

### **“Kiss the Wave”**

This past week was one of those weeks, where, in spite of what little was scheduled and happening here at the church, there was a lot happening in and through some of our members.

Our Mission to Mexico Team returned after a week of building homes and serving families in the Tijuana area who are certainly on the less-fortunate economic side of life. The reports I've heard is that it was (once again) a powerful witness and work week, as well as a chance for the team to grow closer to each other and to Christ.

We also had 15 of our middle school students, here in San Jose, their annual Home Mission Trip, sharing in a number of serving opportunities. Involvement at City Team, visiting some of our seniors, convalescent homes, gathering food for our pantry, our young people were living out their faith and serving in some real and tangible ways.

In the lives of those who are struggling, and that's where a lot of this past week's (mission efforts) were centered, it's always a challenge. To get up each day and do it again, these acts of love, offered in the name of Jesus, (if nothing else) can encourage them to keep going and (hopefully and ideally) serve to strengthen them in their own relationship with Christ.

As I thought about (and prayed for) the things going on this past week and the lives and the situations of the people being served, I've also been thinking and praying about how hard it can be (for any of us) in those times when we're struggling, when things (in life) are not going our way. We had this in mind, but it was that that happened. We had that in mind, but it never played out as we had hoped.

If it keeps going, it can become overwhelming. One thing leads to the next. One wave comes crashing, not long before the next one hits. Next thing you know, it starts feeling like nothing you do (or try) ever works, and you get tired.

You're tired of pursuing. You're tired of applying. You're tired of counseling, tired of arguing, tired of disciplining. You're tired of forgiving. You're tired of asking for forgiveness. You're tired of hurting. If you're honest, you might even say you're tired of praying.

This little two-week series we're in, titled “Kiss the Wave,” is for anyone who is struggling and feeling worn out. It comes from a quote by Charles Spurgeon. We touched on his life (a bit) last week.

He was a preacher in the 1800's, highly respected for his work. He had incredible influence. He also had incredible suffering. He dealt with depression for much of his life. His wife (once said), it was “so deep and severe that we feared he would never preach again.”

He dealt with anxiety. Early (in his ministry), he was preaching to a large gathering, (thousands of people) and someone in the room yelled “Fire,” but there was no fire. It started this stampede. Seven people were trampled to death, hundreds more were hospitalized. From that day on, every time he got up to preach it would trigger this anxiety that he would have to battle his way through.

When his wife gave birth to twins (in 1856), it led to a series of health struggles she had to live with. Nine years later, she was an invalid, she could barely move and would be bedridden for the next twenty-five years.

In 1869, he was not only dealing with depression and anxiety, but he was also tormented by physical pain. He had Bright's disease, which involved a painful inflammation of his kidneys. He had gout, which caused incredibly painful arthritis.

And so when he spoke about his sufferings and struggles in life, here's what he said. (He said), “The waters rolled in continually, wave upon wave. I do not mention this to exact sympathy, but simply to let the reader see that I am no dry-land sailor. I have traversed those oceans. I know the roll of the billows, and the rush of the winds.”

He says, “I know what it's like, wave upon wave upon wave.” And yet, when he talks to us about the sufferings of this life, his challenge to us (as Christians) is not simply to endure the waves or to get through the

waves. His challenge to us is to kiss the waves. That wave that is just beating you down and you don't think you can do it any longer, he says (it's time) to rise up and to kiss it.

It comes from this quote of Spurgeon's. He says, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." I've come to know that the waves of this life that cause suffering also bring (with them) an opportunity to learn about and (come to know) the power and presence of God in greater ways.

The wave brings with it (he says) an opportunity for God to work that never would have happened otherwise. It brings an opportunity for God to be glorified in a way that he wasn't able to be glorified before. And so, (he says) "I've learned to kiss the wave," because there are things God does in the waves that don't seem to happen when we're simply laying on the beach or the side of the pool.

The apostle James talks about this in chapter one. He's writing to Christians who are being persecuted because of their faith. They've been kicked out of their homes, dislocated to other parts of the region. He's writing to give them a different perspective on the suffering they are experiencing. He wants them to see the pains and struggles of this life, not through the lens of this life, but through the lens of what God is doing and is (able to do) in this life. This is what it should look like for you to experience hardship if you're a follower of Jesus.

In chapter one (verse two), he says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers (and sisters), whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James is making the point that what is happening in your life, God is using to deepen your faith.

