

## The Good in the Bad

*John 12:20-33*

INTRO:

Sometimes in life, those events that strike us as unfortunate, tragic, or bad are, in the gracious work of God, good. Jesus reveals a God who wins victories through defeat and triumphs through suffering. Our victories and triumphs may come the same way.

ME:

I don't know about you, but I was not looking for a message about suffering, but as long as we are talking finding good in suffering, let's at least give this a chance.

YOU:

**So are excited about thinking about suffering?** Whether you are or not, bad things happen in life. **Are you at all interested in learning how to find the good in those bad times?** *Yeah, I thought you might be!*

So. Let's take a look together a John's Gospel and see just what God can teach us about seeing the good in the bad.

First let's turn our hearts to prayer, as we prepare to open them to God

GOD:

*20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.*

*27 “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say — ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.*

This is the Word of God, for us, the people of God...

WE:

It is good for us to go on retreats, away from our regular daily and weekly schedules, to reconnect with God. To go deeper in our awareness of his presence in the world and in our life. *For the last year and a half I have been doing that!* I have mentioned before the continuing education class I am taking at Richmond Hill. We gather monthly for an overnight retreat after reading 2 or 3 books about helping others notice God at work in their lives. As we do this, we also learn to recognize God at work in our own lives and we learn to listen better. We also have several 24 hour silent retreats as part of our time in this program. We wear badges that say “silent” around our necks and there is a silent dining room in the refectory where we eat in silence. Now, I like to talk, but this has been a wonderful discipline for me to try to nurture my ability to spend time in silent prayer. Since it is expected of us as part of the program, in a way it is involuntary. This reminds us that there are times in life when we are sent on involuntary “*retreats*.” There are times when the routine of life is brought to a forced time away. We did not plan for our lives to be interrupted, but they were. And then we have the opportunity to learn an important truth. In these times of forced, involuntary sabbatical, we are made to step back, take stock, and reassess.

As a pastor I have often heard people in the days following a heart attack, **“It’s the best thing that ever happened to me. I’ll never be the same again. I woke up to the reality of my life, to God, to what is important.”**

*What an amazingly positive spin on a heart attack!* Sometimes, in those confined places in life, when we are trapped, with nowhere to escape, we are pushed close to God and to what really matters in life. For instance, it is fascinating to consider how much powerful biblical material was written by people in jail—by Paul in prison, by John in exile on the Island of Patmos. This reminds us also of the powerful letter that Martin Luther King Jr. wrote while he was in prison in the Birmingham jail, of the powerful novels written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn while he was imprisoned in the Soviet Gulag. Eugene Peterson says that we also have times of “**forced imprisonment.**” We go through some great loss—unemployment, relationship troubles, or bereavement. It is like exile, as if we are being forced to move out of our accustomed home into an unaccustomed new place. Not that these circumstances produce new life and good by themselves, but it is amazing how they can be the condition necessary for new life. I don’t really believe the old saying that God never puts more on us than we can bear. I’ve seen too many people crushed by the burdens that life sometimes piles upon their backs. But it is fascinating how often those burdens become opportunities whereby we experience fresh and new the power of God. In a way, it’s a bit sad that we have to wait for this involuntary retreat, this unwished-for, but badly needed, Sabbath. Maybe this says to us that we ought to be more intentional about seeking out times, places, and opportunities for this practice of the presence. I read about a man who, when he lost his high-paying job, at last had the opportunity to devote himself to

the art of bird carving. He was even able to say later, **“My getting fired was one of the best things that ever happened to me.”** This is more than some Pollyanna smile placed over life’s tragedies.

*Rather, it is that hopeful, expectant confidence that arises from the Christian’s conviction that no matter where life takes us, God is there.*

The God who did not shrink even from enduring the shame and suffering of the cross in order to be close to us will not evade standing beside us during our times of cross-bearing as well. **Did you hear today’s scripture?** In his days on earth, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And we can too. Times like these are times when every Christian ought to be disciplined to ask, **“What is God doing now? Is this time of difficulty and tragedy also a time of potential kairos?”** Kairos is that time when regular, everyday time, chronos, becomes God’s time. Or, **is this time that has come upon me, unwanted and uninvited, a time when God is setting me apart in order to get closer to me?** Jesus was always voluntarily going into the wilderness to get away from the crowds to be alone with God. Sometimes Jesus was involuntarily cast into the wilderness, such as the time right after his baptism. We began Lent by remembering Jesus’s time in the wilderness as he began his ministry. These wilderness times can be times of growth. So remember this when you are

required to go into the wilderness. In some wild place, alone, perhaps in fear or pain, ask God to guide you in enabling this difficult time to be a blessing, an opportunity to grow in your faith and in your relationship to God. Jesus suffered. So must we. Being the Son of God did not mean that Jesus was immune from suffering. Rather, it meant that there was a way to suffer that transformed suffering forever.

If you need to find some good in the midst of bad times, o to Gun Cotton and get some coffee. **Or, How this for a streak of kindness?** According to a report in the Tampa Bay Times,

*"The acts of kindness **in St. Petersburg, Florida** began at 7 A.M. Wednesday with a woman, her iced coffee and a stranger's caramel macchiato. The woman paid for her own drink, then asked to pay for the drink of the person behind her in the drive-through. That person returned the favor and paid for the person behind..."*

The Starbucks baristas started to keep a tally of the paying it forward customers. By 1:30 P.M., the chain had reached 260 customers. By early evening, the tally hit 378. **"Then, at 6 P.M., customer No. 379—a woman in a white Jeep Commander—pulled into the drive-through and ordered a regular coffee."** Then a barista told the woman about the pay it forward chain, she declined, saying she just wanted to pay for her \$2.25 drink and not someone else's. Apparently, she didn't understand the con-

cept, and the chain was broken. But 378 people paying it forward? *That's not bad.*

Lessons as truthful as this are rarely learned without some pain. So, in our times of pain, perhaps we ought to condition ourselves to ask the question, “What am I supposed to learn from this? What is God teaching me now?”

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

***With God's help, we can learn to see the good that can come from the bad this Lent and for life.***

YOU:

**How will you work to find the good in the bad times of life?**

CLOSE:

Let me share some tips that I found to help you:

**1. Accept the bad times:**

The old saying, “**Bad days make you appreciate the good days more**” is just true. If all we ever have is good days, we'll get used to it and start taking them for granted. They will no longer be meaningful. Start reflecting at the end of your day about your day and look for good in it. Even on your worst days, try to think about at least one good thing for which you are

grateful. Trust me, when you think of all the amazing things you have in life, your day will no longer seem so bad.

### 1. Keep moving forward:

There is no point to sit and dwell on what's going on. So, you had a bad day, you'll have to get over it because there are going to be plenty more, sorry. Do what you have to do to leave that bad day behind and start your new day. Everybody has bad days, it's how we deal with them that makes us the type of person we are.

There is a wise saying to help us here:

*The bad news is, nothing lasts forever. The good news is, nothing lasts forever.*

### 1. Realize that each day is a fresh start:

The best part of this life is that you can start over everyday. You can go to bed at the end of a long day, knowing that you get to wake up with a brand new day and tackle it. You can leave that negative energy behind; you don't have to take it with you. **Doesn't that alone make you feel better?**

Even just those three tips will make a difference, I promise. There is so much good in this world — don't let the bad days take over that. So, tone down your controlling mind, refuse to let the bad times define you, get up, drink your coffee, and tackle your day (good or bad). *And you can even pay for the next person's coffee too!*



*Let's pray to have eyes to see the good even in the bad...*