

On-line Service Notes EWBC
 Sermon for 4 June 2023 Trinity Sunday
 “Trying It On”
 Text: 2 Cor. 1:3-11

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in [a]any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are [b]ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. 6 But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; 7 and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in [c]Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 [d]indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; 10 who delivered us from so great a *peril of death*, and will deliver *us*, [e]He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*¹.

“Trying It On” refers to what new Christians do *with their new life in Christ*. Imagine getting fitted for a tuxedo, or a fine suit, of an evening gown for a gala event. You go to the fitting room and tailor, or seamstress takes you measures means, pins you up, particularly your hems, cuffs, tucks or gussets—so as to have a good fit. Then, after the garments has been produced, you return for further adjustments and any necessary alterations are determined at this time. Then you take your fitted garment to the cashier, pay up and go home. It’s a process. And you are required to stand still and to assume certain postures so attain something that looks god and works for you. And as you know certain pieces of fabric will be cut off and thrown away and the rest

¹ Footnotes

- a. 2 Corinthians 1:4 Lit *every*
- b. 2 Corinthians 1:5 Lit *to us*
- c. 2 Corinthians 1:8 I.e. west coast province of Asia Minor
- d. 2 Corinthians 1:9 Lit *but we ourselves*
- e. 2 Corinthians 1:10 One early ms reads *on whom we have set our hope that He will also*

of the fabric will be sewn into place. Trying it on now lies behind you and you are now ready to go to your event.

2 Cor. 1 based on this analogy pictures our new life in Christ as a spiritual blessing. For which we bless, and praise God. **Blessed be God!** And then we begin to experience the mercies and comforts of God. And this is so because of the tribulations that we will face in our Christian walk! By tribulations I mean “troubles, afflictions, trials, testing and temptation.” Life as a Christian is at times a cake walk—thrillingly wonderful, carefree and so forth . . . and, at other times, it is not so much a cake walk as it is a trial. We will need mercies and comfort.

We need to have a sound theology of suffering because suffering is what we are called to was “followers of Jesus Christ.” The reason for that suffering, according to Paul, is this: that we may comfort others with the comfort wherewith we may comfort others. It’s all grist for the mill. In other words, everything we suffer (all chaff aside) can be made useful (as kernels of grain make flour), or become profitable (personally, if not financially). Ground grain becomes the staff of life! We store up the divine comfort which is sent to solace ourselves and, distributing it) we bless others **comforting others with the comfort wherewith we were comforted.** Sometimes it’s a listening ear and sometimes it’s a shoulder to lean on. This is foundational in our theology of suffering. **God, the Father of mercies, gives all comfort . . . in all our tribulations.**

Kermit, the frog, from Sesame Street sang a song, “It’s not Easy Being Green.” If I might paraphrase that for our current purposes, I would render it, “It’s Not Easy Being Christian.” And from Paul’s perspective, I think we can affirm this sentiment. At least it is not easy being a real, or true Christian. Genuine Christianity retains something of the redemptive properties of suffering—enshrined in the affirmed that Jesus suffered and died for our sakes, vindicating the justness of God (proving Him righteous in punishing sin) and, through the shedding of His blood, obtains forgiveness of all sin for those who believe in Him. Then we read: **5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are { to us} ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.** The sufferings of Christ are things suffered in the cause of the gospel of Christ’s kingdom—what we go through pursuing the same object (reconciliation with God/forgiveness of sin through faith in Him) which make us partners, or partakers with Him. “And it may be observed as an universal truth, that if we suffer in the cause of Christ, if we are persecuted, oppressed, and calumniated on his account, he will take care that our hearts shall be filled with consolation.” (Barnes’ Notes) There is a fellowship of suffering into which every Christian is invited! The Paul adds this benefit: what we suffer for the gospel accrues as a benefit to others (to you Corinthians!). Whether we are afflicted, or comforted . . . it is for your sakes

Let’s dig into this **in all our tribulations** bit because as Paul states what we endured in Asia was **excessive**: beatings, stoning, imprisonment, shipwreck and deprivation). **And it drove out of them all sense of self-reliance** (and self-reliance is the core of many so-called “self-help” approaches! Admit you are powerless from alcohol, present yourself as an alcoholic, attend meetings, work with a sponsor—do

the twelve steps, repeat and repeat. It is such a joy to watch the ladies in church jail launch; that is, try on their new life in Christ. It's exciting and inspirational so witness the power of the gospel at work in them. **We would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. He on whom we have set our hope, He will deliver us!** (V. 10) Your prayers assisting the whole business of salvation render us thankful.

