

“Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases....”

Rev. Bill Pinches • Mason First Presbyterian Church • Good Friday 2020

I would like to lead you in a guided meditation. We’re going to explore some of the words that the prophet Isaiah wrote many centuries before Jesus, words that he wrote *about* Jesus. These words are relevant *every* year on Good Friday; this year, some of them are *especially* relevant. I’m going to ask you do to some writing, some reflecting on what’s going on inside your own heart today. So you will need some pen and paper, or something else to write on. I realize it may be tempting to try to go through this meditation with-out doing any writing, but please, I truly believe this will be of great benefit to you if you actually write some things down. So go ahead, find something to write with, and something to write on.

Now, make sure that you are someplace where you won’t be distracted. Turn off the TV, turn off the radio, put away your phone. Find someplace comfortable to sit, maybe the most comfortable chair in your home. Someplace where you can truly relax.

Now take a few deep breaths. In, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

Pay attention to how your body is feeling. Are there any parts of your body that are uncomfortable, or tense or sore? Take note of them, then breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

If you’re listening to the audio recording of this meditation, close your eyes. Just ... relax.

Imagine that you are someplace pleasant. Maybe you are outside, on a beautiful spring day, feeling the warmth of the sun on your flesh, listening to the gentle chirping of the birds. Or maybe you are at a beach, lying on the sand or floating out upon the water, listening to and feeling the gentle lapping of the waves. Or maybe you are lying under a big tree, looking up at the sky, watching the puffy white clouds float gently overhead. Maybe you’re someplace specific, someplace you’ve been ... Yellowstone ... the Grand Tetons ... Bryce Canyon.... Put yourself someplace special, wherever that is for you.

And just relax. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

Now ... I want to invite you to think about all the *emotions* you have been feeling these past few weeks. These past few weeks have not been easy, for any of us. Try to identify, as clearly as you can, all the emotions that have been feeling ... the emotions that have been pulsating in your heart ... the emotions that have been flowing through your body. What are they?

Maybe there’s some fear. Maybe there’s some anxiety. Maybe some worry. Maybe some stress, or frustration, or anger. Maybe some bitterness, or resentment, or jealousy. Maybe some disappointment, or loneliness. Maybe some guilt. Maybe some sadness. Maybe some grief. I’d like to invite you to write down as many emotions as you can think of that you have been feeling these past few weeks. Go ahead. If your eyes are closed, open them. I’m going to give you a whole minute here. Just write down all the emotions you have been feeling.

(one minute pause)

Now ... look back at what you wrote down. Scan down that whole list. Then close your eyes. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

Next, I'd like you to get a little more specific. If you wrote down fear, what, exactly, are you afraid of? If you wrote down stress, what, exactly, are you feeling stressed about? If you wrote down anger, what, exactly, are you angry about? I'm going to give you three minutes for this one. Open your eyes, look back at your list, and try to make it more specific. Flesh it out. Just try to explore, what's *really* going on inside you, right now?

(three minute pause)

Now ... look back at that whole list. Close your eyes again. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

Now, let's go back to that pleasant place you envisioned earlier. Keep your eyes closed. Were you outside on a pleasant summer day ... or floating on some gentle waves ... or looking up at the clouds ... try to put yourself back there again. Try to relax. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out.

Now, open your eyes. Look again at everything you have written down. What do you feel *now*, when you look at your list? Does it feel ... *burdensome*? Does it feel ... *overwhelming*? Or something else? Write down what you feel right now, *when you look at your list*. I'll give you a minute.

(one minute pause)

Now set your pen down, close your eyes, and relax once again. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out. Just keep your eyes closed for the time being. I'm going to read you some scripture.

He was despised and rejected ...

A man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity...

Surely he has borne our infirmities, and carried our diseases...

He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities...

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...

Those are a few lines from the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 3 through 6. They are talking about Jesus. Isaiah calls him a "man of sorrows" or a "man of suffering." Isaiah is describing the suffering that Jesus endured, that Jesus himself *took on*, on Good Friday, when he was nailed to that cross, when he endured the depths of human pain, when he absorbed the *whole* pain of the *entire* human race.

"Surely he has borne *our* infirmities and carried *our* diseases."

We're all bearing some infirmities right now. Some of us are afflicted with a terrible disease right now. You just wrote down a lot of what you are feeling and experiencing. What's causing *you* suffering.

One of the things that's so beautiful about Jesus is that he invites you to let *him* suffer on *your* behalf. He willingly took on *all* the suffering and pain of the *entire* human race. That includes all the suffering and pain that *you* are experiencing right now. Everything you're feeling, everything that's causing you anguish and anxiety, he's inviting you ... to just give it to him. He's inviting you ... to let it go.

So I'm going to walk you through your list one more time. I'm going to take a couple minutes here, and I'm going to help you give your list of burdens to Jesus. We're going to give Jesus *all* your pain. *All* your fear. *All* your heartache. *All* your suffering. I'm going to invite us into a time of prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember how, long ago, people did terrible things to you. They betrayed you, they denied you, they beat you, they mocked you, they did cruel and bloody things to you. And you ... you let them. "Like a sheep that did not open its mouth," you *allowed* them to cause you pain, you *willingly* endured suffering and hardship. You did it because of your great love for all of us. You did it because you came to free *us* from *our* suffering and pain. You were wounded for *our* transgressions, crushed for *our* iniquities. You bore *our* infirmities, and you carried *our* diseases. Your great desire was for us. For our well-being. For our salvation, our healing. Your great desire was to take away from us the burdens that we could not take away from ourselves.

