yesterday I was asked a question that just might be *the* most asked question ever.

After the funeral of a dear friend a few of us were sitting around a table in the fellowship hall of that church when one of the ladies asked,

“Why do people suffer? Why did SHE specifically have to suffer?” meaning our mutual friend, Doris.

For she was kind and compassionate, always concerned for the welfare of others --especially her family-- and never ever complained about her situation ...not even these last 8 years while battling various cancers.

Why should *she* suffer?

Though we will never have a complete understanding of God’s ways, Isaiah 55:8-9 remind us

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Yet there are things for us to consider; like the nature of sin; the world is broken, Sin entered in, bad things happen, terrible things happen and people suffer.

From our perspective we might think a loving God would not let good people, *really* good people suffer.

Why would God take a young life, a productive life, a life needed by so many others?

Good questions! Young, old, rich or poor. Good, generous or greedy. All can suffer in various ways and to various degrees.

Listen to the first words God utters to Job in chapter 38; They themselves in the form of a question;

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

In other words who do you think you are?

God goes on to ask Job, who, by the way has suffered greatly, more than most people.

“Where were you when I created this earth? Did you help me lay the foundation? Did you determine the size, the width, the circumference...the power of nature itself?

Did you hang the morning stars, or fill the heavens with joyful song? And where *were* you when I decided how far to stretch that sea?

Equally good questions.

The Psalmist affirms God’s commanding presence by first offering thanks; the author of words acknowledges the author of the world.

God’s grace covers all corners of the globe...in this case... where waters run deep

and we are at the mercy of the wind and waves. We are totally at God’s mercy.

We do praise God for the calming of the storm but we seldom thank God for the trouble in the first place. We are quick to seek and sometimes acknowledge our satisfaction but slow to accept life when we are not pleased.

We can shake a fist at God, but we ought to remember who is in charge.

What we can do is share our experiences with one another as Paul did in his letter to the Corinthians.

We can witness to others our knowledge and first hand experience of God’s faithfulness...especially midst the worst times of our lives.

It is human nature to be happy, to rejoice and even look heavenward whispering or shouting “Thank you!” But how often do thank God for suffering, ours or someone else’s?

We are all uniquely made human beings, crafted by God, for God. We each have a mission and we start out in the same place, the womb.

However, some of us are born in to poverty while others of us are welcomed in to warm homes where shelter and provisions become a given.

Some are born more beautiful than others either inside and out,

And Christ dwells within Each. One. Of. Us.

... we all have a heart and we *all* have choices to make;

Those choices affect other people as well as ourselves.

So when we ask why people must suffer and why especially a really good person,

we ought to step back and realize that God works through those hardest moments of our lives.

God is especially close during those times.

Maybe our suffering is God’s way of encouraging us to share our testimony, our faith, so that someone else might learn from our example.

I truly believe my friend Doris did that. I am convinced she touched *thousands* of lives during her lifetime.

She wore a bright and ready smile always.

She was cheerful and generous and genuinely kind.

I know many will be forever changed by her words and deeds.

Maybe God used Doris’ suffering to bring her even closer to God. Because that is what God desires most of all from each of us...a personal –one- on- one- relationship.

Before Doris passed away she helped her husband Ron plan her funeral. One of the things she left with him was a four page list of scripture she was most fond of...4 pages!!!

Another reason people suffer as Paul puts it,

“suffering produces **endurance**, and endurance produces **character**, and character produces **hope**, and hope does not disappoint us,

because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” Romans 5:3-5

God has overcome death...God defeated EVIL by opening the doors to heaven so that God could bring His children home.

God loves us so much He gave His only Son to make this all possible.

Yes we are always glad when the seas are calm, when the storm is over and we once again feel in charge.

Where we don’t have to worry or be afraid.

It is easy to put ourselves in the place of the disciples.

We understand the fear instilled in our hearts when terrible things isolate and threaten our livelihood.

Paul tells us, there is no restriction receiving affections except that which resides in you. You are the stumbling block.

He is speaking of affections, concern, and altruism. And he speaks often of community.

We are here to support one another, become one, as a community of believers.

Notice the five words in the beginning of the gospel, “Other boats were with them.”

We are all in the same boat so to speak, we all have burdens to bear, storms to face, and we all can trust that God will persevere.

Our pain and suffering will not be equal. That is probably because life is not meant to be the exact same for each person.

We are given the privilege to be alive, to experience God’s love and to be part of the freedom which God grants all humanity.

We pick up the torch and carry it so that we might help relieve the pain and suffering in this world.

So here are the disciples, Jesus’ closest friends, sitting in a boat, next to other boats, when a great storm stirs up those calm waters... and there in the stern is Jesus ...sound asleep.

“Don’t you care about us Jesus?”

Don’t you care?

How could they ask Him *that*?

After all they had seen with their very eyes, all that Jesus had done for them and so many others...Don’t you care?

The calming silence becomes one of the saddest silences ever!

How heartbreaking to have your trusted followers ask you –don’t you care?”

So Jesus gets up and commands the waves to stop.

The wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ...Ceased...Dead... These are not warm and fuzzy words.

To top it off they ask who is this guy? “Who then, is this, that *even* the wind and the sea obey him?”

Really don’t they know that by now?

Indeed who is Jesus, but the Son of God? Have ***we*** not learned how faithful God is?

The Greek word for faith in this context should be translated as ‘trust.’ When Jesus asks “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith? ...He is really saying “DO. You. Still. Not. Trust. Me?”

Where were you when I healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the multitudes?

My heart breaks for God every time we lose trust in God and have to ask “WHY?”

We know how disappointing and hurtful it can be when someone loses trust in us. In God’s eyes Multiply that by a zillion.

As children we trust without a doubt. Somewhere along the way ...as we are busy growing up ...our trust wanes...

Where does that trust go? ***That*** is the question we should be asking.

Why do we still have no faith? Why do we still not trust God enough to let God be God?

Yesterday a young friend of ours was given the horrible news that her sister had been hit by a car and had to be put on life support.

When I sent her my love she replied *“Thank you for praying. God is already answering prayers. He is listening! Please continue PRAYING for her!*

And even though things do not look good for her sister *...*our friend also wrotethat *they are staying positive and strong in prayer*

*in hopes her sister heals as time passes.*

*That... God has a purpose for everything and everyone!”*

This is true faith, this is having trust in God regardless...

Open wide your hearts my friends...open wide your hearts. Amen