

Sermon Series: Comfort for Tough Times—Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Westfield, IN—2/23/2003

Title: “Comforted to comfort others”

Text: 2 Corinthians 1: 3-11

Intro: Ills.: Confusing Grace

Theme: Jesus not only wants to comfort and lead us through and out of our tough times, but while we are on the journey through those tough times, he wants to teach us a few things so that we might learn and teach them to others.

Why do we have to go through tough times?

- Because of the **OPPRESSION** of **SIN**
 1. The word for **tribulation** in our text means something that oppresses and squeezes in from every side
 2. Sin in general in the world and our own sins in specific bring a host of bad news consequences in on top of us
- Because of our **CONNECTION** to **CHRIST**
 1. Persecution for our integrity of faith-walk and our witness to our hope in Christ **WILL** bring backlash
 2. *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” John 15: 19*

What God wants to do WITH US in tough times (Print and Read 2 Corinth. 1: 3-4)

- To **SHOW US MERCY** (“Blessed by the God and Father...The Father of mercies.” Vs. 3)
 1. God relates to our needs (sympathizes) because in Jesus he assumed our needs (empathize) and comes to our aid
 2. *“We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Heb. 4: 14-16*
 3. **Ills.: Jesus Understands my pain**
- To **STAND ALONG-SIDE OF US** (“the God of all comforts [paracletes]” vs. 3)
 4. God’s comfort is not from a distance or a “check’s in the mail” approach
 5. He sent his Son, Jesus, in the flesh to take on our humanity, our sin, our need and bring his answer
 6. He sends his Holy Spirit within us to remind us of all His promises in Jesus
 7. *“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.” 2 Cor. 1: 20*
- To **MAKE US GOD-DEPENDENT**
 8. Our sinful nature leads us to be **SELF-DEPENDENT**
 1. Our independence is often a cloak for self-idolatry which leads to destructive consequences (like Adam/Eve)
 2. Interdependence on God and with others, he puts around us, means being crucified to myself (Gal. 2: 20)
 9. Becoming real about ourselves leads us to be real with God (**PRINT AND READ 2 COR. 1: 8-9**)
 1. **Ills. Cow Envy**
 2. *“despairing”* of the inadequacy of self aid/comfort opens us to God’s permanent *“deliverance”* from our need
 3. *“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” 2 Corinth. 3:5*

What God wants to do THROUGH US in the midst of tough times

- To **DISPENSE HIS GRACE OF COMFORT (PRINT AND READ 2 CORINTH. 1: 4)**
 10. **Ills.: Water girls give relieve to hulking football players**
 11. *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” 2C 4:7*
 12. View your time of trial as being prepared for the future ministry of being a **VESSEL OF GOD’S COMFORT**
- To **SHINE AS A BEACON OF HOPE** from us to others (**PRINT AND READ 2 CORINTH 1: 5-7**)

1. The witness of “*joyful patience*” in the midst of suffering gives comfort to those about to go through it
2. **Ills.: The purpose of a light house**
- To **LEAD OTHERS TO PRAY**
3. **PRINT AND READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1: 10-11**
4. If my trial or ultimate deliverance leads others to invest more intimately in a relationship with God, bring it on!
5. It gives us more “*God stories*” with which to comfort each other in the future

Confusing Grace

My pastor was telling our congregation about an experience that had almost killed him that afternoon. In his desire to give God credit for protecting him, he made this rather inadequate attempt: "If it weren't for the grace of God, I'd be in heaven right now!" **Jesus Understands Our Pain**

Author and speaker Jill Briscoe recalls: In Croatia I was asked to speak to a church gathering for about 200 newly arrived refugees. Refugees from this area of the world are mostly women because the men are either dead or in camp or fighting. This group of Muslims, Croats, and a few Serbs had fled to a seminary on the border of a battered Croatian town. The town was still in danger of sniper fire and bombing, but the church had escaped because there were apartment buildings between it and the guns. Attackers had tried to fire shells over the apartment buildings to the seminary, but they hadn't managed to do it, so it became the refugee receiving and feeding place. We worked all day visiting with the refugees. At night a service was held in this huge, old church, and I had to speak. I didn't know what to say. Everything I had prepared seemed totally inadequate, so I put my notes away and prayed, "God, give me creative ideas they can identify with." I told them about Jesus, who as a baby became a refugee. He was hunted by soldiers, and his parents had to flee to Egypt at night, leaving everything behind. I could tell the people began to click with what I was saying. I kept praying like crazy. I continued telling them about Jesus' life, and when I got to the cross, I said, "He hung there naked, not like pictures tell you." They knew what that meant. Some of them had been stripped naked and tortured. At the end of the message, I said, "All these things have happened to you. You are homeless. You have had to flee. You have suffered unjustly. But you didn't have a choice. He had a choice. He knew all this would happen to him, but he still came." And then I told them why. Many of them just knelt down, put their hands up, and wept. I said, "He's the only one who really understands. How can I possibly understand, but he can. This is what people did to him. He's the suffering God. You can give your pain to him."

Cow Envy

Two cows were grazing in a pasture when they saw a milk truck pass. On the side of the truck were the words, "Pasteurized, homogenized, standardized, vitamin A added." One cow sighed and said to the other, "Makes you feel sort of inadequate, doesn't it?"

2 Cor. 1:3-11

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. ⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. [NIV]