Job 1:20-22, Matthew 27:27-32

“Was this really necessary?”

 On Friday and Saturday 13 of us, 10 teenagers, Karen Cooper, SherryAnne, and I went to an undisclosed location near exit 201 off the turnpike for a retreat with the confirmation class. We kept ourselves busy, pretty much the whole time by catching lizards, singing repeatedly a song called sanctuary, sitting around a bonfire and putting out a trashfire, rolling a tire down a hill, as well as many hours planning a worship service to be held April 15. These youth are special, I mean even more than normal.

 And you know, the retreat wasn’t necessary. Them being examined by session this Wednesday isn’t necessary, putting together a class creed and writing an individual essay, it really isn’t necessary, but it sure was worthwhile and developed not only memories that will never leave, but we hope a rock fast faith in Jesus Christ that they will hone for the rest of their lives.

 But think about it, is anything we do really necessary here on Sunday? It would be so much easier if we didn’t scurry around all week teaching a faith 101 class, or honing and perfecting our contemporary service, or look to bring in an organist/choirmaster. Nothing we do here is necessary. We could all come to church and go home and that would be the extent of our Christian walk. But aren’t you glad that we aren’t satisfied with only the necessary?

 Today in our Scripture we will read about two people who go through in their lives experiences that beg the question and make us ask: Was that really necessary? That question will revolve around one of our major themes this lent which is suffering. So to the question is the suffering we find in Scripture necessary we can apply that to our own question of is the suffering that we go through life necessary? Why and for what purpose is it? Hopefully today you will go home with what we could be classified as another insight into that question.

**READ**

There is no one who suffered more in their lives than the two people that we lifted up in Scripture today. Job and Jesus can be seen as perfect prototypical examples of those who have suffered, in fact the phrase suffering like Job comes, well, from Job. I remember my good friend that I have mentioned a few times in my sermons who happens to be Jewish well into our 1st or 2nd year while we were serving in Italy his mother was tragically killed in a housefire. I flew back immediately to be with him. We walked around the burned out house with grief hanging heavier than the smoke in the air.

 At the gathering the evening before the funeral a man came up to him, the family’s rabbi actually, and said, don’t forget what Job went through. Well, Michael had no idea what he was talking about and I explained it all and he said, well, was all that necessary, and then he looked around torn up with grief and asked the question, was all of this necessary?

 There are times when you leave your theology at the door and just listen and don’t try to teach. Since then I’ve had my teaching moments with him and I’ve been taught by him as well. But what a fair question we have today for us, and also for Job. Let’s look at Job before we look at us.

 Chapter 1depicts tragedy after tragedy that strikes the Job family. Livestocks, crops, home, and family members all killed in an instant. In an instant. After that in chapter 2 he then is also struck with desease so all that is left is a not very supportive wife and a frail body. All the kids, the apple of his eye, gone.

 Was it necessary? Well, let’s ask Job himself, the one going through it. What does he do when he hears the news? 5 things happen, and what are they? Say them in the right order – arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, fell on the ground, and worshipped. So, which of these does not fit? He is able to worship God in the valley of the shadow of death. But it doesn’t end there, he is able to be a blessing to those around him as he cries out: naked came I, the Lord giveth, blessed be the name of the Lord.

 When I was at Princeton we had students from the seminary and from the University put God on trial for Job’s situation and as you would expect the University students were the prosecution and the seminary students were the defense. It ended up being a hung jury, but Job in these Scriptures seems to be okay with suffering beyond comprehension to which he is subjected.

 Now, for some of us the faith of Job is a bit intimidating. Maybe we’ve been through similar suffering or at least enough to stay with us for a lifetime. These words today may sound more like a curse than a blessing. You are in no mood to be taught, you need to recognize your grief. Yes, we do. How can we hone that faith and that patience of Job that turns suffering to praise and blessings. I mean, is this all necessary?

 Let me share with you snippets from the papers that the confirmation kids did on their own on topics that they chose. In each of their papers invariably the theme came up and repeated itself that God is always by my side no matter what. Was it necessary? No but it did happen and how we are able to frame it in our faith now becomes a part of our future and our purpose in God’s eyes.

 Jesus’ suffering was made visible in a very realistic and grotesque way in Mel Gibson’s Passion of Christ. So much so that people were asking the question was that really necessary? The details in Matthew are stark and barbaric.

 It states that a cohort was gathered by Pilate’s soldiers, that’s 600 men to abuse and torture and beat Jesus. 600 men were involved in placing the thorny crowns, beating it down on his head with a reed, mocking him, spitting on him. It is hard to understand and really comprehend because we are much more civilized and our culture doesn’t allow it. We understand that none of this is necessary.

 It isn’t necessary for a soldier to go and massacre women and children and burn their bodies. It isn’t necessary to humiliate and torture even sexually prisoners and take pictures of it as a trophy like the soldiers took Jesus’ tunic as a prize. Maybe we aren’t so far away from all of that unnecessary action ourselves. None of this suffering is necessary and yet so much of it comes at our own hands.

 But the aspect that is redeeming in all of this is that the details and the reality of Jesus’ suffering leaves all of us able to share with him in our suffering. Yes, we know for a fact that Jesus can relate. That should be a great consolation. It should be consolation when we are faced with our own suffering and wondered its purpose. Our ability to see God and press forward knowing that God is able must control us.

 Our suffering when put up to the light of Job and Jesus ought to produce a desire for obedience and even a deeper faith. I know it can break us. I know we can sink into despair, but look around you, don’t go through it alone. Job went through it completely alone, his friends even his wife told him to curse God and die. Jesus went through it alone. All of his disciples scattered leaving him to deal with his suffering by himself.

 What is your suffering now? Your health, the loss of a spouse, loneliness, a relationship on the brink, your kids, your future, a job. All of this suffering that you are facing, well, it may be unnecessary, but you are going through it anyway. Learn from Job and Jesus to look ahead with eyes of faith.

 I’m going to leave you today with the words of Philippians 2:5-11. That’s our goal in suffering. Amen.