

“Hurt and Hope Through Loss and Grief”

Theme: Values and Yearnings - The Keys to Life

Sermon Scripture: James 5:13-16; Luke 13:10-13

Family Activity for the Week: As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to comfort and care for others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can each of those be used to help in comforting others? How can each person’s gifts be combined with those of other family members to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also, write words or draw pictures about how they can be used to comfort people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to comfort others in the months ahead.

Monday, November 4 – Read Psalm 30:1-5. Verses 2 and 3 indicate that the writer of this psalm had faced a serious illness. Poor health (our own or that of someone we love) often tests our faith as nothing else can. But out of his personal hardship, the psalmist drew a lesson that has echoed through the ages: “Weeping may stay all night, but by morning, joy!” (verse 5). Pastor Jeff often reminds us in worship of this quoting Frederick Buechner’s words, “The worst thing is never the last thing.”

- The immediacy of physical illness forces us to pay attention, but it is only one of the ways that we can find ourselves in need of God’s comforting, restoring presence. What are some ways God has brought you “back to life from among those going down to the pit”? In what ways can you share that comfort and restoration with others?
- Jesus raised to life Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus (John 11:11-45) and Jairus’ little girl (Mark 5:22-42). That seems to have been only a partial response to their mortality — they later died again. When Jesus rose from the dead, though, the apostle said, “He destroyed death” (2 Timothy 1:10). The “morning” promised in Psalm 30 may not come in this lifetime, but we can trust that it will come. When facing the hard fact of death, how can trust in God’s eternal “morning” strengthen you or others to keep going?

Prayer: *Lord God, when the night seems darkest around me or those I love, I ask for your comforting presence. Remind me that joy comes in the morning. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 5 – Read Isaiah 49:8-16. Israel’s exile in Babylon was a national, “near-death experience.” Babylon laid waste to Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and most Israelites thought hope was gone. But Isaiah 49 promised those exiles a new start. To people inclined to say, “Yeah, right. God’s forgotten us,” verse 15 replied, “Can a woman forget her nursing child? Even these may forget, but I won’t forget you.

- What are some of the times when you’ve felt most keenly, as verse 14 puts it, that “the Lord has abandoned me; my Lord has forgotten me”? In what ways has God’s promise in verse 13 come true for you: “The Lord has comforted his people, and taken pity on those who suffer”? What people played a role in extending God’s comfort to you?
- In 2 Corinthians 6:2, the apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8. He said it spoke, not only to Israel’s exiles 600 years earlier, but to all of us who follow Christ, the ultimate divine restorer and redeemer. In what ways does it alter your outlook on tough times to apply Isaiah’s promise that God never, ever forgets God’s people to yourself and those you love?

Prayer: *Lord, I praise you for being, not only a God who watches over us with the strength of the best fathers, but one who loves us with the tenderness of the best mothers. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 6 – Read Luke 4:16-21. In his hometown synagogue, Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-3 as what we might call his personal “mission statement.” That mission statement comes from a set of values for Jesus that undergirded his actions and teachings. We see Jesus connected with those where hurting at almost every moment of his life, bringing hope and healing to those who felt lost, forgotten and abandoned.

- Luke didn’t specifically quote all of Isaiah 61:3, but Jesus must have known its words as he chose this passage. Isaiah said God would give, “a crown in place of ashes, oil of joy in place of mourning, a mantle of praise in place of discouragement,” to those who mourn. If that was Jesus’ mission statement, what do those words suggest about our calling as Jesus’ followers?
- After Jesus spoke, the people of his hometown tried to kill him (cf. Luke 4:28-30). Why? Scholar N. T. Wright wrote that Jesus, “speaks of Israel being called to be the light of the nations ... The servant

