

Lent: From Pain, Sorrow and Penitence to Hope

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 5: 1-8

Lent and Easter come very early this year. Our Lenten programs begin with the Ash Wednesday Service on February 6, followed by weekly meetings on Thursday. During Lent, we meditate on the meaning of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and then we attempt to make sense of our life, especially our own agonies, pains, and sorrows. In the Christian tradition, many people think that one suffers because one is a sinful being. One is so far away from God, living selfishly and hurting others in order to fulfill just one's own desires. Hence, one deserves death as the ultimate punishment of God. This is a reflection of Apostle Paul's theology. (Please read the *Letter of Paul to Romans, Chapter 5 and 6* and *Galatians*.)

However, Paul did not end up with God's punishment. Just focusing on sin and punishment is not the way of Christian faith. There is comfort where desperate sufferings are. There is life when death swallows up one's soul. There is joy when sadness overshadows one's life. In the midst of sufferings, Jesus begged God's pardon for those who despised him and crucified him. Therefore, we must see the fact that there is love far stronger than fear; there is joy far greater than sorrow, and there is hope far brighter than despair.

During Lent, we will hear the personal testimonies of several guest speakers, who share their own experiences and understanding of suffering, pain, sorrow and hope. We invite wonderful guest speakers, who are from various faith traditions and fields, such as a Roman Catholic priest of our town, a medical doctor who is affiliated with a Catholic hospital and hospice, a Korean clergy woman of the UMC, who is also a psychologist, and a Jewish cantor, who celebrated his fortieth anniversary of work. Each guest will bring us not only his or her personal life-experience but also different aspects and perspectives on suffering, pain and sorrow from his or her faith community and tradition. I believe they will enrich our spiritual journey and help us to overcome trials and disorientation of life.

So friends, please come and join us to meditate on the meaning of Lent. Then let us anticipate the resurrection of the Lord and his second coming.

Peace,
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