

# Inseparable

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 7/26/20  
At Crossroads United Methodist Church  
Waunakee, WI

The inventory I use with couples in pre-marital counseling has one function called, "Idealistic Distortion," which is how unrealistically, that person sees his or her relationship with their partner. Sometimes I will say, "Idealistic Distortion" is a number given to show you the tint of your rose-colored glasses."

If the number is high; that is, if one sees their partner only in idealistic terms, I may remind them that a basic part of marriage is one's willingness to suffer. (I can imagine a lot of heads nodding in agreement right now.)

We have to suffer the loss of the person we thought we married and adjust to the person that actually exists. That is what love does. Real marriage is based on a long-term willingness to suffer the loss of one's illusion and build a lasting relationship based on reality.

I think that a strong case can be made that suffering lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. Paul, himself, give us an eloquent argument: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

The Christian faith is very realistic and takes the world we live in, realistically. It is not like some of these popular spiritualities that we hear so much about nowadays.

The Christian way is not a flight into a world of angels and spirits and religious fantasy. It is grounded in the real struggles of flesh-and-blood people; our brothers and sisters who sometime irritate us to no end, but are nevertheless given to us by God to be our neighbors.

When St. Paul writes about the love of Christ, he doesn't mean hearts and Valentines. He means the daily struggle to act with love toward one another even when we feel we can't stand each other, because that is the only way we can truly embody the life of the Savior who gave himself up to his enemies and a terrible death for our salvation.

Representative John Lewis knew this. Last week, John Lewis lost his struggle with Pancreatic Cancer. In one way or another, he born to be a preacher. Whether it was with words when he preached to the family chickens in Alabama where his parents were sharecroppers; or to the huge crowd on the National Mall during the "March on Washington" in 1963; or from the halls of Congress.

But Lewis also preached with his actions in 1964 on what would become known as "Bloody Sunday" as he lead some 600 marches across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. It was when they stopped to pray that the police discharged tear gas and began beating them with night sticks. It as there that he received a mark that would be a reminder of the fractured skull from that day.

Asked once if he regretted not going into traditional ministry, Lewis said, "I think my pulpit today is a much larger pulpit....I preach every day."

In his memoir, Lewis wrote that there is "something in the very essence of anguish that is liberating, cleansing, redemptive."

John Lewis explained his philosophy this way: "At a very early stage of the movement, I accepted the teaching of Jesus, the way of love, the way of nonviolence, the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. The idea of hate is too heavy a burden to bear. I don't want to go down that road. I've seen too much hate, seen too much violence. And I know love is the better way."

# Inseparable

I realize that for most of us, suffering means something much more mundane than what John Lewis' life represented. Being aware of the needs of others, giving ourselves in a Christlike, sacrificial way, does not necessarily mean lying down in front of state troopers – though it might.

To me, there is something endearing about what we call, 'dark humor.' I remember at Annual Conference when those being ordained were asked the historic questions that go back to the time of John Wesley and early Methodism. One of the questions is this: "Are you in debt so as to be an embarrass you in your work?"

I remember a colleague sitting next to me who, recognizing the rising debt of students from college and divinity school, answered, whispering in my ear, "No, but then, I don't embarrass easily."

It was funny and sad at the same time. It refuses to deny but it equally refused to be vanquished. Yes. To suffer and to even laugh in spite of it is a hallmark of the Christian faith.

But Paul assures us in spite of everything: there is nothing that can separate us from Jesus Christ. Everything we will have to face; everything of our own doing....

Nothing can separate us from the love of God, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation," not even our own worst selves, "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," in whom we can rest all our fondest hopes and our deepest loss.

And let the people say, "Amen."