

Augustana College  
Chapel of Reconciliation

## How long must I bear pain?

Psalm 13

Pastor Paul Rohde

March 20, 2006

I have good news for you. Christian faith is about life and healing and joy.  
I have better news for you. Christ Jesus comes into all our brokenness and pain, to bear and redeem and bring us and our pain to new life and healing and joy.

At one point I thought about a preaching series on pain. I was so inclined because I am asked so often, “What do you make of God and pain?” and because our freedom to be aware of ourselves and each other in pain often seems so limited. We’ll continue to think about whether a series would be helpful. . . in some ways it sounds like scheduling a bunch of root canals. . . Minimally I thought one reflection on pain this lent would be appropriate. . . and I hope it will be helpful. My goal is though we’re thinking about pain, that it not be a painful experience. I’m going to lean on lighter examples of my points. And I do think it brings us to God’s good news.

What is pain? What do you do about it? What do believe about God in it? And the Psalmists timeless question, “How long must I bear pain?”

For starters, pain is a message, but it is not only one kind of message. The psalm makes clear—it can be about the absence of God, or troubling, violent neighbors, or it can be an internal, self-contained discord. When I’m asked what I believe about God and pain, I need to begin by saying I don’t believe all pain is the same. Douglas John Hall offers an extensive discussion of this in his book, God and Human Suffering.

There is *creative pain*. Learning something new or learning something different is painful. Jenny told me yesterday she’s learning a new way to hurdle—it’s hard and I believe it hurts. Training for a marathon, transitions, making changes, having a baby—these are all creative, life-giving experiences. And they are all painful. I’d add “serving world peace” to the list. It’s a very good—and very hard—thing to do.

*Consequential pain* is more cause/effect. The pain of being stranded can have something to do with ignoring the low fuel signal on your car, for example. I have done this. Or in the same category, accidentally misplacing your photo ID on the way to the airport, can cause pain. I have done this, too. Dashing out of the shower to catch a phone call—running, tripping stumbling down the stairs only to encounter the UPS delivery person in your stark nakedness [I have not done this] is indeed painful. . . . and consequential.

Spending the \$\$ your parents gave you for books on a rock concert in Omaha. You get the point, this is pain that is a consequence of something we have done.

But there is also *innocent pain*. If your roommate accidentally uses the study guide for your midterm to start the charcoal grill tonight, I'd say you are pained innocently. Your professor writing the midterm in a language other than the one in the textbook or someone sneezing on your ice cream cone create consequences for the innocent—and they are painful. Innocent pain speaks to times we're a target for someone else's anger or in the way of their road rage. I suppose in some ways this is a kind of consequential pain—but the consequence is someone inflicting pain on someone else instead of one's own fault.

I believe there is also *inexplicable pain*. I have an aunt who has had multiple sclerosis for more than 30 years. She has almost no movement left except with her hands. . . . and she tells me every joint in her body aches. We needn't look very far to know the world is very painful for way too many children. And any of us listening in to the capstone course on genocide in January has to acknowledge pain which cannot be explained.

I'm sure there are others, but for starters I hope the pain of growth and consequences, innocent and inexplicable help us see that there are many kinds of pain. And besides feeling any of these individually—they also describe communal, community experiences. Sioux Falls is trying to do something about racism—I think that's growth pain. Consequences and violations of innocence almost always us together as well as individually.

I hope this brief discussion will keep us from "one size fits all" answers. From assumptions or statements that make all pain any one thing—good or bad. Sometimes it's really hard to know what kind of pain is which. . . .and many times an experience is more than one.

And naming them is still not the same as knowing what to do about the experiences. It's not like we figure out what name should be on the tab and then we can just put it in a file folder, "Pr. Paul, I'm having growth pain." "OK, I'll file you under G". Nor is it if we simply scream long enough somehow it will get better.

But neither is it something we can simply ignore. In Tuesdays with Morrie, Morrie tells Mitch he thinks most people experience only fear and pain. They start to feel—but when the feeling is painful or scary they simply shut it off. I fear that our communities shut one another off, too. And lots of social commentators suggest that addictions of all sorts—including busyness—are really about people unable to face or express pain. How can we support one another? How can we claim God's good gifts in this? And can we claim them without facing how we hurt?

The Psalm is a picture of people, communities engaging one another and God. It doesn't simply describe pain, it is an expression of pain for understanding one another and for

claiming the presence and promise, the hearing and help of God. What would this look like for us?

Murray Haar has suggested that before we share the peace, we share the pain. We could invite all who are hurting to come forward, be marked with the sign of the cross and hear the promise, “the crucified one goes with you.” I hope there’s some way we could promise to go with one another in this, too.

Last Friday Taylor Swartz was a powerful example of how attending to pain, saying it again and again and again “*This cannot be! It makes me angry! No, God, NO!*” opened the promise of God for him. Taylor’s text was the promise for Jeremiah, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Taylor gave a profound witness to the way candidly grieving the plans he wanted and his hopes dashed transformed and opened this verse for him—and for us!

More freedom and truthfulness in pain could look like 12 step, Al-Anon meetings, where people speak very openly about failure and disappointment and learn to move out of victimization by knowing they have options. And by trusting that God’s promises speak to real brokenness, to really tough situations.

Maybe hearing, really hearing lament, maybe hearing people engage communities with pain will help us be clearer about the difference between pain relief and healing. The biggest irony of this is how facing pain together serves our healing.

I’m satisfied if this sermon stirs conversation about what it would like to practice God meeting our pain. I really think it would look like really people speaking real words about a very real world. Maybe before we would be new, the text will be new. The Gospel is full of people in pain—and the Gospel is full of God meeting, bearing, healing them.

These texts have good news for you. God is about life and healing and joy. These texts have better news for you. God in Christ Jesus is meeting all brokenness and pain to bear and redeem and bring us again to healing and life and joy. Amen.



## CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

**FAITH FEST COMMITTEE** - Applications are available on the Narthex table for the 2006-07 Faith Fest committee. This is a subcommittee of the Outreach Program that plans a high energy, fun event on campus involving area youth.

**UNITY NIGHT** - A service of prayer uniting all the campus ministry organizations on campus will be held Wednesday, Mar. 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9 pm, in the chapel. Refreshments following! Everyone

### CHAPEL CALENDAR

- Wednesday (22) Holy Communion, 10 am - Donn Grinager,  
International Programs
- Friday (24) Worship, 10 am - Ryan Olson, Senior Speaker  
*SPRING BREAK - Mar. 25<sup>th</sup> - Apr. 2*
- Monday (3) Worship, 10 am - Fr. David Krogman, St.  
Mary's Parish
- Tuesday (4) Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am
- Wednesday (5) Holy Communion, 10 am - Sarah Sumner-  
Eisenbraun
- Friday (7) Worship, 10 am - Andrea Halverson, Senior  
Speaker