



For Those Who Wonder: “Where Is God?!”

Considering a Message from Isaiah 49:13-17

For the Week of November 11th, 2018

It is the 3rd to Last Sunday of the Church Year. So, the church year is winding down, which is also the time when we consider how the time left for this world is also winding down. We are currently living in the "end times." In these end times, Christians will see and experience struggles and hardships. We are told to expect this! The devil, knowing his time is short, will be "working to deceive even the elect, if it were possible" (Matthew 24:24-25). And he loves to do this by accusing God of evil—suggesting to us that God has forsake us and abandoned us. Satan would try to point us to the challenges we face as evidence that God is against us. But the reality is, God desires to work through these challenges for the good of His people. This is why he offers forewarning and encouragement to those who will face these things. He does "not want us to be uninformed" (1 Thessalonians 4:13) so he offers details in His Word that will help us be prepared for the struggles faced in the end times. This is what God has always done. In the Sermon text we see how He offered this same encouragement to His chosen people before they were going to face an incredibly difficult situation. As He proclaimed to the Israelites before the Babylonian Captivity: "I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15) He continues to proclaim this to us. Though at times we have forsaken God—He assures us that He will never forsake or abandon us. He has in fact gone to such great efforts to save us by the work of Jesus Christ, that we have a sure and certain hope that He remains with us through any struggle or challenge.

Opening Prayer: We thank You Heavenly Father for bringing us together. Send Your Holy Spirit to help us grow in faith and love, especially as we gather together with our fellow Christians. Help us to not doubt You or Your love though we face hardships and difficulties. We call upon you to fulfill your promise that you will work through these things for our good. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

CONNECT to Each Other

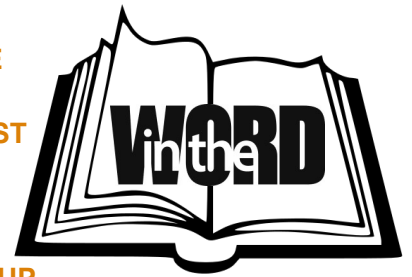
Take a few moments to greet each other—especially anyone who might be new or unfamiliar to the people in your group. Introduce yourselves again if anyone is unfamiliar with anyone else, give an interesting factoid about yourself that not many people know...

1. Have you ever faced (—or have you known anyone else who has faced—) hardships and difficulties so great that you wondered if God had left you or abandoned you? Please share examples of your own—or of others that you were encouraging (—as you are comfortable...).
ANSWERS WILL VARY/SUBJECTIVE—THIS IS A COMMON TEMPTATION THAT WE FACE—THE DEVIL LOVES TO THROW OUR PAST SINS AND GUILT AT US ESPECIALLY WHEN WE FACE HARD TIMES IN LIFE IN ORDER TO GET US TO THINK GOD IS GETTING BACK AT US! EVEN JOB'S FRIENDS WERE SUGGESTING THAT THIS WAS WHAT WAS GOING ON WITH JOB...OF COURSE IT WASN'T!

CONNECT to the Word—Read the Bible text together (also consider its context): **Isaiah 49:13-17**

2. Why does Isaiah prophecy that Zion (—that is, the people of Israel,) would say “The LORD has forsaken me...has forgotten me.” What was going to be coming upon them? **THIS WAS DUE TO THE PEOPLE'S CONTINUED REBELLION AGAINST GOD, IN SPITE OF THE PROPHETS AND WARNINGS GOD HAD SENT TO HIS PEOPLE TO GET THEM TO RETURN TO HIM. SOON GOD WOULD BE USING THE BABYLONIAN ARMY AND EXILE TO LOVINGLY DRAW HIS PEOPLE BACK TO HIM! AS STATED IN SERMON: “GOD WAS USING THE BABYLONIANS TO BRING HIS SPIRITUALLY STRAYING PEOPLE BACK TO HIM! HOW IRONIC! THOUGH ALLOWING THEM TO BE CARRIED AWAY, HE WAS DRAWING THEM CLOSER!”**
3. Why do we face hardships and difficulties? Is God getting even with us? Is this retribution? What kind of attitude does God have towards us as we face hardships and difficulties—as we face

