

Sermon: **No Such Thing As A Painless Life**

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First Baptist Church, Hamilton

Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 66

New Testament Scripture: John 16:16-24

Lest anyone think that the topic of "pain" is an untimely topic, this Thursday's Wall Street Journal featured an article on "New Ways to Treat Pain."

Advil, Aspirin, Bufferin, Tylenol, Anacin, Aleve, Motrin, Excederin, tablets, caplets, soft jells,

As a society do we have pain?

Where is your pain today? Head, sinus, joints, neck, back, hips, knees? Maybe it is a toothache?

Perhaps your pain is in your heart. Perhaps it is based on a relationship gone bad... a trust broken...a betrayal...Is your present pain from the loss of a loved one, or from the thought of the empty nest syndrome...

There is no such thing as a painless life. If you think someone promised you such, you are mistaken. Our model for perfect living did not experience a painless life. God's Son did not experience a painless life. Will you? Should you?

The Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah in chapter 55 wrote of Jesus, saying, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." "Familiar with suffering" because he suffered. He was in pain. He lived a life full of pain — physical, emotional, spiritual. Jesus Christ did not know a painless life. Will you? Should you? PAIN, it comes with the territory.

It is interesting to note that in the fifty-six references to pain or pains in the Bible, seventeen of those references (about one third) are to the pain of childbirth...labor pains. When you think about it, this might be the most common worldwide pain in the history of humankind. It is interesting that no male will ever experience this — it's something to think about. I know it is at least a reminder that men and women are having different experiences in life.

We often come at issues with different perspectives. Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, to coin the title of a popular book that was written to make that very point.

But pain is a universal phenomenon. Even as there is no one on this earth who has not sinned, so there is no one on this earth who has not experienced pain. There is NO painless life. This being so, let us take a biblical look at pain.

Phillip Yancey was once asked, "You've written three books on pain. In a nutshell, what have you learned?" He responded, "As if by instinct I replied with this simple formula. 'Pain is bad.

Pain is good. Pain can be redeemed.' Later, when I had time to reflect, I concluded that this trilogy of ideas sums up what I have learned not only about pain, but about most everything else in life.”

First, Pain is bad. It is bad because it doesn't feel good. It hurts. It causes great discomfort, and, if it comes at night, loss of sleep. I don't like pain and I don't want any more, thank you. It is personally very disturbing, and I find myself thinking too much about it when I have it.

When hospitalized, it is almost all they think about. “How are you feeling today? Do you have any pain? On a scale of one to ten how would you describe your pain? Remember, I have a pain pill for you when you need it. Don't forget to push the button when you have pain and the drug will go into your system and relieve you of your pain. Where does it hurt?”

If the truth be known, we all have pains all day long. Some last a long time some are gone in an instant. When you are active in real life you don't think about how you feel, for you have too much to do.

Athletes have a slogan that says, “You have to learn to live with the pain.” That might be true, but we don't have to LIKE it.

Pain is bad because it focuses all of my attention on MY body, on me, on my feelings, on my health, on my cure. It makes me the center of the earth. All of you must serve me because I am in pain. When pain places me in the center of the universe and you and everyone else at the periphery — pain is bad.

Pain is also good. Athletes have another saying regarding the goodness of pain...all together now..."No pain, no gain."

Physical pain alerts us to some difficulty in our body. A stomachache after eating raw oysters tells me that I would be wise to deny myself such a pleasure in the future. A pain in your left shoulder, shooting down your left arm may well be symptomatic of a heart attack. Take an aspirin and call 911. Pain helps us to locate the trouble so it can be treated.

Pain lets you know that the plate is hot, that you have a splinter in your foot, that you have bruised your shoulder. A life without pain would be a very dangerous life — a very risky life.

Bernie Siegel in "Peace, Love and Healing" quotes a cancer patient, “Cancer is the gift for the person who has everything. I looked my whole life for a teacher, and it wasn't until I got cancer that I really started to pay attention to the preciousness of each breath... All my other teachers gave me ideas. This caused me to directly experience my life. When I got cancer it was up to me to get born before I died.”

Pain can do that to you. It focuses your mind. It prioritizes your energy. It keeps you from “majoring in the minors” in life. It can be good.

Finally, not only is pain bad and good, but pain also can be redeemed. Jesus said in our text, “You will have pain...” You can count on it in life. He didn't say, “IF you should have pain...” or, “If you should happen to come across pain once in a while...” NO, he assumes pain's existence.

He states that you will have it in life. You can count on it, but you can also count on this: “Your pain will turn into joy.”

Other translations of this text say, “your weeping shall suddenly be turned to wonderful joy.” - the Living Bible, “your grief will be turned into joy” - Phillips, and finally, “your sadness will be turned into gladness” - Today's English Version. The biblical witness is that pain can be redeemed. George Matheson caught this vision in his hymn when he referred to God by saying, “O Joy that seeketh me through pain.”

Our daughter Jaclyn had a good friend named Sara. She and Sara were always playing together as children. One day Jaclyn came home in tears for Sara had told her that her dad had been transferred and they would be moving out of town. They could no longer play together every day. Jaclyn said through her sobs, “I never want another best friend again because they just leave you.” We explained to her that that was just part of loving other people. Included in love is pain. You don't have love without pain...you have love with pain. That's the deal.

In today's Gospel text, Jesus is talking about labor pain. Jesus said, “When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.” For over 34 years of visiting newborns and their mothers in the maternity wards of hospitals, this has been the consistent testimony of countless new mothers.

Do you see how birth pain is redeemed? It is given a purpose — a reason for existence that far exceeds the particular discomfort. It brings into being a new human being. The pain was part of the happiness. That's the deal. The pain is redeemed.

In life you will have pain — you can count on it. In life “your pain will turn into joy.” You can also count on that. The colorful, nineteenth century gifted violinist Niccolo Paganini was standing before a packed house, playing through a difficult piece of music. A full orchestra surrounded him with magnificent support. Suddenly one string on his old violin snapped and hung gloriously down from his instrument. Beads of perspiration popped out on his forehead. He frowned but continued to play...improvising beautifully.

To the conductor's surprise, a second string broke. And shortly thereafter, a third. Now there were three limp strings dangling from Paganini's violin as the master performer completed the difficult composition on the one remaining string.

The audience jumped to its feet and in good Italian fashion filled the hall with shouts and screams, "Bravo! Bravo!" As the applause died down the violinist asked the people to sit back down. Even though they knew there was no way they could expect an encore, they quickly sank back into their seats.

He held the violin high for everyone to see. He nodded at the conductor to begin and then he turned back to the crowd, and with a twinkle in his eye, he smiled and shouted, "Paganini...and one string!" After that he placed the single string Stradivarius beneath his chin and played the final piece on one string as the audience (and the conductor) shook their heads in silent amazement.

Friends, there is no painless life. Pain is bad. Pain is good. Pain can be redeemed...like Paganini - and the one string! If you find a path in life with no obstacles...it probably doesn't lead anywhere.

Sean Stephenson is quoted in Bottom Line Personal (May 1, 2010 edition), regarding his lifetime of pain: "I was born with *osteogenesis imperfecta*, also known as brittle bone disease. As a result, I suffered more than 200 bone fractures before turning 18. I grew to only three feet tall and I'll spend my life in a wheelchair — but I've built a thriving career as a psychotherapist...I worked in the White house as a presidential liaison for the office of Cabinet affairs...and I have an active social life. My life and my therapist training have taught me that it isn't our problems that hold us back, it's how we handle those problems. As my mother told me years ago, pain is inevitable. Eventually, it touches us all. Suffering, however, is optional."