

A Easter 07

5 June 2011 St Michaels Studio City

RCL 1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11

Why is Life So Hard?

Why is life so hard? Why are we hurt, why do we fail, why are we lonely, why aren't things just a little bit easier? Questions we all ask, questions we have always asked, our people, the human race. It seems to go with the territory, once we have arisen from the primordial ooze and God has breathed Himself into us and, unlike our dogs and cats and salamanders, have become aware that we are, that we are hurting, that we are glorious, that things could be different. Why is life so hard?

The answer is that there is no answer, at least, not one tidy, little bundle all tied up with ribbons and bows and turning off the question. Instead, there are lots of mini-answers, lots of our people's reflections and God-inspired perceptions, each one reflecting a piece of the ultimate answer, just as our people catch hints of God and Her purpose but never seem to completely grasp God Himself.

One of the answers is exemplified in a passage from the prophet Ezekiel: we suffer from God as punishment for our wrong-doings. ^(39.21-29) It is a popular answer, especially for people who are not suffering very much, for it seems to guarantee the justice of God. *You've been bad and now God's gonna get ya for it.* We Christians cannot make this a part of our answer because we follow a Lord who explicitly repudiated this notion. Jesus said it just isn't true, and I believe what Jesus said. Jesus said that God does not add on to the natural consequences of our actions more supernatural pain. But, ah, those natural consequences, there's the rub. God also does not seem much inclined to interfere with the normal running of His laws of the universe. If we mock the bully, we're likely to get our nose bloodied. If we're hateful, we're likely to be lonely. If we're thoughtless, our life is likely to be chaotic. If we're reckless, we're likely to die early. Because we are communal species, we exist in community, we are affected by what those around us do; so if those with whom we share house and home, city and nation, planet and universe, are bullying, hateful, thoughtless, or reckless we are likely to suffer along with them. What scripture *does* say, for our instruction, is that God is always in the consequences, working for the welfare of Her people. Nothing is outside the sphere of God's work. The welfare of God's people means not only the well-being of the people as a whole but the benefit of the individual as well. We are not lost in the crowd. God is with us in our exile and wandering, and because of that presence, we are saved.

Another answer as to why life is so hard is contained in today's reading from Peter's letter. We suffer because by our suffering we are redeeming the world. By His suffering Christ saved the world, and Peter says that our suffering is part of Christ's suffering. ^(1 Peter 4.13) So, by our suffering we are redeeming the world, too. Our difficulties are not meaningless, our pain not lost in the void. Everything is noted and treasured by God and used by God to make all things

new. There is a glory in our pain, as Peter says, that may not make us comfortable but does make us light shining in the darkness. So, let us entrust ourselves, in Peter's words, "to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good."

Another answer as to why life is so hard is contained in Jesus' words from today's reading (John 17.1-11) from John's gospel, the section that has become known as the high priestly prayer of our Lord just before His death. As priest, as high priest, He prays for His people, the single most important activity that a priest can do. Jesus says that we suffer because we're different. The way of the world is to attempt to get along without God and without all the governance of our behavior that the existence of God implies. The way of those who belong to Jesus, not only explicitly by name but also implicitly by orientation, the way of those who belong to Jesus is fraught with the opposition of those who feel threatened by their loyalties to truth, justice, compassion, life, and love. So our lives will always have difficulty because we are set against the crowd. But we are not to fear, because God in His Christ has won the war in which we are still fighting battles. Christ prays for us in a way different from the way He prays for the world. With God in Christ on our side, no one and no thing can win against us, no matter what today looks like. The victory that Christ won over hate and death is the victory that He has won over **our** hate and death. We hurt now but we will not hurt always.

So, we are blessed, you and I, because our lives are difficult, because we have challenges, because we sometimes lose, because we hurt. We are blessed because we know that our pain does not come from God. We are blessed because we are saving the world in Christ. We are blessed because God in His Christ prays for us, works in us, calls us to Himself, strengthens us, makes us His own. Christ has won the victory, and because of that triumph we are victorious, too, victorious in this life (no matter what the appearances) and victorious in the life to come.

Now if we can say these sorts of things about the negative, hurtful parts of our lives, just think what our evaluation of the positive, creative elements can be. Off the charts!! When we get it right, when joy flows from us like a waterfall, when beauty lights up our universe, when deep satisfaction permeates our souls, then how much more is God pleased and empowered to do the good that He wants to do in the world.

You and I are blessed in all the different parts of our lives. That is what Jesus has accomplished through His re-creation of reality in His life, death, and resurrection. Nothing gets left out of God's purposes. So, let us entrust ourselves "to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good." (1 Peter 4.19)