

When God Doesn't Make Sense Week 3

I'm going to begin today with some questions... At times when God and life-situations don't make sense, have you felt abandoned by God? When we don't get the answers we are looking for, has God seemed absent or distant?

Is God there when things happen that we just don't understand? When children and good people suffer, do we recognize that God is with us?

When we have personal challenges and struggles with a relationship, a child or parent, with money or with unemployment, do we question whether God loves us? When God doesn't make sense, how are we able to go on and put our trust and hope in Him?

As we began, in the First Week of Lent, to unpack "When God Doesn't Make Sense," we came to understand that God gave us the gift of FREE Will. Through the story of Eve and Adam we learned that sin, suffering and death came into the world, when they turned from God and

chose, through their own free will, to disregard the command he gave them, 'to freely eat of every tree of the garden; but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...' By this, God was trying to protect them. Evil and suffering are not God's will. God's will for us and creation is all GOOD.

Lent is a good time to examine our life and the decisions and choices we make through our own free will. Many of us do this examination through prayer, sacraments, fasting and caring for others. Lent gives us the opportunity through these practices to refresh our TRUST and HOPE in God and draw us closer to God's heart. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

In last Sunday's Gospel we were given the example of Peter, James and John and they fell to the ground in fear after witnessing the radiance of God, and then hearing the voice of Jesus that told them, "Get up. Do not be afraid," thus encouraging them to put their hope, trust and faith in God.

Today we reflect with scripture on times when God seems distant or absent, when He isn't taking any calls, when it just feels like we are on our own and we say "Is God really with us?"

If you've missed any of the homilies in our series "When God Doesn't Make Sense", or you know someone who needs to hear these messages, you can go to our website and either listen to, or read them there.

In today's gospel from John, a Samaritan woman who finds herself and outcast because of her lifestyle, comes to the well in the heat of the day, to get a bucket of water.

And there she has an incredible encounter with Jesus, a Jew. For much of the encounter she doesn't even realize who she is speaking to and is shocked that a Jewish man would even ask her for a drink of water:

"How is it that you, a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" Jews and Samaritans would not even drink from the same cup.

But He did this because he knew her. And he knew she was suffering because of some of the choices she had made in her life through her own free will. He knew that he was her way to healing and hope.

Some years ago, I worked with a woman who had struggled since her early 20's, with chronic depression and crippling anxiety.

She felt so isolated and alone in those early years because she had no one to talk to about this. She had no idea what was happening to her or why she felt the way she did.

Very often, she wondered where God was in all of her suffering. She couldn't feel His presence or recognize him in her suffering; much like the Samaritan woman in our gospel. She cried out to God in her need.

Just as Jesus gradually reveals himself to the woman at the well, so he also did the same with my friend from work.

Over time, through listening and prayer she ultimately came to recognize that he was with her on her journey and in her struggles.

As like many of us, it was a process for her. God seemed to take his time in revealing himself to her.

Why did it take so long? Was she not ready for what was to come? Was she blaming others for her anxiety and depression as the Israelites blamed Moses for their situation in the desert?

Was she too traumatized by her struggles that she couldn't see that our Lord was with her in her suffering?

She began to see that he was the one who carried her through each day; he was the one who gave her the strength she needed just to get out of bed in the morning.

She came to understand that her suffering was not in vain. She saw that God had a purpose for her life and he would use her suffering to prepare her for greater things.

And then she came to rely on His grace and love to help her live her life, not always in a care-free way, but many times in a halting and stumbling way.

Does that sound familiar? Do we sometimes stumble under the weight of life's burdens? Can we see that God can transform our suffering into something more than just pain?

My friend found that she could relate to others who were isolated and hurting because she understood suffering and isolation herself. She could be Christ's presence to those people

Do you think God answered my friend's prayers? Do you think he answered her question "Where are you Lord in my suffering?" He would ultimately use her challenges to bless others and I can't help but think, "Wow! What an answer!"

It may not have been the answer she was looking for or in the time expected, but it was a profound lesson in God's mercy, his faithfulness and his ability to use all things for good.

God's comfort, his love, his strength, came to be what she relied upon. Maybe it wasn't what she expected, but it was what she needed!

There are deep questions that go along with suffering and hardship and where God can be found in all of this. Many of us here today have struggled with these questions at one time or another in our lives.

What I do know from my own life and from my ministry with those who grieve and those who suffer is that God is with us.

As with the Israelites in the desert and the Samaritan woman, we don't always recognize him, but he is there with us, even if we don't feel his presence.

And, I have also found that we won't necessarily find the answers we are looking for. But, when we trust and seek God in our need, He will give us His answer.

As the woman at the well discovered, and as my friend also discovered, we will often find God in

unexpected ways, in situations, in the joys and in the hardships, and through other people. I truly believe that!

This Lenten season, let us all take some time to reflect, to listen and to pray in order to discover how God is working in our lives and how he has been with us at times when we didn't recognize his presence.

Let us be thankful to the Lord for His continued faithfulness and his love for us, his humble people.

Let us also pray at this time for our elect, Ruxandra and Autumn, who are celebrating the first scrutiny as part of their RCIA journey towards full communion in the Church.

This life giving water that Jesus offers us today is his gift of grace to us. Let us, as a community, join with our candidates as we pray for God's blessing upon them. May we all see the power of God's mercy and faithfulness in our lives today.