

My friend Andrew surprised me a couple years ago when I handed him the entertainment section of the Kansas City Star. He lives in New York, the entertainment capital of the world. And Andrew is, quite simply, one of the most brilliant people I know. He speaks several languages fluently, he knows the Bible inside out; he is enormously educated and quite personable. When he visited I let him choose the weekend entertainment. I told him what Kansas City had to offer: theatre, opera, symphony, ballet, art films, organ recitals and so forth. Then I gave him the entertainment section of the paper. Andrew took one look at it, his eyes grew big, and he pronounced, "Here it is! This is what we'll do: We must go see Operation Handshake." I had no idea he was interested in warplanes, but off we went.

For me it was more interesting to see the people, and especially the veterans. The only people more highly esteemed than veterans are wounded veterans. They are living testimony of victory in spite of suffering. Their message is, "I'm wounded, but we won." All of us suffer: Musicians suffer, teachers suffer, parents suffer, and we all have emotional scars, but physical scars earned through suffering seem larger than life.

Peter wanted to save Jesus from physical scars. Fair enough--nobody wants a friend to be hurt. But Jesus didn't want his friends to be hurt either, so on the road from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem he explained to them what was ahead: what it meant to be Messiah, and what it meant to be disciple. Namely, this: The Messiah would accept suffering to show how complete his victory is; and the disciples will accept suffering to show their faith in that victory.

The problem, it seems to me, is this: Suffering is easier to accept if we choose it. If we choose to go to war, if we choose to be a good student, or an athlete, we accept suffering as part of the package. The problem is we don't always choose the suffering we get. We don't choose illness; we don't choose the painful decisions some friends and family make; we don't choose the death of someone we've relied on. It's true that some suffering builds character, but other suffering just seems wasteful.

When Jesus informs Peter that suffering will be part of his life, he also warns the disciples that suffering will be part of theirs. He doesn't say that all suffering will have a purpose; it would be nice if it did, but some suffering is a waste. What Jesus implies is that whether or not suffering is positive, whether or not we choose it, suffering just has no power. The Messiah will conquer suffering and offer life that suffering cannot take away.

Suffering is painful, but it loses its power in the big picture of our redemption. The day we carry our scars with the pride of a war veteran is the day we conquer our suffering. That's the day we can say, "Yeah, I'm wounded, but through Christ, I've won."