

Holding On 5-3-2020

Ever fall and someone had to grab your hand to stop you from slipping further away? It's a terrifying feeling, one you may always remember. It's a helpless feeling because for a few moments, you think of the worst outcome. Falling even from a simple trip makes us afraid to repeat the same movement. Many times, as we age, we fear falling because we know only too well our bones are more brittle and it takes longer to heal. Isn't it funny how kids fall and break their arms and have so much fun wearing a cast for people to sign, yet as adults we dread that and would find little or no solace in a few signatures and funny drawings on some plaster? Instead, we only look at the problems it causes in our normal routines. Endurance is a word we look at almost right beside bravery. It takes a little bravery to endure hardships, but when we reach the other side of whatever we are going through, looking back becomes that memory but no longer causes us to suffer the inconveniences or the pain.

Our whole lives we experience endurance on many different levels. We endure school, yet for some of us it can be an unpleasant or difficult experience. Today we talk about bullying in schools, and that is nothing new. I had been shoved, pushed, slapped, had my hair cut, gum thrown in my hair and been verbally abused just in the seventh grade. I endured my middle school years and they were painful and unpleasant times outside of the classrooms. I always felt safe and happy inside class, but sitting in the bleachers waiting for the school bus transport home, going to gym class, and just walking the halls and taking the stairways were the times I just had to hang on and endure it all. Why do some people get bullied and others don't? As Christians, we may be bullied for our faith. Unbelievers may laugh at us, demand we not speak of God in public places, and even try to cause us to doubt what we have been raised to believe.

Jesus is the prime example of endurance. He was born an infant as we all were, which was the choice made in heaven by God to have his son experience humanity in its entirety. I am sure Jesus' childhood was fun and he spent a lot of time no doubt with Joseph, his earthly father, who taught him a trade and that gave him some calluses on his hands. He also would have sat hours with his mother Mary, allowing her to sing to him perhaps, and maybe if she was able, read to him or at least pass down some family stories or fables of the day. The bigger tests of endurance came when Jesus began his mission.

We all have a mission, although some of us don't see our lives as a mission. When you look at a census from the 1940's for instance, most women are listed as housewife. It is a term not many women call their profession any longer as most have gone into the workplace just like men and now men can be househusbands, and maybe both would prefer other terms to define what they do all day. For the 1940's housewife, that was her mission. Her mission was to prepare her family for their day. The husband went to a job either white or blue collar, and she packed lunches in little paper sacks or metal lunch boxes (which came along later) for the children to carry off to school so they would have a mid-day meal. This was before school lunches, hot lunches I recall we named them. She cooked while the children were in school and husband at work, and she cleaned and did laundry and prepared an evening meal. She washed the dishes by hand as dishwashers would have only been for the wealthy in the 40's which believe it or not were in existence. A woman named Josephine Cochran designed the first automatic dishwasher in 1886. The housewife's work was not done after the supper dishes, because next the children were entertained for a few hours and finally sent off to bed. There a story would have been read to them to allow them to peacefully fall asleep hopefully before the story ended. After a few more chores, finally the housewife retired to her own bed where usually her husband was

already found relaxing from his long day at the office or already fast asleep.

Jesus had no formal office. His world was his office. He travelled not by any vehicle but did ride the occasional donkey for transportation. Mostly, he walked. When you walk, your feet may get tired, without the formal sidewalks and roads we have today, your feet got mud caked and many blisters would have formed. People expected all that during Jesus' day. Jesus did not sell tickets to his public appearances. He even provided the occasional meal. Jesus made water into wine at a big wedding and made the lives of many alter drastically due to the miracles he performed. Jesus endured the walking daily. He endured those who mocked him, saying he was not whom he claimed to be. He endured the pain of those who rejected him and His Father in heaven, with coarse words and sometimes an attempted blow to the face to prove how angry he made them. Jesus had to be fast, because sometimes he had to endure the crowds who pushed against him almost sending him to one of those falls, we spoke of, the ones where someone needs to reach out and save you.

Jesus was reaching out to save the sinners, but not all were grabbing hold to be saved. Jesus allowed that human body of his to be whipped until he could barely take another step or stand upright. He allowed himself to be nailed to a wooden tree we call the cross. He actually allowed his spirit to leave his body and descended into the land of the dead as it is written in the Apostles Creed, the Ecumenical version we usually do not read. This descent is also eluded to in I Peter 4:6 when the good news was proclaimed to the dead and Ephesians 4:9 which says Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth. Yet, by telling the thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus in glory that very day negates that idea. So, once again it is an unclear passage but yet the three days of endurance with at least his physical body in the tomb is yet another sign that Jesus, too, endured many things on our behalf.

When we put it all together, the many things we endure in life it is more and more clear we do it not just for ourselves. That 1940's housewife did all those chores for her family, to make them happy, safe, and keep them healthy. The husbands went to jobs that they were able to function at, but it didn't always mean they were at work having fun while the little woman was home ironing his shirts. Jesus was walking down roads day after day, stopping and speaking to new people along the way and proclaiming the words of his father. Jesus was causing miracles to occur, which as we notice in the story of the woman with the bleeding disorder, took their toll on his strength, Jesus spent 40 days and night in the wilderness being tempted by Satan with no food or water or any other comforts until it was over and he was attended to by the angels.

We complain when we have to walk a few extra steps or take the steps if the elevator is out of order. We complain when something we expected to happen is delayed. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, it can be expected; but if you endure when you are doing the right thing and still suffer, you have pleased God. That is what was written in the text we read today. Endurance comes in many forms and changes for one person to the next. Even Jesus Christ endured many things, much we don't know about, in order to save all of us here right now. Jesus committed no sin, that is also reminded to us from this text. No sin, but a payment was made for us. Each of us were paid for by his blood on the cross that he shed. As we have our love feast today, let us be reminded that although the element is truly grape juice, it represents that blood shed for us on the cross during hours of endurance Jesus had to experience in order for us to be free of our sins.

Endurance is holding on. We hold on to the idea of a God in a place we have never seen called heaven. We hold on to the idea that we will go to this wonderful place and live a different life one day than the one we have on earth. This is our faith. We must endure many hardships in order to be able to look back and see them as memories.

One day, we will look back on these earthly experiences and the lives we led in the same way. There will be no more pain, no sorrow, no lack for anything, only joy and love surrounding us. We will experience all that God has promised to us, but first we must endure our present just a little while longer. Hold on is the message, hold on and finally take the hand of God as he reaches out to one day bring you home. Amen.