

**Sermon Title:** *“Why me? Why are you surprised?”*

**May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – Ascension Sunday**

**Text:** 1 Peter 4:12-19, 5:6-11



**Theme:** When bad things happen to us, it's only natural to ask, "Why me?" but we shouldn't be surprised when God puts us through some trials and tribulations in our faith walk.

**What's in it for me?**

**Sermon Text:**

Grace and Peace to you from our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christ is Risen! He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah!

How many of you love sports? How many of you like watching sports? How many of you are missing the sports that you love to play and watch? Well, one of the few sports that I am able to still participate in is cycling. Yes, I'm bummed about Seattle-To-Portland getting cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but I'm also thankful that we haven't been locked down quite as severely as most of the Pro Cyclists, many of them residing in Europe who have much more severe restrictions than we do. Well one of the newly retired pro-cyclists that have joined one of my favorite YouTube channels is stuck in lockdown on his mother-in-law's farm in Ireland along with his brother-in-law. The crazy antics that his former cyclists comes up with to keep himself fit and entertained and having to interact with his brother-in-law is not only wildly entertaining, but has brother-in-law Nigel muttering to himself, "What am I doing? Why me? I could be doing nothing, but instead I'm watching this fool ride his bike around my garden." Can you imagine being locked down with your in-laws for weeks on end? You, too might be asking God the "Why me?" question.

During the Easter season, we have had some real gems in God's Word to study, especially in John's Gospel and the book of Acts, where we see the Disciples emerge from being scared teenagers in hiding to bold proclaimers of the faith in less than two months' time. Last Thursday marked the 40 days following Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Easter morning. As we were not able to worship like we normally do on Thursday with the 3Ms, Happy Ascension Sunday. I try to find some kind of application of God's Word, or something that we too can take

to heart, so that when you sign off from here and go about your daily lives, you have some healthy portion of God's Word to help you get through your week. Some texts really take a lot of prayer, research, and study to try to find something, but in today's epistle lesson, God's Word just reaches out and grabs us. It seems to speak to us today as much as it did when Peter and the Holy Spirit wrote it so long ago and it answers the famous, "Why me?" question.

Whether it is a somewhat comical situation we find ourselves in or a serious one, I bet we have all popped the question, "Why me?" Well, why not? In our text today, Peter puts aside any illusions of prosperity gospel that folks like Joel Osteen might have. Life as a Christian doesn't necessarily guarantee an easy life filled with pleasure and material wealth. Likewise whether you have these things or not has no bearing on how God feels about you. He loves you just the same. Peter tells us not to be surprised when we suffer for the faith and endure hardship. God has a purpose.

I know many of us are praying over Faith's future as a congregation. A lot has happened over these last few months. Our Pastor left, and we are uncertain about what kind of pastoral leadership we may have for the near future as our call committee has stood up again to begin the process of calling a new Pastor. As we just went through this process a little over a year ago, many of us can appreciate how difficult and challenging this can be. This was difficult enough, but to have this pandemic piled on top of this probably has us asking God, why us? Why is He having us go through all of this difficulty and upheaval? Was it something we did? I too, have these thoughts, from time to time. I would be lying if I didn't admit that balancing a full-time high stress job, taking care of my family, and ensuring that you are all getting the pastoral care you need while between pastors has been a challenge, but also a blessing. I am certainly thankful to all who step up to help. This is truly a team effort.

Peter's epistle here helps us arrive at an answer of why we are suffering. The answer does depend on the cause of our suffering. Suffering as a result of following Jesus while honoring the Lord our God and loving our neighbors as ourselves is treated much differently than our suffering due to our own sinful choices in life. So there is two types of suffering, suffering for righteousness sake and us getting our just deserts.

Suffering for Christ's sake looks quite a bit different than suffering the consequences of sinful behavior. When God presents us with a test of Faith there is usually a point to it and He is always with us every step of the way. Take our current situation for instance. How many of us would have even considered online worship to be a good thing a few months ago? We have

seen many benefits to this online worship setting. We have been able to reconnect with our shut-ins in a more meaningful way and connect with people who may not feel comfortable coming into our church building. God may be trying to reach people through us and so He is teaching us how to adapt, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed. While I do not believe that our current crop of elected officials are intentionally depriving us of our religious liberties out of spite, could God be preparing us for a time when that does happen? How many of us now feel more comfortable sharing the Gospel through new avenues? How many of you feel more connected to your brothers and sisters in the event that you join the ranks of the shut-ins?

While I know many of us are eagerly anticipating the day when we can meet together in person and receive the sacraments, there have also been a significant number of people who want online services to continue even after we are able to meet in person again. Rest assured, we are working on trying to make this happen in a way that is God-pleasing and is cost-effective. All of us in leadership roles want to be as inclusive as we can, but minimize risk of getting our brothers and sisters sick, particularly our most vulnerable. Our District President has recommended to all of us that love be the basis for all decisions we make regarding the resumption of physical worship together.

As we prepare for a “Safe Start” for our congregation in the coming weeks, we must heed Peter’s warning about the Devil in our text today. We are all sinful human beings in need of Jesus’ righteousness He won for us on the Cross, but Satan likes to trip us up and distract us. We have a unique 4-in-1 ministry and Satan loves to trip us up and get us fighting among each other instead of working together as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit first showed us. There will be many opportunities to connect people across our multiple ministries, if we work together and are intentional about it.

As we reopen, it is likely that we will have to hold services with reduced capacity and that people will return at different times, based on their own comfort zone in engaging the world. We need to be mindful of this when we do reopen. We have already seen some of the ugliness in the news when people interact with their neighbors again and a conflict over wearing facial masks sparks a heated debate when their use has become mandatory. The devil is tripping those folks up again. Don’t think it won’t happen here. It won’t if we show people the love Jesus first showed us. Make them as comfortable as you can.

When suffering comes our way, we are quick to ask God, “Why us?” and expect that God will relieve the suffering we are going through, but as we can see, sometimes God is allowing us

to suffer because it serves a greater purpose. While these last few months have been especially challenging for our congregation, I see God leading us out of this difficult time with a stronger congregation, with better focus. Challenges, yes, but I know how wonderful it will be to see you all again in the flesh. I also know that being shut-in will no longer cut you off from worshipping at Faith. I don't know who our next Pastor will be, but I do know this, he is a very lucky man to be called by God to oversee this congregation.

As we celebrate Jesus' Ascension into Heaven. Know this, the current difficulties we face pale in comparison to when Jesus returns to bring us home. That will be a glorious day.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

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