

Well ... it's not the most pleasant note

upon which to begin a sermon, but it is a note that resonates with a note in each & everyone of us here.

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SUFFERING ... to be human is to experience

suffering

All of us

have had our bouts and episodes of suffering throughout our lives when suffering has had its grip upon us.

Of course, there is physical suffering ... everything from a headache to the long drawn out pain that some cancer patients go through.

There is emotional suffering ... everything from people mental illness or deep depression, to the minor disappointment that one may experience in the course of a given day.

There is spiritual pain ... everything from the uneasiness that maybe a sermon can elicit within us, to the deeper spiritual wrestling of probing the "why" questions of God that can never really be answered.

SUFFERING (there is no doubt) is a part of the human experience ... and the reason I begin

on this note this morning is because of verse 31 in the reading from Mark's 8th chapter

where Jesus tells the disciples that he must undergo "*great suffering*".

New Testament scholar Edward Schweizer

says this of suffering ... and I quote: ***"To understand something of the suffering of Jesus is to understand something of God. It is here and not in heavenly glory that one glimpses the heart of God."***

Think about it, to glimpse the heart of God

would be an awesome thing, wouldn't it? ... But glimpsing it in suffering may not exactly be the way we would go looking to know and see the heart of God.

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But this goes right to the core of our Christian faith ... because

Jesus was human, his suffering embraces our suffering; if that is so then there is something in our own pain & afflictions that give us access to God's heart.

To say it another way: Where there is human suffering in our lives and in the world, we believe God is present.

And where there is an act of compassion & kindness offered in the midst of suffering, there we glimpse the heart of God.

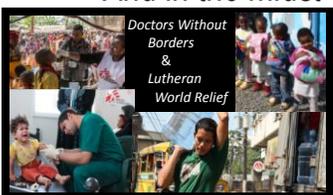
One does not need

to look too long and hard in our world today to find human suffering happening in the midst of our daily lives.

There are now 68.5 million forcibly displaced people around the world—more than at any time in modern history ... these are people who have fled extreme dangers, whether to escape relentless bombing, an invading army, gang violence, or other life-threatening circumstances.

Such persons and families face further struggles on their journey to find safety ... basic things like access to clean water, food, shelter, personal security, and health care – this is human suffering on a grand scale.

And in the midst of these international situations of suffering we hear about the work



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of Doctors Without Borders offering medical care (a large percentage of which are children) in countries like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Our own Lutheran World Relief is present to help

when people are forced to leave their home country. LWR (Lutheran World Relief) is in Northern Kenya helping Sudanese and Somali refugees. LWR is helping refugees on the border of Burma and Thailand, and they sending quilts & kits to provide basic needs for many of the current Syrian refugees.

As Lutherans we are part of a compassionate responses to suffering ... *You want to know what our benevolence dollars do that we send along to the national church? ... WELL THIS IS PART OF IT.*

THIS IS COMPASSION IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING ... IT GLIMPSES THE HEART OF GOD

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In our own nation, this past week, we remembered

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the events of 9/11 that happened 17 years ago ... pictures of collapsing sky scrapers, interviews with those who lost loved ones on that day, the spiritual questions thrown before us in the aftermath of it all ... this event

frames the suffering of a nation.

And in the midst of it a nation (and the world really) responded to this suffering with an outpouring of donations, prayers, and people volunteering to physically help clean debris, donate blood, bind wounds, and listen to the wailing of mourners hoping that loved ones remains might be recovered to bring closure.

THIS IS COMPASSION IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING ... IT GLIMPSES THE HEART OF GOD



Here at Bethany we do things

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to help people in times of need, times of suffering ... and many of you know what those things are ... packing lunches for the homeless for an organization called *A New Leaf*, hosting homeless families here on our campus - *Family Promise*, budgeted contributions to *Homeward Bound* – an organization that helps women fleeing domestic violence. we give 100's of dollars in food cards to those who come by the office seeking help

THIS IS COMPASSION IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING ... IT GLIMPSES THE HEART OF GOD

The Heart of God

is revealed in suffering and compassion ... that's strange idea to get our heads around, yet a very real feeling to experience when one is the recipient of a compassionate act.

You see ... something of the Heart of God

is glimpsed when SUFFERING and COMPASSION collide ... that's the best way I can think of to describe it – A COLLISION – where the raw pain of a suffering humanity, the frayed and broken pieces of our lives

COLLIDES

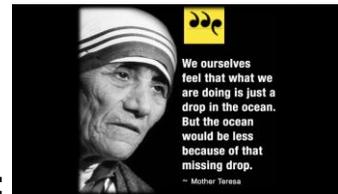
With the deep and endless mercy of God,
the tender yet strong love of God.

It is in this collision that the power of God's undefeatable love is unleashed

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Mother Teresa put it this way (I've said this before in a sermon, but it is worthy of a repeat)

When told that the good she does for the poor on the streets of Calcutta is like a



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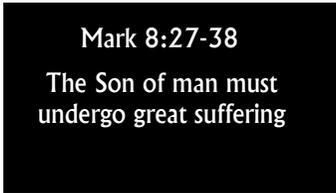
drop of water in the big and vast ocean ... she responded:

***We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean.
But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.***

In other words ... if that compassionate drop of water were not received by the one who is suffering, it would be sorely missed.

The Heart of God is revealed

in Mother Teresa's statement ... it tells of how God's compassion COLLIDES with the gigantic forces of human brokenness, suffering, and despair.



The reading today from Mark's 8th chapter

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is pivotal ... it is the first of three predictions of Jesus' suffering and death, it is the pivotal point where Jesus becomes the expression of the desires of God's heart.

It brings together
the suffering of humanity and the compassion of God ... these two ingredients when
brought together in collision, express the Heart of God.

Suffering

For sure, suffering is not a pleasant way Screen 7

to begin a sermon, nor is it a good note upon which to end one either ... and actually, it is
not the note upon which I will end.

The note upon which

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we will end today is the note of God's compassion (always there and
present) in the

midst of our suffering ... the "great suffering" of which Jesus speaks in verse 31 becomes
the open flood gates of God's compassion entering "mysteriously"
(and with no hesitation) into our suffering to bring healing and hope.

And an additional note upon which we will end today,

is the note of the communion meal ... this event embodies the COLLISION of human

In this meal

you



glimpse the heart of God

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suffering with the God's compassion.

In this meal you glimpse the heart of God