

1 Peter 5:6-11

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Sermon

I have been really blessed recently to hear about some of the marriages in our church. It's been such a gift to hear the story of marriages that have lasted over 70 years, or that have bridged wide differences in background or personality. It's been amazing to hear about the ways that people express their love through travel and seeing the world together, or through family bonding over the dinner table, or the sharing of music together. And it's been incredible to hear the stories of how people fall in love and what pulls them together.

But, even more impressive to me is hearing about how love can also be expressed through humility. All those times when love looks like suffering for one another. Enduring another vacation with those in-laws who drive you crazy, so that your loved one can see their family. Looking the other way when your spouse puts things in that drawer, where you know they don't belong. Or being willing to confront a big decision together, knowing that one of you won't really be happy with whatever the outcome is. It is amazing that we can deny our own desires for the sake of our relationship and for the sake of the one we love. It is so incredibly beautiful when we can find ways to let our love for another win out over our preferences or our anxieties that would otherwise be so powerful in guiding the ways that we live.

And it's given me new insight into what it means to live in faith. You see, there's a reason that the church has been called the Bride of Christ. There's a reason that marriage metaphors are used all over the Old Testament for the relationship between God and God's people.

The church too, has been called into this relationship of Covenant and Commitment. A bond of mutual love and sacrifice with God that is so much like a marriage. And no marriage that lasts is all butterflies in the stomach and cartoon hearts circling around your heads. If you want a real marriage, you must be willing to make sacrifices, and endure inconveniences. To get angry with each other, and then show mercy and forgiveness. To roll your eyes at each others' annoying habits, but keep on seeking out what you love about each other. And yes, there will be times when you must suffer for one another too- in order to express the depth of the love that God has given you.

And I think that in our life together as the church, now is one of those times, where we suffer for the sake of God. Where we suffer for the sake of the ones that God loves. Where we suffer for a while, as a sign of our commitment, to the life of love that God has called us to live for Him.

There is so much in these days that feels insufferable. It is so frustrating to not be able to live the way we want. Our anxieties are all running wild. And we want to be able to take back control of our own lives. We want to take it in our own hands to put everything back to normal. And to do the things that we want to do. We want to be able to make decisions based on our preferences and our desires and be done with all these regulations and guidelines!

And yet, God continues to call us, to the way of love.

To the kind of love that suffers for our neighbors and maintains the discipline, of living in the way of Jesus Christ - who sacrificed all the desires of his life, in order to save our lives.

God continues to call us to this long-suffering kind of love, and not to let it fizzle out when we get tired of the hard parts. Because this is the kind of love that makes a difference in the world. This is the selfless kind of love that our society so desperately needs. That young people are looking everywhere to find and be part of. And so many of us wonder if it still exists in the world - or if we've all just decided to look out only for ourselves.

Well, I think this is the church's opportunity, to give our anxieties over to God and to show off the kind of love that God has given us. To be the hands and feet of the one who sacrificed for us. And to make our sacrifices, for vulnerable people, who God so deeply loves. Because there are people suffering around the world, and our sacrifices today can bring them relief, protect their health, and give them hope to survive until the day, when the God of Grace himself, will come to restore and support, strengthen and establish all of humanity, as his beloved children and his faithful church. Amen.

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