

Welcome this morning. Thank you for having me here today. It always feels like coming home here at Covenant Church. I have known many of you for a long time and you feel like family. Recently, my wife and I had Covid and I knew you all were praying for us and we even got cards from many of you. A testimony of the kind and caring spirit of this congregation.

If many of you know Pastor Steve and I have known each other for quite some time. As a matter of fact, I always laughingly say that Steve was the first human being I ever knew. Steve's Aunt and Uncle, Jim and Mary Arnold lived in a duplex apartment with my mom and dad in a house here in Millersport, up on Park Street. After I was born, we moved to the Wolfe Farm and when Jim and Mary came to visit, they always brought Steve with them. It was the best of times. Steve, Mark and I went to school together here in Millersport and have remained good friends over all these years. So there is the history of how I got here today some 60+ years later. God truly does guide our steps and it's no accident that I am here today.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day that we celebrate the birthday of the church, The day when the sound like a violent wind came blowing through the house where the disciples were sitting and tongues of fire came to rest upon them as they spoke in different languages. The day when the Holy Spirit came to dwell permanently with men.

Pray

The title of the message today is: "The Lord Is With Us"

Acts 2:1-13

The day when Peter, known as the disciple with the foot shaped mouth, stood up, raised his voice and assured the people that these men were not drunk, it was only 9:00 am, but that they were experiencing what the prophet Joel had talked about some 400 years ago: Note about vs:15 Only 9:00 am

vs 17-18

And we are are living in those days. It is not speaking of the last days as in the end times, but of the times where the Messiah had been revealed and have men were given the full dispensation of God. (Holy Spirit)

But then we come to verse 19 and it sounds like things are most assuredly going to get worse before they get better. And boy has the church ever seen some troubles. She has been persecuted, attacked, and faced adversity on every front, but she still hangs on.

Today we live in a world where there is trouble across the globe, earthquakes and disasters, wild fires set by arson, division in our own country, morals declining, death of our loved ones, what was good is now bad and what was once bad is now viewed as good. Lets face it folks, life is tough, and seemingly getting tougher every day, we have struggles, doubts, and sometimes we wonder if there's any hope that things can change.

We sometimes wonder where is God in the midst of all this?

There is a song that says he's there in the newborn cry, he's there in the light of every sunrise, he's there in the sorrow and the dancing, in other words He's always with us no matter what the situation or circumstance, and he gives us that assurance in His word. He tells us that He knows and still cares that we are in turmoil down here, but the question is where do we find some assurance that He is with us.

Where do we turn when things are in turmoil? Sadly, we see in our world today people turning to all kinds of diversions, all sorts of escapes in order to avoid the worries and difficulties of life. God says that he will make a way for us, but sometimes were just not sure, so we take matters into our own hands look to other places to find peace.

Today I'm going to share two Bible verses that bring us comfort and assurance when the weight of life starts to get a little heavy. There are two scriptures that go hand in hand in times of trouble and they have been the ones that have brought comfort and assurance in my life, and the lives of many others, and hopefully will for you also. The verses re-assure us that God is with us in all situations.

I've been around the lake most of my life, and I've noticed that most people that have a cottage on a lake to give it a name. Donna Thogmartin's parents had a cottage out at Buckeye Lake, and the name painted over the front door was "The Refuge". The name was pretty self explanatory, A place to go to seek shelter from the pressures and demands of everyday life.

Psalm 46:1-11

Psalm 46 tells us not only that God is our refuge, but what to expect in the way of difficulties in life. There will be times of trouble, times where it will seem like the earth will give away, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, and though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging, but that there is a river or a place of peace that leads us to where God is.

There is a word that we want to look at today. It is what I call an umbrella word. It is a word that "bundles" the terms trouble, doubt, loss, and fear all into one category, and that word is adversity.

The question is, did God create adversity? I would rather say that he didn't, but adversity is part of the nature of creation. Maybe you would rather say that it is part of God's permissive will, in other words He allows it to happen. But if it is a part of the nature of creation (the way things are) and part of His permissive will then he must have created it.

God did not create us to be zombies, He gave us free will to act and make decisions on our own. Sometimes our adversities are a direct result of the overreach of those God – given freedoms we have. Sometimes they are a direct result of decisions we make, and sometimes

they are a result of decisions that someone else makes, that have a direct effect on us. We tend to think of adversity as bad and I have to admit it that I don't particularly like it, but Gods word says that adversity will not destroy us but help make us better people.

A couple verses that confirm that God created adversity, or from Gods perspective, a testing of our faith.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. (His death gives us life)

James 1: 2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so you may be complete and lacking in nothing.

Parents, do we not allow our kids to go through adversity because it is good for them? Of course we do. It shapes them into better people. Its not a lack of love on our part but it is us wanting our kids to grow up strong and to believe that their faith makes a difference in their lives. We don't do it just to be mean, in fact we would rather not do it at all, but that example comes from the most loving of parents, God himself. More often than not, discipline and adversity go hand in hand and discipline is key to our growing in faith.

