

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

June 21, 2026 – 4TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST / PROPER 7, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Earthly Suffering is Training for Heavenly Peace*”

Jeremiah 20:7-13	(The Lord is with the prophet, despite his unpopularity)
Psalms 69: 8-11, 18-20	(The Psalmist has suffered reproach and begs God's mercy)
Romans 6:1b-11	(Buried with Jesus, we are dead to sin and alive in Christ)
St. Matthew 10:24-39	(Jesus teaches that all who follow Him will face opposition)

In today's Gospel, Jesus warns His apostles about the cost of discipleship. Following Jesus is not an easy life, He says. In fact, you may be handed over to councils who will flog you; dragged before governors and kings; betrayed by your family; and hated by everyone because of the very name of Jesus. Who wants *that*? Seriously, what kind of Sunday message is it to be told “children will rise against parents and have them put to death”?

Now that Jesus has their attention—and ours—He goes on to say other things that bring more comfort: Do not fear death, for the forces of evil may kill the mortal body but they cannot kill the soul. Then He adds that beautiful, poetic image: even the sparrow, worth half-a-cent, is cared for and loved by God. Every tiny bird. *And* every hair on your head.¹

In this curiously contrasting narrative, Jesus lays out two fundamental principles of Christianity: First, believers are not spared from suffering; and, second, when we suffer, God suffers along with us. That is the very meaning of the word “compassion”—from the Latin “cum passus”—“*to suffer with*.” So, let's dig a little deeper into those two aspects of the Christian life.

First, suffering: *we* may not be flogged before governors or hated by everyone—but we do struggle, right? We are mortal, we contract diseases, grieve the death of loved ones, lose jobs, struggle with health challenges, and undergo a variety of nasty experiences—some trivial, others catastrophic. Jesus knows this. After all, the curse of original sin remains upon us while we are still on earth. However, Christ has ultimately redeemed us from that curse through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

The Christian life is not a magic fix to the woes of this mortal life. If it were, there would be no hatred, violence, cruelty, or evil in the world. Imagine: No mass murders; no school bombings; no killings in synagogues; no starvation in war-torn areas; no one torturing animals or abusing women or children.

As lovely an image of the absence of earth's horrors might be, it is actually a picture of the fulfillment of God's Kingdom, that for which we hope and pray, and for which Jesus came to earth, proclaiming the coming of that Kingdom—something that, let's face it, is not here yet. So how are we to live in this world where hatred and violence are so rampant?

We need God's help! And that's the *second* part of the Christian life: *God is with us*. Remember the Christmas prophecy? “He shall be called Emmanuel, God with us” (Isaiah 7:14; *see* Matthew 1:23). Moreover, before He ascended into heaven, Christ promised us that He would be with us always, “even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The promise made by Jesus is that we are never alone in our struggles. God is here to comfort us, to help us through the difficult times, to show us the way when we don't know where to turn, to help us when we cannot help ourselves—and certainly to rejoice with us in good times. Every one of us will suffer in this mortal life, but God is with us—to console and guide us.

Perhaps we might think of these two things—the inevitability of suffering, and the omnipresence of God—when we consider the many current controversies in which we are entwined—in our Nation, around the world, in the Church, and even in our own families and communities.

Voices on both sides of every issue want resolution. They want to end the struggle. And they seek to accomplish this through human edicts, even violence and war—any means, as long as only one winner emerges. And all of their decisions and actions are based on contradictory interpretations of the same information, text, or tenet. It's enough to make our heads spin and want to turn off the radio, TV, or feeds from our smart phones or computers, and ignore reality.

But could it be that our Lord and Savior, God-made-human, Jesus Christ Himself, is calling us not to strive to end our struggles, but to be in the midst of them? Might it be the case that once we accept our place in the very midst of troubles—whether near or far—the Holy Spirit could show us the way forward? That seems to be Jesus’ view. Yes, we all have opinions of our own; make no mistake about that. But as Christians whose prime directive is always love, we are called to listen to and try to respect opposing views. We are not to flex our pride, daring to presume that our view is the right, or the only, viewpoint.

