# 15 A

MDP of God

There’s a story of an elderly man who was very hard of hearing.

And for many years his family tried to convince him to get hearing aids, because it was nearly impossible to communicate with him – he was just so hard of hearing---*and he was stubborn*—**so for a lot of years he refused**

So he finally relented – he went to the doctor and was fitted for a set of hearing aids that restored 100% of his hearing- they were a real small- hi tech hearing aid that you can’t even see in a person’s ear

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So a month later he went back to the doctor – and the doctor said to him, with a big smile on his face- “Your family must be thrilled now that you can hear again, it’s had to have brought tremendous changes in all of your lives”

And the man said, “Not really, in fact I haven’t told them that I can hear- for the last month I’ve just sat around and listened to their conversations – *Doc, I’ve changed my will three times in the last month”*

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Listening to God’s Word is at the center of what Jesus is getting at today

You see there’s a difference between *hearing* and **listening**

If I was speaking to you in Greek, *you could hear me,* but you couldn’t listen- to listen there has to be some understanding – real listening is done more with the heart

And Jesus is basically saying in this gospel that He speaks in parables, *because there are people who can hear Him*, **but who won’t listen**

That is they can hear His Words, but they won’t let His Words change their lives

Jesus says, “They look, but they do not see --and hear, but do not listen or understand”

He goes on to say that Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them, “Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears ***and understand*** *with their hearts* and be converted and I heal them”

My friends, Jesus wants us to do more than hear His Words- *He wants us to listen with our hearts*- He wants us to be converted- and to bear fruit 30 or 60 or 100 fold.

It seems to me that our task is to prepare the soil of our hearts- so that our hearts can receive His Word in a way where it takes root

And once it takes root we need to allow it to grow and bear fruit

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How do we prepare the soil of our hearts?

I remember several years ago when I was in high school, my parents decided to put in a garden- *and of course it was going to be a* ***family*** *project*

So it was my job to go to my cousin’s house *and they had horses* – I had to get horse manure and then rotor till that into the ground- because that would help the plants grow

And actually it worked really well – we had huge cantaloupes and watermelons

And I think there’s a lesson in there for us- in all of our lives [I didn’t know how to exactly put this- so don’t be offended]-“manure happens”///—that is hardships happen – suffering happens- heartaches happen

And like that horse manure in my parent’s garden –those hardships, sufferings and heartaches actually helps our faith to grow

St Paul in our 2nd reading today speaks about that – He says that the suffering of this life is nothing compared to the glory to come- and if you read just before this in Romans 8, *he makes it clear that suffering is an important part of the Christian life*

He says that we’re heirs of God, heirs with Christ **if only we suffer with Him** so that we can be glorified with Him

And of course the reaction most of us have to that is to say or think, “*But Paul, I don’t want to suffer*”

And Paul is answering that thought today when he says *that the suffering of this life is nothing compared to glory to come*

He’s saying “do a little cost benefit analysis here – yes you have to suffer, but our suffering is nothing compared to the glory God has in store for you”

And he’s saying look at the world *– it’s designed for suffering*- He says that creation was made subject to futility – he says all creation is groaning- he says we also are groaning

You see, this world is a saint making machine – and the way to become saints is through suffering

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We all have to share in the cross of Jesus – You see it’s usually in our sufferings that we learn that we’re not at the center of the universe- we learn that we’re not in control –--- *we learn our total dependence of God*

*And we can* **listen** to His Word in a way where it’s going to take root in our hearts so that we can bear fruit

When you look through the bible you’ll see that most of the great heroes of bible **suffered greatly** – *that’s how God made them holy*

When you look at the history of the Church you’ll see that most of our greatest saints suffered terribly – *again, that’s how God made them holy*

So it’s in the suffering of our lives that God is helping to prepare the soil of our hearts to receive His Word and bear much fruit

Now some of you might say, “Well I know someone who was really religious and then some tragedy struck and now they want nothing to do with God”=… so suffering isn’t necessarily good for someone’s faith”

In cases like that it’s like what Jesus said of the seed that fell on shallow soil – it springs up quickly, but doesn’t have real roots and dies

Some of the saints have pointed out that a faith destroyed by suffering, wasn’t a faith worth having to begin with

It was a superficial faith – **and in suffering** *God was inviting them a deeper level*- inviting them to a deeper sharing in the life of His Son –--- *and in rejecting God it only indicates that they weren’t nearly as religious as they thought they were* [or others thought they were]

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Near the end of Romans 8 St Paul addresses that – in a passage that is very much misunderstood by many evangelicals and fundamentalists Paul says, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword**…. No, in all these we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us”**

Now Fundamentalists and Evangelicals will misinterpret that to mean – that once we’re saved , we’re always saved – that nothing can lead us to lose our salvation – ***and that’s not correct***

*Notice Paul* ***doesn’t say***, What can separate us from the love of Christ? -/// “Will adultery, or fornication, or murder, or blasphemy, or abortion, or stealing. No in all of these we conquer overwhelmingly”

**No,** *he says*, anguish, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or the sword – *those are sufferings*

He’s **not** saying **sin** won’t separate us from Christ – *He’s saying suffering won’t separate us from the Lord* – That suffering in fact brings us to a deeper relationship to the Lord who bore the cross for us

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My friends, it’s so important that we don’t just hear God’s Word, but that we really ***listen*** to it

The fact is—when I look around, I see so much brokenness

People who are seriously sick—or face the illness of someone they love who is seriously sick==couples who struggle in their marriages—so many people who have lost loved ones and live with a deep sense of loss

And when these crosses come---we can misinterpret things—we can wonder if God really cares—is He there? Does He love us?

And it’s so important that we realize when crosses comes to us—that we recognize it as a call from God to be co-workers with Jesus—as a call to a deeper relationship with the Lord--- as a call to share more deeply in the life of Jesus who suffered so much for our salvation

It’s so important that we allow the sufferings of our lives [***again we all have manure in our lives***] to prepare the soil of our hearts so that His Word will bear fruit abundantly