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Messiah has not come to inflict punishment, but to bring the nations God's love and mercy. That was a central theme in Israel's own scriptures, yet this message was, and remains shocking. Jesus' claim to be reaching out with healing to all people ... was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected." Who, in your personal life or in wider international or national settings, do you find it hard to wish comforted? How can you join in Jesus' mission even where it's hard?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, when I read about wiping tears from our eyes, I often think that's about the distant future. Thank you for wiping away my tears even now. Steady my hand as I wipe away other's tears. Amen.*

Thursday, November 7— Read John 15:9-12. Jesus spoke these words to his disciples on the night before he was crucified. And he spoke about two big ideas we might not expect to hear from someone who knows he is going to die the next day: "love" and "joy." Jesus brought us love and joy even in the shadow of the cross, and he called us to become people who extend those qualities to one another.

- Jesus laid out what's been called "a triad of love" for the disciples. The Father loves me, Jesus said. In the same way, I have loved you. Now, as I have loved you, love one another. We often fall short of this ideal—but this kind of love is also willing to do the hard work of binding up wounds and pursuing reconciliation. How does it bring you comfort and strength to know Jesus' love for you is rooted in God's eternal love? How can we live this kind of committed, steady love towards one another?
- Pastor Roger Frederickson observed, "The nearer Jesus came to the Cross the more joy became a part of His vocabulary. How strange this sounds to affluent, comfort-seeking Americans who confuse joy and happiness. Joy is an unexpected gift growing out of our intimate relationship with this One we love and serve." How have you found this deeper kind of joy in being present with someone else to bring them the comfort of your presence and God's? Who do you know who needs this joy now?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me open my heart more fully to take in the depth of your love for me. And then help me, as I walk with you each day, to grow to love others as you love me more and more. Amen.*

Friday, November 8 - Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. 2 Corinthians is one of the most personal of all the apostle Paul's letters. We don't know many details, but we know he'd been through a very trying experience (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11). What's more, the Corinthians, people he'd won to Christ, had been seriously at odds with him for a time (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:7-13). So, it makes sense that in just the five verses of today's reading the word "comfort" occurred nine times.

- Paul said that God comforts us, and because of that reality we can comfort one another. Scholar William Barclay said, "*Comfort* in the New Testament always means far more than soothing sympathy. Always it is true to its root meaning, for its root is the Latin *fortis*, and *fortis* means brave. Christian comfort is the comfort which brings courage and enables a man to cope with all that life can do to him." When has God, or one of God's people, given you new courage by the comfort you received?
- In receiving comfort, we also learn how to give it. Pastor Kenneth Chafin wrote, "When teenagers whose lives are being torn apart by their parents' divorce come for help, they look to me for comfort because I was a teenager when my parents divorced ... the church's most effective visitors of cancer patients are those who themselves have cancer and have found resources within their faith to cope with their illness." In what particular ways have your life experiences equipped you to offer comfort to others?

Prayer: *Compassionate God, thank you for the times you have strengthened me and given me new courage. Make me the kind of person whose caring strengthens others. Amen.*

Saturday, November 9 – Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This is the first place where the Bible talks at length about the church as, "the body of Christ." Paul's powerful image helps us understand why giving and receiving comfort is so vital. If you've ever had a cut finger, an aching tooth or a bad back, then you know that in our physical body it's a fact that "if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (verse 26). And that, Paul said, is how it is—how it needs to be—in the body of Christ.

- The phrase "mutual concern" in verse 25 could be translated more strongly, with words like "thoughtful trouble." When have you benefited because someone else, living out Christ's love for the hurting, took some "thoughtful trouble" to comfort and bless you? How can you clear space on your calendar and in your heart to make "thoughtful trouble" for others a regular part of the way you live out your faith? How will your connections with others, and your walk with God, grow richer, deeper and more joy-filled as God guides in you in finding ways to do this?

Prayer: *Lord God, you certainly took "thoughtful trouble" when you left heaven's glory to live on earth and be my Savior. Make me an instrument of your peace and comfort, in ways that fit the gifts I find in my life. Amen.*