“punishment” or “discipline”? **THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES THAT WE FACE BECAUSE OF THE BAD DECISIONS THAT WE AND OTHERS MAKE—THAT IS: BECAUSE OF SIN! BUT WE MUST KNOW THAT CHRIST HAS PAID FOR OUR SINS—THE HARDSHIPS ARE NOT RETRIBUTION OR REVENGE FROM AN ANGRY GOD—HE IS AT WORK TO TURN EVIL FOR OUR GOOD! HE IS DRAWING US CLOSER TO HIMSELF IN SPITE OF THESE THINGS!—HE IS ACTING IN LOVE—BRINGING HIS PEOPLE UP, TRAINING THEM, HELPING THEM TO MATURE AND GROW!**



4. How is “discipline” a more accurate word than “punishment” when discussing the challenges we face? How is “discipline” related to “disciple”? **PUNISHMENT CARRIES WITH IT THE IDEA OF “GETTING EVEN” OR OF “RETRIBUTION”—DISCIPLINE IS NOT ABOUT THESE THINGS—IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE. I.E. A PARENT WHO HAS TO DISCIPLINE A CHILD! GOD DISCIPLINES—THAT IS, HE “DISCIPLES”—”AS WE FACE ‘DISCIPLINE,’ GOD IS AT WORK TO HELP US BE ‘DISCIPLES’! HE’S AT WORK IN THESE WAYS TO TRAIN US AND HELP US IMPROVE AND BE BETTER THAN BEFORE!**
5. What beautiful comfort is found in the verses of Isaiah 49! What do you find to be the most comforting line/verse? Explain why... **ANSWERS WILL VARY/SUBJECTIVE— THE FACT THAT IN SPITE OF SUFFERING WE CAN REJOICE AND SING; THE LOVE OF GOD GREATER THAN A MOTHER; KNOWING YOUR NAME IS TATTOOED ONTO THE PALM OF GOD’S HAND! ALL ARE SO COMFORTING!**

CONNECT to Life

6. In what ways has God worked through hardship and tragedy for the good of His people? How has he worked through hardships and challenges for YOUR good? **THE MOST IMPORTANT EXAMPLE IS THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST HIMSELF! BUT HOW GREATLY WE BENEFIT FROM THIS! OTHER ANSWERS WILL VARY/SUBJECTIVE—IN RETROSPECT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE EXAMPLES, IT IS MADE CLEAR TO US—BUT NOT SO MUCH WHEN WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING AND HARDSHIP—THEN IT TAKES FAITH ON OUR PART—TO BE COMMITTED TO GOD!**
7. How did the hymns, other lessons, parts of the service, etc. fit together with the Sermon message and overall theme for the day? **VARIOUS ANSWERS—OBVIOUSLY THE WHOLE SERVICE IS DESIGNED TO BE A COHESIVE UNIT/SINGLE THEME.**

CONNECT in Prayer—*In closing & throughout the week!*

- PLEASE OFFER PRAYERS of Thanks that God has such love for unworthy people like us—and that He shares this Love with us personally as we receive His Word and Sacraments!
- PRAY for the ongoing work of our Building Project and for those working on our project.
- PRAY for our newborn babies (Especially Lydia Scheele—who was baptized this past week!) and expecting mothers of our church.
- PRAY that God may guide Adam & Mandy Pavelchik as they deliberate on their divine calls to come and serve at Mt. Olive as Principal and as 6th Grade Teacher.
- PRAY for our Veterans who faithfully served us and our nation as we celebrate Veteran’s Day on November 11th.
- PRAY for our sister in Christ Lisa Brown as she recovers from a recent surgery to remove thyroid cancer. Prayers of thanks for successful surgery—and requesting continued healing and return to health.
- PRAY for any other special requests or needs of the people in your group!