Frankly, this faith decision is a radical departure from their former lives, from the self-serving and sinful patterns of how they used to live: independence, self-determination. For one thing, they face the persistent, subtle and sometimes not so subtly insidious influences of the world, the flesh and the Devil. These features of their former lives seem to take umbrage at their deliverance—it's a little like whacking a ground hornets' nest! A swarm of demonic displeasure develops and will deliver a lot of pain to the naive, or unwary. And, as if that were not enough, there's an abundance of pagan influences afoot these days. They will tempt you to doubt, disbelieve, or retreat from your new spiritual trajectory! Satan will throw everything at you, including the kitchen sink! There's persecution, oppression, social disapproval, cancellation, prejudicial hiring and firings, confiscation of property, imprisonment, disenfranchisement, threats to life and liberty—even death. Death threats are largely impaired by resurrection truth—we know that the end of life here is not actually an end at all! But I digress.

What I am aiming at here is a description of the contours of our spiritual battle. Living the new life is totally consistent with that battle. Therefore we see in scripture the expression of repeated encouragements. They are also needed in our church life., too! Very few of us experience constant victory—probably none of us!—must of us experience setbacks, defeats, lapses, renunciations and denials of faith on an all too frequent basis. What we need to hear is “Well done . . . Stay faithful.” At other times we need someone to dress our skinned knees and bruises. We need to pray for each other's renewal of mind, the spirit of our mind . . . we need encouragement to out our new nature on again and again, Persevere in your pursuit of Christlikeness!

We need the picture of ourselves as obedient children. We need to see a separation between us and the passions of our former ignorance. Perhaps it is helpful to describe your past as “me doing stupid” and your future as “me doing smart.” But I prefer imagining yourself as ennobled, as spiritually altered, transformed, entering your next stage of reality—the real truth of who your are becoming—that is, Christlike.

To be sure, temptations, frustration, impatience with yourself, persecutions and opposition as well as hostile pagan/Satanic/worldly pressures will beset us all the day long—and sometimes into and through the night! Some advice: Stay in the word and in worship. Be very selective in choosing friendships choose those who will reinforce your new life.² New wine, new wineskins! Die to fitting ins, getting along and acceptance. Remember Jesus' words to Peter: **Do you love Me more than these . . .**

² Some of the nastiest things will be whispered to your heart:

“You will never belong , , , you will never be acceptable, or belong . . . you're not one of us, there will be both isolating and exclusion.

above all? Always consider your trajectory, forgetting the footprints of yesterday. Live in terms of where you are headed, not where you've been.

Compromise is common, betrayal and treachery even more so! Be prepared for those who will taunt/test you. Be as fine steel and let these trials set your temper. Living the new life, it is possible, has become even more challenging. Perhaps there is more pressure, greater subtlety and perhaps temptations will be more coo (in appeal, allurements, with false promises of power, place and respectability. A murky, pervasive grayness may appear to be the new norm-reducing life to the most mundane level imaginable. Satan may whisper that you have been filthied beyond cleansing and purification (it's projection or reflection!). There are no permanent stains; nothing nullifies the power of the blood. Sin is no permanent tattoo! You will not always be blemished!

Living out our days, this business of "trying it on," will come with alternations, re-sizing, re-hemming's. We are translating ourselves into Christlikeness all along the way. It is not painless, or simple and each of us does this uniquely. He will appear despite my face, my smile, my affect! The process is neither instantaneous, nor automatic . . . but the outcome is predictably the same. In a wonderful, significant, manful way His fullness will occupy the space we prepare for Him. It will be the outcome of gracious G&D—which is to say, growth and development—it is a work of God-giveness. *And we are the beneficiaries, the recipients of this grace wherein we stand!* Yes, beyond defeats, retreats, advances and detours, restarts, kick-starts and new beginnings . . . despite all sputtering and falterings, we find that even missteps can be redeemable. ***This then is the pattern of our life in Christ***—the idyllic versions, the prosperity versions of it tend elsewhere. Even Bunyan's Pilgrim attempted shortcuts. (Beware of that!) ***Perfection awaits us all in the end!*** Shortcuts are unsure, dangerous, costly, implausible, traps and snares—even reckless! They often result in regret, sorrow, anguish, discouragement and defeatism. (We should choose less of that!)

We are more than conquerors through Him who strengthens us! "Were not the right Man on our side, our striving would be losing; But God has chosen for His will to triumph through Him." (Luther) We shall be less impacted and more impactful as the day's go on. Imagine all this, just for trying it on!

Amen