Time was when we Episcopalians lived like that. We were respectful and polite when it came to diversity within our congregations. We listened to each other. Sure, we didn’t agree on every issue, but we agreed to continue in conversation. Nowadays, even some in the Church take themselves too seriously. They imagine and presume that our debates and legislative actions will somehow bring about—or perhaps prevent—the salvation of the world. Excuse me, but that’s God’s job—remember?

We cross a line when Christians of any political stripe and theological persuasion—faithful, caring, loving people—presume to know the mind of God, in excruciating detail and with absolute certainty. Or, worse yet, they have decided to take over sovereignty from God. This is not our calling as Christian people.

Oh, we will have struggles and issues—every age has its own particular set of these. But rather than stick our heads in the sand, the God-made-human whom we worship calls us to be in the midst of the trials of this world. He calls us to bring to those troubles the faith, love, hope, truth, and joy that are ours through our relationship with Jesus Christ. Even in our own personal battles, we are called not to engage in a fight to the finish, where one person or group winds up the victorious insiders and the others become the rejected outsiders. Rather, we are called to proclaim to everyone we encounter that God is here! He is in the midst of us! He will never leave us or forsake us! And then we are to share with every human being—our fellow pilgrims on the journey—the love that we have known in Christ Jesus.

Every human heart has the capacity to love and the capacity to hate. Even *us*. So, what helps keep us on the path of righteousness? What will help tip the balance for good over evil? What can we do to overcome the negative instincts we all have?

First, listen for the still, small voice of God. The God who was with the infant Isaac and grew him into Jacob, a great patriarch for God’s chosen people, Israel. The God who never sleeps, and keeps watch over our lives, as we read in Psalm 121, verse 4. The God who will reunite us all in a resurrection like that of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul reminds us in Romans 6:5. And the God-made-human who came to earth to proclaim, as well as demonstrate, that love is stronger than death.

Therefore, what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead! The kingdom of God has come very near us! And when we suffer—and we will—we also have the Church, the Christian community, where we “bear one another’s burdens,” as St. Paul said in Galatians 6:2. And, again Paul reminds us, “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV).”

As Christians, we are not spared from suffering. But when we suffer, God suffers with us. The Bible assures us that our suffering will prepare us for eternal rest and peace. So, rejoice, for Scripture promises: “God will wipe away all tears from [our] eyes. And there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; neither will there be any more pain. For the former things are gone” (Revelation 21:4).

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, by Your patience in suffering You hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to Your Father’s will: We pray that You would give us the grace to rejoice even in the midst of our problems and trials. Please remind us daily of Your promise to be with us through all of life’s ups and downs, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can be strengthened to endure all of life’s hardships and continue walking with You through every trial. Continue to remind us that earth is not our home, and that the difficulties we face now are nothing compared to the joy we shall experience with You in paradise. We pray this in Your Holy Name. *Amen.*²

¹ Adapt. J. Barrington Bates, “Preparing for Eternal Glory,” 25 June 2017, [EpiscopalChurch.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/preparing-for-eternal-glory-proper-7-a-2017/) <<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/preparing-for-eternal-glory-proper-7-a-2017/>> 15 June 2026.

² Sources: Grace Cathedral, “Prayers for Healing and Wellness,” n.d., [GraceCathedral.org](https://gracecathedral.org/prayers-for-difficult-times/) <<https://gracecathedral.org/prayers-for-difficult-times/>> 15 June 2026; K-Love Pastors, “8 Prayers for Suffering,” 27 September 2023, [Klove.com](https://www.klove.com/resources/pain-and-suffering/8-prayers-for-suffering-6449/) <<https://www.klove.com/resources/pain-and-suffering/8-prayers-for-suffering-6449/>> 15 June 2026; .