picture from what we understand in the Christian faith. We believe you have a soul that God created. We believe that God loves you and God has promised to always be with you and to never abandon you. Jesus came explicitly not only to die on the cross but to be raised from the dead on the third day. He came so that you might

know that God has more in store for you than this, and that your soul has the potential to live forever with God.

This is the essence of the Christian faith which is resurrection, Easter. It is that when you die, and you put your trust in Christ, and his good karma has been credited to your account, you stand before the Lord and he says to you, "Welcome home. I have been waiting for you." There is a you. It's all your memories and all your dreams and all your thoughts that you carry with you. And as we are told in first Corinthians 13 you receive a heavenly body different from your earthly body and you are reunited with those who have gone before you, the communion of the saints.

This is the picture that we have so that Jesus could say to his disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled." This is his answer to our angst. "I know that you feel trouble in fear but don't be afraid because I will be with you. Don't be afraid even when you pass through the valley of the shadow of death because I will never leave you. Don't be afraid because I go to prepare a place for you and someday I will come back for you. Don't be afraid."

Yes you are going to grow old. Yes you were going to get sick. Yes everything is transient and none of that is permanent, except the Lord God. What he does offer you is the promise of life here and life eternal with him in his kingdom, and that is a fundamental difference in how we solve the problem of human suffering in life after death.

The apostle Paul said it this way when he talked about the relationship we can have with God through Jesus Christ.

SLIDE 22 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

When you have this kind of connection with God you have an opportunity to go to him when your heart is troubled, and to say to him, "these are my concerns in my struggles." When you do that God promises to bring you his peace which passes all understanding and guard your hearts and your minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

We have a lot to learn from our purpose friends. I appreciate so much their gentleness and nonviolence. So much of the wisdom of their

literature is much like the wisdom of our own. I believe they have much to teach us about becoming still and quiet in meditation and really listening. But I think we as Christians have much to offer our friends in the Buddhist as well—the good news of hope in life and peace in the love of Christ. Let's pray.

As your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, there are some of you who even recently have experienced this sense anxiety or angst of life. This morning is an invitation for you to be able to trust in Christ. God knows your name and your story and he loves you more than you can imagine or believe. God knit you together in your mother's womb and he understands the fears, and the disappointments of this life—he experienced them through Christ. And he longs for you to have his peace.

*So this morning I would like to invite all of us together to say a simple prayer. If you are here and you are not a Christian and you are ready to take that step and to trust in Christ, then I invite you to say this prayer with us quietly under your breath. **"Lord I give you my life, my hopes and my dreams. I give you my fears about growing old and the future, and even death. I accept the gift you give to us in Jesus Christ and commit my life to following him this day. Thank you for the gift of forgiveness that he offers, for the good grace that takes the place of the bad karma. Thank you for the promise of life forever with you. We trust you today, in Jesus name. Amen."***