So is adversity good for us? As much as I hate to say it, I think it is. When we share stories about our lives, its the tough times that we make it through that really mean something. The times that tried and tested our faith.

There leaning tower of Pisa in Italy has a 5 degree lean which is attributed to the tower being built on soft soil. Since the year 1280 the tower has survived four strong earthquakes. Engineers were baffled why the leaning structure did not topple over during the quakes. After researching, it seems that the same soft soil that caused the tower to lean in the first place, prevented the shock waves coming up through the ground from being transmitted to the base of the tower and kept it from collapsing. In the case of the Tower of Pisa, and in all situations, God is there in the sorrow and the dancing, in other words (the adversity and the healing). Proverbs says that the end of something is better than the beginning and so it is with adversity, God says that he is with us before, during, and after times of trouble and that we will learn to trust him more as we survive adversity.

God always offers a door of hope for a suffering world through Jesus his son, and sometimes its through the adversity that brought the suffering, that He brings the healing. A young man I know went to prison for causing a fatal car crash while driving drunk. While in prison he received Gods forgiveness and when released, started a prison ministry for other people going through the same type of situation he went through. He had to suffer through the adversity of causing a death and going to prison in order for God to use him to minister to others with the words of forgiveness and redemption in Christ that they so desperately needed. A hefty price to pay. But the good news is that God is a God of redemption and restoration. And God brought

him through adversity to restoration.

I'm an old guy and my friends and I like to talk about the way things used to be. Much to our chagrin the times they are a changing, and I have to remind myself that sometimes "change is good" but let's face it, we really don't like change. In the same way that we do not necessarily like change, we as humans don't like adversity either, but we have to remind ourselves that adversity, like change can bring about good in our lives.

Here are three reasons adversity is good for us:

1. Gets our attention: call it a wake up call or what ever you want, sometimes we just get complacent in our day to day lives and adversity will cause us to set up and take notice that God is speaking to us daily and that he wants us to be engaged with him. When we "glide" along through life often we become complacent, self reliant and worst of all, self centered, because we can get so self absorbed when things are going good that we forget that there are people around us that are struggling.
2. Reminds us of our weakness: in other words it keeps us aware that we cannot do it on our own. We can try everything in our earthly power to overcome adversity, and we may succeed to a point, but without Gods help we will come up short of His perfect will and miss the best that God has for us.
3. Causes us to examine our lives: Nothing like a little adversity to make us take a look at the way we are living. It exposes our sin, re-prioritizes our priorities, and gets us back in focus. It is good to have a little reality check every once in a while and adversity is one of the best teaching tools there is.

When Mel and I were younger, we were raising two kids who were both in school, we were both working full time, I had a machine shop business in my garage in the evenings, had a little part time business going on the side, Mel's mom had lost her second husband, she had taken a fall, broken her knee and was living with us. We were also taking care of some of Mel's elderly relatives. It was a pretty stressful time to say the least. I remember during that period having a dream that our house was on fire. It was the house that we live in now. But the interesting thing about the dream was that the outer perimeter of the house was burning like crazy and I was concerned that we were going to be trapped inside. But even though the outside was burning, the inside of the house where we were was warm, in other words we could feel the heat, but not on fire. It was that pressed but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed feeling. An interesting dream that I have never forgotten.

And that's the way life is, sometimes it feels like the house is burning down around us, but God is that inner place, that place of refuge where we are safe in His care. God is telling us that even though it appears from the outside that things are unraveling at the seams, we are in no danger if we are trusting him to be with us through that difficult time.

Romans 8:35-39

So we are guaranteed in his word that nothing will separate us from God as long as we remain in Christ Jesus. This is the long-term promise, and that is a good word, but you say Lee, how do we survive in the short term? What do I do right now when I feel like the house is burning down around me?

Here's what you do. Set down, open up your bible and read the 23 Psalm. But while you read it. Put yourself not in the place of King David, but in the place of the sheep. Read the words from the sheep's viewpoint and realize that the best thing to do is to trust in The Shepherd.

Read the 23 Psalm together.

The first line of the 23rd Psalm says it all: The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. We could stop right there and that would be enough. Those two lines are enough to bring peace and assurance to any troubled soul. God always provides a way through his word for us to cope with even the most difficult adversities, and the 23 Psalm is one of God's greatest gifts to heal a fearful and worried heart.

Remember that God gives us adversity because it shapes us into what He wants us to be. He is for us and not against us, he is rooting for us like any parent roots for his child and He allows things to happen in our life so that we might gain a heart of wisdom.

If you're feeling worried, have doubts about Gods love for you, or need strength for the day, Remember that Jesus overcame the most difficult of adversities, death on the cross, so that we could be washed clean from our sins once and for all and He assures us that He is always there with us. Our adversity is nothing compared to the sacrifice that He made on the cross. His loss became our gain so that we don't have to worry or fret over anything, no matter how big it may seem. John Chapter 14 says So let not your heart be troubled and let the Holy Spirit, the same one that the disciples received on the day of Pentecost, give you comfort and peace. And remember that "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Pray