**The Holy Trinity**

**John 16:12-15; Romans 5:1-5**

**June 15, 2025**

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

*Jesus said to his disciples at the Last Supper:* 12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Good morning, Church. Would you please repeat after me?

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)

***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)

***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)



Let's run that back again:

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)

***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)
***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)

I have a lover's quarrel with those words. I want to say suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character…

Hold on.

I think I've built up enough character for one lifetime, thank you very much, Jesus.

Do I have to get back on the suffering train to build up a little more character? Well then, stop the suffering train, because I want to get off. I want off this train.

I gather with a group of fellow disciples every Tuesday morning in Bemidji, Minnesota. There are usually ten to twelve of us disciples who gather to read scripture together, drink Folgers coffee, and study the Bible together. Why? Because most of us are preachers, and we reflect on the assigned readings for the coming Sunday. It's Tuesday, and so we come together to hear the readings you just heard, and after we have heard them, we look at each other across the table, over our Folgers Coffee and we ask each other.



"I don't know what you are going to preach on this Sunday, what do you know?" And if we are at all honest with each other, we reply, "I don't know. That's why I came to be with you. It's Tuesday, not Sunday. I came to hear from you…"

And so we throw out our Tuesday bags of tricks, our personal stories. Quotes from some Biblical commentary, or recent publication. We talk about demonstrations in Los Angeles, or some other recent news headline. We dump our tricks and doo dads and pocket lint out on the table, next to our thin cups

of coffee, and we support each other. We listen to each other. We believe in each other.

After over twenty years of gathering with them, they are my fellow disciples. I belong to them, and they belong to me.

Last Tuesday one of the young fathers brought his son along with him. Probably fourth or fifth grade. Out of school for the summer. This young boy patiently sat and read a book, played on his computer, while we dumped out our Tuesday morning pocket lint on the table, hoping for a Sunday morning Sermon. Something for you…

After twenty years of this, we know each other. We know our stories. We sometimes repeat our stories. And by that, I mean we know each others' sufferings.

4.

When it was my turn to talk, when it was my turn to empty my pockets, I talked about suffering, and my desire to get off that suffering train. I said, "We are here today. We are a room full of preachers and priests, and pastor, because we have seen enough suffering, except this young little man here. And although we would like to protect him from it, so build a hedge around him, to shield him from suffering, we know that his time is coming. His turn."

The boy kept reading his book. But the eyes of his father began to brim with tears. Knowing tears.

Things that we know, too.

Because (repeat after me)

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)
***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)
***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)

I'm proud, and grateful to serve you as your White Earth Church-in-Community Developer. It's a shared position, built by the 100 or so ministries of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota, and the 220 congregations of the NW MN Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Together we have come to believe that it's better to learn about Jesus together, and across reservation boundaries that have been used to divide us.

5.

I love serving on White Earth because no one culture or population has a corner on suffering, but given the cauldron of suffering endurance, character, and hope—I would be hard pressed to find a more resilient, more hopeful, more transformational setting for the gospel.

We call it The Gospel According to White Earth because every culture that witnesses to Jesus' love has it's own way of living the gospel, telling the gospel, being the gospel.

The story of John Johnson Enmegahbowh, Saint Enmegahbowh, who we pause and remember today, is one important chapter in the Gospel According to White Earth, and his witness for the ages, and how this saint taught us that:

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)
***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)
***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)

On a broader scale, beyond just White Earth and Saint Enmegahbowh, indigenous theology—Native American Spirituality—has a Gospel—good news—that informs our common spirituality.

The New York Times columnist and author, David Brooks, knows something about crossing boundaries that have been used to divide us. Brooks was raised Jewish, and has found a home among Episcopalians. The person and witness of Jesus Christ, at work in Brooks life—in his experiences where, lets say it together…

6.

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)
***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)
***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)

When Brooks met Jesus in that journey through suffering to hope, it wasn't like he rejected his Jewish roots. What unfolded was a deeper understanding of God at work in the world. He wrote, "Is it fair to ask, did I convert? Did I leave Judaism and become a Christian?" His response, "I feel more Jewish than ever before. I was and always will be culturally Jewish, but now I feel religiously Jewish. God's covenant with the Jewish people is a real thing… But Jesus is the person who shows us what giving yourself away looks like. He did not show mercy. He is mercy. He did not offer perfect love. He is perfect love."

From that perspective, Brooks gives suffering it's due: "In seasons of suffering, we throw ourselves on others and appreciate the gifts that our loved ones offer. Suffering puts you in solidarity with those who suffer."

Like Brooks, the Episcopal Church in Minnesota found what giving itself away looks like, what mercy looks like, in places like White Earth, and Lower Sioux Agency, Leech Lake, Prairie Island, South Minneapolis, Red Lake, and beyond. These faith communities have been populated by people like Saint Enmegahbowh, and generations of other native priests and deacons who have served Jesus for over 150 years.

7.

A big part of my life being spent creating new and renewed opportunities for our Native neighbors to take up that call of suffering service. And for non-Native folks to come alongside, and learn the way of Jesus. He did not show mercy. He is mercy. He did not offer perfect love. Jesus is perfect love."

We have so much to learn from each other. For example, we are gathered here on Holy Trinity Sunday. A day to consider the expansive way that God shows up in the world. Three sets of fingerprints on our Creation, our Redemption, and our Inspiration.

If you take a look at the three persons of the Trinity, in the way that they are introduced to us in the Creeds of the Church, let's take for example the Apostles Creed.

The first article, on Creation, is rather brief and abrupt. I believe in God the Father… Creator of Heaven and Earth. Period. Full stop.

And then we are off to the second article, on Jesus, which is much more expansive. Longer. More detailed. Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate. There's that word again. Suffering. The second article details all of that. Western Christianity has a very well developed second article faith, that ends in this dramatic flourish that I remember well from my childhood



*He ascended into heaven,*
*and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.*
*From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

Then we skip through the third article, the work of the Spirit, saying "I believe in the Holy Spirit, and then a bunch of things that grow out of the Spirit. Church, communion, forgiveness and resurrection, Amen. But what is the Great Spirit, Gitchie Manidou? Well, come to White Earth, where there is a much more developed understanding of Vision Quest, and a better understanding of that first article, too. God the Creator. The one we parody in commercials for margarine and Hamms beer: Do you remember Chiffon Margarine? *"It's not nice to fool Mother Nature."* And "*From the Land of Sky Blue Waters…"*

The Gospel according to White Earth is something much more than that. Something of an inverted Trinity, with a much more developed understanding of Creator and Spirit, engaged with this suffering servant, Jesus Christ.

The one who teaches us from the cross, that

***Suffering produces endurance,*** (Repeat)
***And endurance produces character,*** (Repeat)
***And character produces hope…*** (Repeat)



***And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.***

Let us pray,

*Great Spirit, Gitchie Manidou, Wakan Tanka, Yahweh, One God with Many Names. Pour your truth into our hearts today, the hearts of all your children, that we might know you across human barriers and reservation boundaries that have been used to divide us. Make us one in you.*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen*.