

By Rev. Helen Harper:

Rev. Harper is the Priest at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Niagara Falls.

The Way of Love

It might seem like an odd concept to us, but isn't it true that very often when we do something good we often suffer for it? It might also not be reassuring to hear that when we suffer for doing something good it's actually a blessing. Suffering is not pleasant, whether it's as simple as having our feelings hurt by someone, or whether we pay the ultimate price of losing our lives.

The church has long told the stories of people called martyrs who lost their lives for their belief in Jesus. These are often frightening stories that make us cringe when we read about how the early martyrs of the Christian church suffered and died. We even hear the stories our modern-day martyrs such as Archbishop Romero of San Salvador, who was shot and killed while saying Mass in church, because of his dedication to and love of the poor. We also know about Mother Teresa who cared for the poorest of the poor in India. Mother Teresa cared for those in need while she herself lived a life of self-denial and suffering.

John 14:21

"... I will love them and reveal myself to them."



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We do good works but sometimes we suffer for what we do, which just doesn't seem right. So what keeps us from giving up and caring only for ourselves? The answer has to be love. It has to be our understanding that God loves us and that God's love is a deep abiding love unlike the shallow fickleness of like human love. God's love is our strength in suffering as well as in joy. So often we're tempted to wonder where God is when disaster strikes. We have heard people ask where was God when the tsunami struck Japan, or when the earthquake hit Haiti, or when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center fell, or even today during our own time of suffering with the loss of so many hopes, dreams, and lives. How could God let these things happen to us. Did God actually make them happen? These are questions which might be too difficult for us to even think about. So where do we go for comfort if we truly feel God has abandoned us?

What scripture always reminds us is that the heart of God suffers with us. The abiding strengthening heart of God wraps us in love and compassion when human things or natural things threaten and overwhelm us. Scripture reminds us that love is often seen in the good works we see and hear people are doing for others during our most difficult human times.

During the days, weeks, months that stretch out before us, remember it is God's abiding love that pours from person to person and from one heart to another. Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave us orphans that he would send an Advocate, none other than the Spirit of Truth to help us. The Holy Spirit was sent to us and continues to live among us. God doesn't cause our suffering; God gives us gift after gift to help us deal with our lives, during suffering and this is good news for us. The psalmist in psalm 66:18 says: "*Blessed be God who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld his love from me.*"

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Stained Glass Image info

Title: Remain in My Love, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

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