And so (he says) "...when troubles come," (when troubles come.) He doesn't say if they come or that they might come. No, (he says) when they come. He says they are going to come.

We touched on this last week. The sufferings of this life (often times) catch us off guard. We know this world is broken. We know things happen that are not good. We see it every day.

It happens to others, but when it happens to us it catches us by surprise. It starts feeling like God is not holding up his end of the deal. It feels like, when we enter into this relationship with Jesus, that his part was to keep the waters calm and warm. And so, when the storms come, it feels like he's let us down.

This is one of the reasons (I believe) why many people walk away from the church. They have this idea that it is God's job to keep us free from pain and suffering. And so when pain and suffering come, people walk away because they think that God is not faithful. He's not trustworthy. (It's not true.)

The Bible teaches that we will have suffering and we will have troubles. Much of the New Testament is written by (and to) people who were suffering for their faith. James says, when the "troubles of many kinds start coming..." There are many different kinds of troubles.

Some of the troubles (we face) come in small waves. People look at what you're going through and they say "It's not that bad." What they don't know is that (what they're seeing) is just one wave, and the waves just keep coming. The bills just keep coming.

It's one argument after another. It's one criticism after another. It's one rejection after another. Any one of those things, you're OK, at least for a while, but it just keeps coming.

There are (what I would call) rouge waves. These are the ones that (seemingly) come out of nowhere and they knock you down. Maybe it's the death of a loved one. Maybe it's the loss of a job, a painful breakup, the gossiping and hurtfulness of a friend, a rebellious child, and (for a season) it's just really tough.

And then there are the tidal waves, and when they come, it changes the landscape. Everything is washed away, it's all demolished and gone, and all you can do is to rebuild. The loss of a child, an unfaithful spouse, a terminal illness, a devastating car accident, a rape, a molestation, an addiction that has become out of control.

James says when those kinds of trouble come, "consider it (an opportunity) for pure joy..." Really? Come on? You've got to kidding? You're telling me that I should be filled with joy?

This is how he starts his letter. He's writing to these Christians who are being persecuted and he's telling them that there's an opportunity in front of you. There's a chance (you're being given) to grow and to learn and to be joy-filled.

Now, depending upon which wave you're up against, this might not only sound naïve, but offensive. An opportunity for great joy? Really?

Any yet, this is what Spurgeon meant when he said "I've learned to kiss the wave," because every wave brings with it an opportunity to discover a joy and a peace that is not dependent upon the condition of the water.

It's not dependent upon the circumstances you face. You reach a place where you begin to see that waves are an opportunity to grasp, rather than just an obstacle to endure.

He says, "consider it pure joy" when you face these obstacles. That's not natural. It's not easy. It's not even what we want to feel. What we want to feel is to be mad or angry or act as if it's not fair. It might not be. There's no promise that it will be. We want to feel bitter and resentful and blame it on God. Believe me. (I know what that's like.) I've been there, more times than I'd care to admit. James says. "consider it pure joy..."

That word "consider" is an interesting word. It doesn't just mean to give it a passing thought. It means to give it "intentional and prolonged thought." When troubles come, our job is to, with intentional and prolonged thought, think about those things.

This is so counterintuitive. This is so not what we would want to do. When troubles come we'd rather stare at a screen, or go on some shopping binge, or drink (or smoke) something that helps us forget. That's what we want to do. We want to do something to (shut it down) or make it go away. We want to numb it. We want to forget about it.

James says we should think about it. We should "consider it." It means (literally) to "push your mind onto it." You just keep thinking about it; not in a bitter or an angry way, but in a meditative way, in a way in which you're trying to listen to (and become aware) of what God (might be doing) in the midst of your pain.

How can I face this in a way that honors God? How can I approach this in a way that is consistent with the life of Jesus? How can I "consider it" as an opportunity to grow and to learn and to be used by God in a way that will glorify Christ?

It's not that you want it or that you desire it or that you (somehow) convince yourself that you're glad it's happening. You might not get there. But you "consider it" in a way and (with a perspective) that allows God to work in you and to grow you and to shape you in ways that otherwise would not happen.

James says "when troubles come." He says that the waves are going to happen. He says we live in a wave pool and the waves are always on. And so, when they come, they give us an opportunity to think about and to remember and to "consider" the fact that this is not how it will always be. When the waves come, it's an opportunity (as Paul says) to put our hope and our trust in what's real and what's true and what "will not disappoint."

Consider it joy...because in "the testing of your faith"...it's a chance to find out. When troubles come, it's a chance to really know. It's a chance to find out where your hope and your trust really lie.

