***2 Cor 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.***

This morning, God willing, we are starting a series of messages out of 2 Corinthians that will lead us into the Christmas Season. In the past, we’ve spoken of the compassion of Jesus. We’ve learned that we call Jesus our Lord and our God and He calls us His disciples, His friends, His children grafted into the Vine, springing from the Root of Jesse. My friends, we are all drawing from a root system. We are either drawing from the Root of Jesse planted in Jesus, or we are drawing from a root of bitterness planted in the troubles of this world. We choose each morning – choose intentionally – the default is this world.

 We start in verse 3 - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.* Paul is bursting with enthusiasm here! This must be read with a lot of emotion. Titus has returned from Corinth with good news! People are being saved! Paul responds with Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Mercy and comfort, Holy compassion are central to God’s character. Our God is a merciful and comforting God. What if we woke each day blessing the God of mercy, the God of all comfort?

 Verse 4 *who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*Who comforts us in all our tribulations – which Jesus told us we would experience. Why are we comforted? For our personal ease and comfort… No! What does it say? We are comforted that we may comfort others – those who are in any trouble – with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Our comfort is not to relieve, but rather enables us to comfort others. Paul experienced trouble and used his experience to comfort others. Are we eager and active in comforting others?

 Verse 5 *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.* As the earthly sufferings of Christ – abound has the idea of superabounded, greatly overflowed – while He was here with us, these same sufferings now superabound in us and overflow. Anyone here today feel as though sufferings are superabounding and overflowing in your life? Take heart! As the sufferings superabound and overflow, so too does the consolation of Jesus. Consolation is the same word used for comfort earlier. As Christ suffered, so we suffer. 1 Peter 4:12-13 says *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;****13****but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.* The time to be concerned is not in the time of tribulation and trial, as we partake of His suffering – this is revealing His glory, bringing His comfort and consolation, that we may comfort and console others. Rather, be very concerned if no fiery trials and troubles overtake, no opportunity to partake of Christ’s sufferings.

 Verse 6 *Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.* If WE are afflicted, it is for YOUR consolation and salvation. If We are comforted, it is for YOUR… friends, have we ever considered that, not only is God working a work in us, but He is also working a work through us? When we suffer, could it work toward another’s salvation? The church has bought into the “It’s all about me” culture. Yet, Romans 5:3-4 says something very different - *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;****4****and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*We can’t miss the fact that tribulation serves a great purpose. It serves purpose in how we live, how we servevothers, and how we die. It serves purpose in our transformation and in the salvation of others. Tribulation is the seed of Hope. We don’t count it all joy because of what is happening to us… we count it all joy because of what is happening in us and through us.

 This week, let’s consider how we endure sufferings and use them to comfort and console, as God graciously gives comfort and consolation to us. Let’s bless *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* seeking to comfort rather than to be comforted. In the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi printed in the bulletin this morning, he prayed in part - *Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted; to understand, than to be understood; to love, than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.* May we all seek to one day awaken in Jesus to Eternal Life.