



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REV. ADAM CONLEY, CURATE

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 17, 2026

ISAIAH 45:1-7; PSALM 21:1-7; 1 PETER 4:12-14; 5:6-11; JOHN 17:1-11

SUFFERING AND BLESSING

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 *[Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.]*

Most of us are gathered in this room right now because some part of us trusts that what we see in this wounded world isn't all there is. Our capacity for faith in a world mercilessly pummeled by tragedy, violence, hatred, and death, can only be gift, can only be grace.

But we all have at least a basic sense of it, don't we? Our shared hope in the power of God's love to encircle the vast complexity of creation, with healing and justice for all the broken bits we know only too well.

How we must cry out for God's healing and justice when a young trans woman – our Seattle neighbor – was brutally murdered this week!

Nineteen-year-old Juniper Blessing was a student of atmospheric science, music, and philosophy at the University of Washington. She had many gifts, including a transcendent singing voice, and her family described her as “deeply sensitive to the needs of others.”¹

¹ Girgis & Beekman, “UW student Juniper Blessing, 19, remembered as ‘full of life,’” *The Seattle Times*, May 16, 2026.

This wasn't a senseless tragedy as much as it makes tragic sense.

When the President of the United States signs legislation removing all trans people from the military and that legislation is upheld by the Supreme Court, when religious fundamentalists conspire with the levers of government to deny medical care to trans people, to restrict rights at every turn, right down to paranoia over gendered bathroom access: what happened to Ms. Blessing, woefully, shouldn't surprise anyone.

Saint Mark's has a significant LGBTQIA+ community, including many trans and non-binary folx, and we have a growing Queer in Christ ministry that I serve as pastor.

While we always strive to create a safe and dignifying space for our queer siblings, we must also acknowledge the very real vulnerabilities felt by members of our own community.

I believe we should also reckon with the fact that we are connected, broadly, to a religious tradition that bears responsibility for the social stigma that continues to harm and kill queer people, especially our trans and non-binary siblings.

Why we still live in a world of great suffering, especially for some of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities among us, is a

perennial question with no satisfactory answer, if there even is an answer.

This question must be left to rest, at least for now, in the mystery of God.

How we live in a world of great suffering is a question addressed by all the world's great faith traditions.

For Christians, it's a question to which Jesus gives us the gospel in answer: good news to the poor, release to the captives, freedom to the oppressed, healing for the broken-hearted, and a radical equalizing vision of life and freedom for every human person.

All of us are acquainted with suffering at one level or another, in our own lives and in the lives of others. However, most of us don't really know what it means to suffer expressly because we're Christian.

Christians in 21st-century North America and the West do not generally suffer for their faith despite what some nationalist Christian factions with loud bully pulpits may claim.

There are Christians who suffer for being Christian in the world today, and we must remember to pray for them. Some of these suffer threats from violent militias in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Ancient Christian churches going back to the time of the New Testament are at risk of going extinct – at least in places they've called

home since the dawn of Christianity, such as Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and Palestine.

The First Letter of Peter addresses the reality of suffering for a diaspora of early Christians living in exile in Asia Minor. Most of the letter's original recipients would have been well acquainted with what it was to suffer for being Christian.

The epistle stresses that because Christ suffered, they are already joined to Christ in his suffering. Suffering for Christ's sake invariably draws one into closer intimacy with Christ – how could it not?

Christ participates in our suffering, too. While most of us may not suffer directly for our faith, God can use our suffering to create meaning, growth, and purpose.

Juniper Blessing did not deserve to be a martyr for a cause. Then again, maybe there's something in the beautiful and poignant true name she discovered for herself that is only just beginning to touch lives in ways she never could have, nor should have, imagined.

Christ bids us to attend to suffering wherever we find it. We are called to be good neighbors, to show up, to listen, to learn, to serve, and to experience mutuality in service.

We are to build relationships based on love and help gather communities based on

justice. Sometimes this is quiet, persistent work, sometimes it's loud and disruptive.

We go to encounter the face of Jesus in the face of the sufferer, while at the same time cognizant that we bear Christ's image in return.

Remember, we show up to this cathedral as people of faith because we believe there's more to this world than violence and suffering. On this last Sunday of Easter, between the Ascension and Pentecost, we know that our comforter is coming and is already with us. I believe we can have absolute confidence in Christ's victory over suffering and death.

Today's passage from First Peter acknowledges that suffering will go on for a little while – a little while that has now turned into a long while. Even so, the letter assures us that we have a God who cares for us – and wants to carry our anxieties for us. This God is with us in our suffering, just as we are called to be with our neighbor in their suffering.

The epistle tells us that hope looks like this: "The God of all grace, who has called [us] to God's eternal glory in Christ, will [personally] restore, support, strengthen, and establish [us]." We can count on it.

"To God be the power for ever and ever."

Ultimate power is God's, not the world's. It does not belong to the dictators and autocrats of this world. Neither does it belong to the United States Military, legislature, or the Supreme Court. True power doesn't belong to whatever warped forces of hatred caused Juniper Blessing's violent death.

True Power, God's Power is in the blessing that can flow even from a life cut tragically

short. God's Power is in the wake-up call that we still have much work to do.

Friends, we know this world is not all there is. Suffering has a shelf life, even if we can't perceive it. Be assured: Life wins. Love wins. The resurrection is still happening. The good news of the gospel is always something worth showing up for.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!