Right now, Jesus, we are carrying *many* burdens.

So we look to you, Jesus, our brother, our friend. We look to you as the source of our redemption, the giver of our salvation, the restorer of our hope. We look to you and we ask you, once again, if you would take away our burdens, our pain, our suffering, our fear, all our cares. Would you do that for us, Jesus; would you take away our sorrows?

"Yes," we hear you say. "Yes, I will," we hear you say, "because I love you *that* much." You love us so much, you are willing to stretch your arms wide, and take our suffering upon you, *all* our suffering, as you did on that Good Friday long ago. You do this day after day, whenever someone kneels before you and asks you to lift a burden from them. We're asking you now, Lord ... will you take *our* burdens away? The ones that are weighing *us* down?

"Yes," the answer comes, "yes, of *course* I will, because *I love you that much.*"

So we take our lists to you, Jesus. We take all these things that are causing us fear and pain, all these things that are causing us anxiety and worry, all these ways that we are suffering right now. We take our lists, and we ask you: *would you carry this load for me?*

And we watch, we behold, as you stretch out your hand, reaching down to us from your cross. You look at us with a tender smile on your face, as if you were saying, "Of course I will; *that's* what I'm here for." And we watch, in wonder and relief, as you take our list from us. You take it out of our hands, you lift our burdens off of our shoulders, and you bring it close to you. You start touching your bruised and bloody body with the words that we have written, like you are taking a damp cloth to your wounds. Except, what happens is that, each time our words touch your body, some of our writing fades. Words start to just ... disappear. Your wounds look like they may be getting a little more intense; you seem to be taking on more and more pain. We pause; maybe we say, "Jesus, no, you don't have to do this, you

don't have to suffer on my behalf" – but you hold out a hand towards us and you shake your head, *no*. "Yes," you say. "Yes, I *do* have to suffer on your behalf. Your load is heavier than you can bear. But it's not heavier than what *I* can bear. I have come to make you whole," we hear you say, "and right now, you are not whole. I'm going to be just fine. Just wait, and watch. A few days from now, you're going to see me, and I will be healed from all these wounds. Let me take them away from you. Give them *all* to me."

So just sit back, and watch, as Jesus continues taking your words, your pain, your suffering, and he keeps dabbing those words onto different parts of his body, absorbing them *into* his body, until finally there is nothing left. The paper is blank. Jesus breathes in; there is pain in his eyes, a tear drops from his eye ... and then he breathes out. He breathes in, and out ... in, and out. Then he turns back to you, with a smile on his face, and he hands the paper back to you again. It's blank; it's clean; there's nothing on it. He looks at you, he smiles at you, and he says to you, "I've got this."

Sit back, and relax. Breathe in, and out ... in, and out ... in, and out. Allow yourself to feel the full *relief* of this moment. Your burdens ... Jesus is carrying them now. Your suffering ... Jesus is enduring it now.

Now ... open your eyes. You still have a paper in front of you with lots of words on it, don't you? They haven't just magically gone away. But here's the thing. They're not just *your* words any longer. They're not just *your* burdens. Jesus is bearing them with you. Jesus is suffering, right alongside you. Jesus, in his agony on the cross, is absorbing them all into his body, so that *your* body doesn't have to hold them in any longer.

Now, if you will, take up your pen once again. Find a blank area on your paper. Turn it over to the back side, or start a new page, if you need to. Relax again ... breathe in, breathe out ... in, and out ... in, and out. I'm going to say another prayer. If you want, write some of this down. Let these be *your* words.

Jesus ... O, dear Jesus ... beloved friend, precious brother ... you have given your life for mine. You have taken upon yourself my suffering and pain. I give it all to you. I give it *all* to you. Every last bit of worry, ever fear, every anxiety, every burden that I am carrying. I give it all to you. I give it all to you knowing that you invited me to do so, that you came so that you could carry *my* grief, bear *my* suffering, heal *my* infirmities, cleanse *my* soul. You did this, for me. You did this, because *you love me*, because you don't want *me* to suffer, because you care about *my* well-being, *my* peace, *my* joy. And so I give it all to you, Jesus. I give it *all* to you. I lay myself before you, Jesus, with gratitude flowing through me, with joy flowing out of me. I hand over to you all my pain. You take it, upon yourself, willingly. And as your pain increases, as more and more of us give you our pain, our suffering, we watch as you stretch your arms out wide, and you look up to the heavens, toward your eternal Father, and we hear you say, "It is finished." You breathe in, you breathe out ... and your Spirit goes up to God. We watch as your body sags, and a rainbow of color escapes from your body, and heads up into the heavens. You've taken our pain, our grief, our suffering, and you've lifted it all to God's eternal throne. It's not ours anymore. It's *yours*. You took it from us, and you carried it up to God. Thank you, Jesus. *Thank you, Jesus*. Thank you, Lord.

Now ... I want you to take another minute ... and just write down anything you are feeling right now.

(pause one minute)

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, dear friend. *Amen*.