

It's possible to look at all the same facts and come up with a completely wrong conclusion. A man moved from the farm to the city and started a family. He was delighted to have a son, but he was discouraged when the son didn't quite understand the ways of the country. When asked where milk comes from, the son would answer, "From the grocery store!"

Enough was enough, the father took the son on a trip to the farm. Dad gave the son a tour of the farm. They came on a special day because that day a cow was giving birth. The calf was being born in the breech position, so the calf was coming out legs first.

The son watched silently as the farmer and his farm hands worked to help the cow in what was risky labor. After a few minutes of watching this, the son finally pulled the dad's sleeve and asked, "Papa, how fast was that calf running that he got stuck in that other cow?" It's possible to look at all the same facts and come up with a completely wrong conclusion.

Now, it's easy to take a situation like that and laugh at how silly the naïve son was. But other situations aren't so funny. Today we're talking about suffering: when a tragedy strikes, when we face persecution, and when we hear and experience bad news. It's not unlike the boy and the calf. The boy saw the same thing as his father, but he came to a very different conclusion as to what was going on at the farm that day. Two different people can suffer through the same event, and the two people can go through that same experience drawing two very different conclusions about who God is and what He is about. When suffering strikes, is that a sign to run *from* God or to run *to* God?

In the midst of suffering, our lessons for today teach us NOT to be cross-eyed, but to eye the cross. When the going gets tough, keep an eye on Jesus and what He has done for you. **BELIEVERS VIEW OUR SUFFERINGS WITH OUR EYES ON THE CROSS.**

In the midst of a crisis, I. Our fallen nature wants to view suffering cross-eyed. Let's do a quick experiment. If you will, try moving your eyes so that they are cross-eyed. Okay. Got it? Okay, you can look normally. What have we learned from this? Three things: 1. You get a good view of your nose. 2. You can't see much of anything else. 3. It hurts.

First, being cross-eyed you get a good view of your nose. Often, in suffering, we only look to ourselves. Now when tragedy strikes, it's good, normal, and healthy to be concerned for your own mental health and well-being. But often, when we suffer or are wronged, we have an acute sense of how it is unfair, how the person who did this is evil, or how we don't deserve such a thing to occur to us. In fact, if it were up to us, we would never choose suffering. What good could come from it? That's what we see Peter doing when he rebukes Jesus. Peter says, "No

way could your path lead to a violent, humiliating death!” Our fallen nature assumes that the way of God must be smooth sailing and happy trails.

Second, when you’re cross eyed, you can’t see much of anything else. Don’t try to drive a car cross eyed. You might be able to see your nose, but not much else. You close yourself off to the big picture.

In our story from the farm, you don’t blame the son for coming to the comical conclusion that the calf ran into the cow because he has nothing to compare it to. He didn’t know the first thing about farm life!

It’s important in suffering to have the big picture in mind, to know the God who allows such things to happen, and to know the real God, not a god of our imagination. It’s in our fallen nature to see suffering as an excuse to run away from God. That’s what Adam and Eve did in the garden. They sinned and then they hid. Our fallen nature wants to make God out to be the enemy.

Third, when you’re cross eyed, you’re in pain. I don’t think I could be cross eyed for more than a few seconds. It hurts! It’s no wonder that many people are so cross. All of us have scars that we carry from past tragedies, hurts, and pains. We might encounter someone who is hard to deal with. But think of this: we live in a world where many are in pain, and they have no idea where to go for comfort. Is it any surprise that many people act so cross? We as Christians have the answer of who to turn to for comfort, peace, and hope, and it’s not the tip of our noses.

“Papa, how fast was that calf running that he got stuck in that other cow?” It’s possible to look at all the same facts and come up with a completely wrong conclusion. When suffering strikes, is that a sign to run *from* God or to run *to* God? As Christians when disaster strikes, don’t be cross-eyed, but eye the cross! II. Eyeing the cross tells us of the God who suffered for us and with us.

We don’t know God apart from His Son Jesus Christ. And we don’t know Jesus Christ apart from His suffering, death, and resurrection. There’s a reason why there are crosses at the front of this church. **“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”** This sentence summarizes Jesus’ passion. Jesus’ passion is the heart of how we know God and what He does for us. Jesus who is God Himself, suffered and died for you. This is the most profound thing that I as your pastor can say to you. He bore the nails, the ridicule, and the pain for you.

It’s possible to look at all the same facts and come up with a completely wrong conclusion. If you look at Jesus without any context, you, like the son on the farm, could draw all the wrong conclusions. That might look like God abandoning Jesus. That might look like divine child abuse. That might look like a big accident or misunderstanding. In times of doubt and suffering, don’t come up

with your own ideas of who God is and what He should do, stick to the God that has revealed Himself to you in His word.

We've all heard the news from Kenosha. In the wake of the shooting of Jacob Blake, as of Wednesday, two people have been shot to death and untold property damage has been done from looting, arson, and violent protests. The first year of my marriage we lived only twenty minutes away from the site of the shooting. My wife worked in Kenosha while I served at a church in Racine, the next town over. I personally know and worked alongside the LCMS pastor serving in Kenosha who is currently ministering to a community tearing apart at the seams.

What am I to say about this? In these contemporary issues, I have tried my best to follow the Bible's advice to "**be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.**" Given the same set of facts of this week's events, people have drawn drastically different conclusions. I'm not here to give you my hot take on this week's events like a talking head on cable news.

But what a week. The violence in Kenosha, Hurricane Laura, and in the midst of a continued pandemic. Take all of these events and process them through the lens of the cross. The cross shows us that God knows suffering. He's the God of situations so messed up that you can't do anything but curl up into a ball and weep.

Imagine you get a call from the hospital saying your son is fighting for his life on the operating table, know that the Father watched evil men whip, strike, and crucify His only Son. Imagine you're the mom of a police officer who is being hunted by the mob, know that Christ never did a single thing wrong in His life, yet He was chased by mobs and He died all the while His mother watched on helplessly.

Imagine you're a small business owner whose life's work is going down in flames before your very eyes, know that even though Christ became nothing on the cross, the third day He rose again. Jesus is there with you to pick up the pieces of our broken dreams. Imagine you're a protestor who is outraged by injustice, know that Jesus Christ suffered the worst act of injustice, so that one day all things will be made right.

The Cross is where God reveals Himself in suffering, and that means that there is no situation that is unredeemable. The cross is where Jesus has taken on every one of our hurts—even those ones we suffer as a result of all the stupid things we do. The cross is for everyone. Jesus died to redeem people of every race.

In a cross-eyed world filled with sinners—including us—who only can see what is in front of their noses, and who are in pain, the Holy Spirit continually calls us not to be cross-eyed, but to eye the cross. Look to Jesus who suffered to forgive you, and who also suffered to forgive your enemies. That's what repentance is, it is

turning away from our own selfish opinions and instead looking to Jesus who has a solution to our sufferings, sorrows, and sins.

“Papa, how fast was that calf running that he got stuck in that other cow?” In suffering don’t get the facts confused. Suffering is our opportunity to stop being cross-eyed, and instead eye the cross. It’s our chance to flee to Christ who heals the brokenhearted and makes our burdens light. In the midst of suffering, it’s our chance as a Church to witness to those around us: to confess our own sins and shortcomings, to rebuild with those picking up the pieces, and to show the world a still more excellent way.