I remember talking with a pastor friend of mine (a while back) about some things I was dealing with. He told me that it's test time. He said it's time to find out if you really believe what you've been preaching all these years...or if your words were only words. That was hard to hear, but he was right. It comes as a test. Instead of fighting it, it's time to dive into it and to stay with it and to allow (whatever is happening) to give you a chance to grow.

James says, "...because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." It's a chance for God to do a work in you that won't happen at any other time.

I came across an article (this past week) about Corrie Ten Boom and when she and her sister, Betsy, were in the Nazi Concentration Camp. It was terribly overcrowded. It was flea infested. They had smuggled a Bible in and they were reading where it says to "give thanks to God in all circumstances," in this flea-infested, overcrowded concentration camp.

And so Betsy started praying, and in her prayer, she was thanking God for the fleas. Corrie thought this was crazy, but Betsy kept on praying. During her prayer, Corrie became convicted and started praying as well, thanking God for the fleas.

What happened (over the next several weeks) was that the fleas became worse. Instead of going away, they increased. What also happened was that the guards stopping coming in. They used to come in and abuse the women (almost daily), but now they stopped coming.

As a result, they were able to have Bible studies. A number of women came to faith. They became closer and more loving toward each other. They learned (later on) that the guards had stopped coming in because of the fleas. Some great things happened because of the fleas.

You never know what the "Grand Weaver" might be doing. He's not causing it, but he's using it, and (in using it) he's growing his people for his glory.

There's a hypothetical exercise by a man named Jonathan Haidt. He's a social psychologist, serving as Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University's School of Business. His areas of study are the psychology of morality and the moral emotions. I've found this hypothetical exercise (of his) to be helpful.

He says, "Imagine you're going to have a child and just before the child is born, you're handed a script of that child's life, and you're given an eraser and ten minutes to edit the child's story. What would you erase? What would you do?"

You start reading and you realize that your child has a special need. And so, what's going to be easy for most is going to be difficult for your child. You don't want that, so you erase that part of the story.

You keep reading and you discover that your child is going to be especially strong-willed and it's going to cause all kinds of problems. You don't want that either, so you quickly erase that part.

Still reading, you see your child going to college and experiencing this difficult break-up and going through two years of loneliness and anxiety as a result. You don't want that for your child, so you erase that part as well.

Your child is diagnosed with a heart condition that leads to multiple surgeries and medications, and it just changes life, and so you erase that...of course you erase that. Of course you do. You don't want that.

But what if, what if, what if you just erased the challenge that teaches your child the strength of God? What if you just erased the struggle that would give the rest of their life purpose? What if you just erased the pain that would teach them compassion? What if you erased the very suffering that was going to bring them to salvation? What if you erased the wave that would have thrown them onto the Rock of Ages?

You don't know. You don't know. There's so much we don't see (and know) from where we sit. All we can see and know is what we see and know. But we trust in a God who sees and who knows it all.

And so here's my challenge as we close this out. Next time you're in a wave, next time you want to run away and quit, instead of running away from it or fighting it or trying to swim around it, I'd challenge to "consider it", to dive into it, and to let God do what only God can do when it comes.

I can promise you that God will not waste a wave. God will not waste a wave that is given to him. He will use it. He will honor it. He will not waste a wave that is entrusted to him.

And so, we kiss the wave of loneliness, because (in it) we discover God's presence in a way we never knew before we were lonely. We kiss the wave of anxiety, because (in it) we discover "the peace that passes understanding" that we never knew until it hit.

We kiss the wave of weakness, because it allows us to discover a strength that is not our own. We kiss the wave of rejection, because it turns us to God and allows us to find an acceptance that means more than we ever knew.

We kiss the wave of poverty, because it allows us to experience God's provision. We kiss the wave of grief, because it teaches us that our hope is in God. We kiss the wave of depression, because it allows us to find a joy that is not based upon the condition of the water we find ourselves in.

We kiss the wave of suffering because God can (and he will) use suffering to bring salvation to those who are lost. And so, we kiss the wave that throws us against the Rock of Ages. Let's pray.

Lord God, in the midst of the storms of this life we face, we thank you for being that Rock upon which we can depend. We pray, Lord, that you would help us (when the waves come) to not ignore them or to deflect them or to simply try to power through them, but to see them as an opportunity for you to work. Lord, do your work in us, when the waves come, that we might become the people you created us to be, and that our lives might be used for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.