



**DAILY SCRIPTURE & PRAYER RESOURCE for the
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
20 MAY – 27 MAY 2012**

DAY 3—TUESDAY 22 MAY

Changed by the Suffering Servant

Scripture

Isaiah 53:3-11 The man of sorrows accustomed to suffering
 Psalm 22: 12-24 He did not despise the affliction of the of the afflicted
 1 Peter 2:21-25 Christ suffered for us
 Luke 24:25-27 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things?

Christ suffered for us (1 Peter 2:21)

Reflection

The divine paradox is that God can change tragedy and disaster into victory. God transforms our sufferings and misfortunes, and the enormity of history's pain, into a resurrection that encompasses the whole world. While appearing to be defeated, the Lord is nevertheless the true victor whom no one and nothing can overcome.

Isaiah's moving prophecy about the suffering servant of the Lord was completely fulfilled in Christ. After suffering enormous agony, the man of sorrows *shall see his offspring*. We are that offspring, born from the Saviour's suffering. In this way we are made one family in him.

One can say that Psalm 22 is not only about Jesus, but also for Jesus. Matthew and Mark record that Jesus prayed this psalm on the cross, when he used its desolate opening words: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* Yet in the second part of the psalm (from verse 22) the lamentation, the imploring full of pain, changes into praise of God for rescuing people from their oppression.

The apostle Peter is *a witness of the sufferings of Christ* (1 Peter 5:1), which he presents to us as an example: it is to this suffering for the sake of love that we are called. His wounds have healed us, and returned us all to the 'one shepherd'.

Only in the light of the presence of the Lord and his word does the divine purpose of the Messiah's sufferings become clear. Just as for the disciples on the way to Emmaus, the risen Lord Jesus is our constant companion on the stony road of life, stirring our hearts and opening our eyes to the mysterious plan of salvation.

Christians experience suffering as a result of humanity's fragile condition; we recognise this suffering in social injustice and situations of persecution. The power of the cross draws us into unity. Here we encounter Christ's suffering as the source of compassion for and solidarity with the entire human family. As one contemporary theologian puts it: "The closer we come to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to one another." The witness of Christians together in situations of suffering assumes remarkable credibility. In our shared solidarity with all who suffer we learn from the crucified suffering servant the lessons of self-emptying, letting go and self-sacrifice. These are the gifts we need from his Spirit on our way to unity in him.

For reflection/discussion

1. "Life is about sadness." Discuss this statement.
2. Where is the suffering in our country, and how can we come close to those who suffer in order to understand and learn from them?
3. How can our faith help us in our response to long-lasting suffering?
4. What areas of human suffering are unnoticed and belittled today?
5. How can Christians bear witness together to the power of the cross?

Prayer for the Day

God of consolation, you have transformed the shame of the cross into a sign of victory. Grant that we may be united around the cross of your Son to worship him for the mercy offered through his suffering. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes and our hearts, so that we may help those who suffer to experience your closeness. May we stand with those who suffer so that they may help us understand what it truly means to be human. We pray in the name of the suffering servant, our Lord Jesus. Amen.



**National Council of
Churches in Australia**
Faith and Unity Commission