

know how many times I've said that verse to myself! *"Do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*

What's that verse for you? What's Jesus' Gospel that comforts your heart? Don't stop searching until you find it! No matter what you are struggling with, Jesus has so many beautiful things to say to you. King David rejoiced that *"great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies"* (Psalm 108:4). God told his prophet Isaiah, *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands..."* (Isaiah 49:15-16). Do you get that? Closer than a mother holds her baby, God is holding onto you. He even tattooed your name on his shoulder! Don't ever think you're not worth it. God loves the unlovable. Jesus forgives the unforgivable.

Don't ever try to go through your life without Jesus filling the holes in your heart. What do you do when it seems like you can't go on? Turn to Jesus. What do you do, when you are so ashamed that you can't look people in the eye, when you can't believe you did what you did? Turn to Jesus. What do you do, when you feel so sad, and it never goes away? Turn to Jesus. This can be literally a matter of life and death for you and the people whom you love. Don't run! *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest!"* Turn to Jesus.

In the middle of the Holocaust, there was a Christian lady named Betsie ten Boom. Have you ever heard of her? She and her family hid Jews in their house until they were arrested and taken to a concentration camp. She never married. Never had kids. About to die in a concentration camp. What would be going through your mind? Maybe, "How could God still love me?" Instead, here's what Betsie liked to say: "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." She saw Jesus dying on the cross, and she knew that she was loved. Always. "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." When you are suffering, there is only one way out. Turn to Jesus, don't turn away!

Matthew 27:1-5
Pastor Nathan Nass

Midweek Lenten Service
March 22, 2017

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. ² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. ³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." ⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Turn to Jesus; Don't Turn Away!

When I was studying to be a pastor in Wisconsin, one of the WELS churches nearby got a new pastor. His name sounded familiar, but I couldn't remember where I had heard of him before. Then it hit me: This was the pastor whose son had committed suicide. I had heard the story. The pastor and his wife were home when they heard a gunshot upstairs. Their 16-year-old son had taken his own life. As this pastor rushed upstairs, by God's grace the boy lived long enough to stumble out of his room and fall into his father's arms. With his last words, he confessed his sin, and his dad forgave him in Jesus. Then he died. The boy's name was Nathan. I've never forgotten that. It's terrifying, isn't it? It can happen even in a pastor's family. It's scary to think about it!

But we need to talk about suicide. In our country, 35,000 people take their own lives each year. What's even more troubling is the number of people who attempt to take their own lives. Could you guess what it is? In the U.S. alone, 850,000 people attempt suicide each year. That says that a lot of people are struggling. A lot of us are struggling. We need to talk about what to do when it seems like you can't go on. I bet you've been there before. Maybe you're there right now. What do I do when I can't take it anymore? Silence doesn't help. We need to talk about this!

Judas gives us the chance to talk about suicide. Judas' story is one of the saddest stories in the Bible. It's a story that people in Jesus' day never would have expected. Sure, when we think of Judas, we think, "He's the one who betrayed Jesus!" But that's not how people in Jesus' day thought of Judas. Judas was one of the "Twelve." He was one of Jesus' hand-picked disciples! He wasn't just a pastor's son—he was the pastor! For three years, Judas spent every day of his life with Jesus. He heard Jesus preach. He saw Jesus' love. Over and over and over again.

That makes Judas' fall even more terrifying. You know the story. Satan entered Judas' heart. He offered to betray Jesus for thirty silver coins—the price of a slave. When he saw his chance—late on Maundy Thursday evening—he brought Jesus' enemies to him and betrayed his Savior with a kiss. Judas is really a warning for all of us. The Bible says, "If

you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Whenever you hear of a sin and think, "I couldn't do that," then you don't understand the depths of your sin. If it could happen to Judas, it could happen to you. It is shocking to think of what evil we are capable of doing.

It's just that we often don't realize how sinful we are until it's too late. "*When Judas...saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse...*" Judas seemed genuinely surprised at the result of his sin. It's as if he thought his sin wasn't really a big deal, until Jesus was condemned. Then it hit him. Judas was suddenly seized with remorse, so he ran to the Jewish leaders and confessed, "*I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood.*" He wanted to make it better. He was hoping to undo what he did. But here's what they said: "*What is that to us? That's your responsibility.*" Here's a key truth for life. Who you turn to matters! The people around you have a huge impact on your life. Judas needed help, but he was told. "*That's your responsibility!*"

Remember the movie, "The Lion King"? In "The Lion King," there's a powerful scene where Simba, the little lion cub, gets himself into trouble. His father—Mufasa the Lion King—rushes to save him and ends up dying to save his son's life. As Simba cries and looks at his father's dead body, his evil uncle Scar comes by. Simba, filled with guilt, said, "What I am going to do?" Do you remember what Scar said? "Run away, Simba. Run! Run away and never return!" That's exactly what the devil tells you when you sin. "Run! Run away from God! He couldn't forgive you. Run!"

That's what the devil told Judas: Run! The lesson of Judas is not, "Don't betray Jesus!" Here's the reality: You have already betrayed Jesus. I have already betrayed Jesus, every time I sin! Here's the lesson: When you betray Jesus, when you sin, what should you do? Feeling sorry for your sins is not repentance. Judas felt bad. He probably felt worse than anyone in the history of the world has ever felt. But here's what he didn't do: He didn't turn to Jesus. He ran! Judas isn't in hell because he betrayed Jesus. He is in hell because he refused to believe that Jesus could forgive him. Instead of turning to Jesus, "*he went away and hanged himself.*" This is why suicide is so terrifying. It sure looks from the outside like that person has turned away from God. And there is no salvation without Jesus.

Don't do it. When your sin finally hits you—like it hit Judas. When you feel like you can't go on anymore. When you hit rock bottom. Don't run. Suicide is never the answer. It's the most selfish thing a person can do. You break the hearts of everyone in your life. Just think about it: The worst thing you can do for those you love is die without giving them the certainty that you are in heaven. Running from God is never the answer. You can see that in Judas. He was sorry. He felt guilty. He wanted to make things right! But instead of turning to Jesus, he ran. He hung himself. You've felt that same temptation. To run from God. To run from your troubles. It won't work!

Here's the sad irony: As Judas hung, what was Jesus doing? He was hanging too. He was hanging on the cross. Why? For Judas. For you. For me. While Judas thought he had

done something unforgivable, at that very moment Jesus was dying to forgive him. If instead of turning to the Pharisees, Judas had turned to Jesus, if instead of running away, Judas had run to Jesus, to the foot of his cross, and said, "*I have betrayed innocent blood,*" what would Jesus have told him? "I forgive you!" Jesus doesn't run from sin. Jesus doesn't run from your sin. Jesus runs toward the sin. Jesus runs toward sinners. So he can take their sin away. You are forgiven!

When you sin, the devil tells you to run. Do you know what Jesus says? "Come!" "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Come! Come to Jesus with your guilt. Come with your sadness. There is no sin too great for Jesus' forgiveness. There is no problem too big for Jesus' power. There is no sadness too deep for Jesus' love. Sin says, "Run, there's no forgiveness." But there's no peace in running. There's no peace in suicide. Jesus says, "Come, I forgive you!" Whatever you are struggling with today, turn to Jesus.

But there's another part of all this that we need to talk about: Depression. Some of you have struggled with depression. If you have, you know what depression does. Depression focuses you on you. It clouds out the blessings of God in your life. It keeps you from turning to others—even to Jesus—for help. I can say those things, because I know. I've suffered from depression. At the end of my senior year of high school, I had a really bad spell. I took medication for two years. So I can tell you from personal experience that depression can make you think things that really aren't true—about yourself and about God.

Just think of the thoughts you have when you are at your lowest point: "Nobody could ever love me." "Nobody cares about me." "Nobody would miss me if I were gone." If you suffer from depression, don't be ashamed. You are not alone! But realize that all those thoughts in your head are 100% a lie. "I'm not worth anything." That's not God talking! God says the opposite! God says that he loves you. Jesus says that you are worth the world to him. Don't believe the lies that you tell yourself! Jesus tells you the truth. Turn to Jesus!

Depression is why while suicide is never the answer, it's also true that sometimes people do things they shouldn't do without completely abandoning their faith in God. The pastor's son I mentioned would be a good example. He was struggling with depression. On a particularly bad day, he made a terrible decision. He had faith in Jesus, but in that moment, instead of listening to Jesus, he listened to his sinful nature and its lies. By God's grace, his parents got a final minute to see his faith. He confessed his sin. He still believed in Jesus. He was saved completely by God's grace. But don't ever allow God's grace to make you think that suicide is the answer. It never is. You have a different hope.

Remember what Jesus says? "Come!" Since we so often tell ourselves lies, we need Jesus to tell us the truth—over and over again. When you struggle, you need to find that truth from God that gives you strength. The verse that still helps me is my confirmation verse. "*Do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand*" (Isaiah 41:10). You don't