**3 Lent 2025**

 When Rabbi Harold Kushner’s three-year-old son was diagnosed

with a degenerative disease that meant the boy would only live until his

early teens, he was faced with one of life’s most difficult questions:

 Why, God? Years later in 1981, Kushner wrote a straightforward,

contemplation of the doubts and fears that arise when tragedy

strikes. In these pages, Kushner shares his thoughts as a rabbi, a parent,

a reader, and a human being. *When Bad Things Happen to Good*

*People* was the book and it became a best seller attempting to offer

 consolation to millions of people in times of sorrow.

 Kushner addresses in the book one of the principal problems of

[theodicy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodicy), a fancy theological word for the conundrum of why, if the

universe was created and is governed by a [God](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God) who is of a good and

loving nature, there is nonetheless so much suffering and pain in it—

essentially, the abiding [problem of evil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_evil). Kushner proposes a finite

God solution to the problem of evil. God is benevolent but not all-

powerful to prevent evil. His answer to the philosophical problem is

that God does his best and is with people in their suffering, but is not

fully able to prevent it.

 Now you may be wondering, is the God Kushner proposes too small?

Another book written in 1952 is entitled *Your God Is Too Small: A*

*Guide for Believers and Skeptics Alike* by [J.B. Phillips](https://www.amazon.com/J-B-Phillips/e/B000APHNY6/ref%3Ddp_byline_cont_book_1) This forty-year-old

Christian classic and bestseller became a study group favorite,

challenging readers’ conventional views about God and encouraging

them to search for a meaningful redefinition of a higher power that is

relevant to contemporary existence.

 Phillips encourages Christians to redefine their understanding of a

Creator, without labels or earthly constraints and instead search for a

meaningful concept of God. He explains that the trouble facing many of

us today is that we have not found a God big enough for our modern

needs. In a world where our experience of life has grown in myriad

directions and our mental horizons have been expanded to the point of

bewilderment by world events and scientific and technological

discoveries, our ideas of God have remained largely static. This

inspirational work tackles tough topics and inspires readers to

reevaluate and connect more deeply with a God that is relevant to

current experience and big enough to command respect and

admiration. To paraphrase an idiom from African American slang, our

God is large and in charge.

 **This morning’s gospel lesson from Luke presses into these issues but**

**with a twist. Some folks came to Jesus and** told him about the Galileans

whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus

responds by saying, “Do you think that because these Galileans

suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other

Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as

they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam

fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the

others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will

all perish just as they did.”

 The implication is that if you’re a good person bad things shouldn’t

happen to you. First, it begs the question of what being “good” means.

And, more importantly, everyone, whether good or bad is going to

experience painful, traumatic events, and in the end, everyone is going

to die. Period. Jesus invites people to get their heads out of the daily

headlines filled with disaster, doom and gloom, and turn toward God

who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-merciful. Jesus tacks on the

Parable of the Fig Tree to turn up the lights on God’s merciful patience

with us.

 I’ve been at many a bedside with suffering people and their families

 wrestling to find meaning in the suffering. ‘But I’ve been a good

person, why is this happening to me?’ The story of the Fall in Genesis

presents in mythical language a Creation that rejected God’s grace

and love to have things their way. I love Frank Sinatra, but the ‘I did it

my way’ things always makes me cringe. The trouble is that we think

our ways are better than God’s ways, and so we fuss and fight for

power, control, prestige and vainglory. That is the way of the world,

and guess what?: It causes suffering.

 God’s remedy for the problem of sin, suffering and death was to

send Jesus, His Only-Begotten Son, to enter the suffering, to submit to

the suffering, and ultimately to vanquish the suffering in His Death

 and Resurrection. That is our story, Christians. And every time we

gather we remember and rehearse the story in order to live into it

and share the Good News with others who are suffering. When bad

things happen to good people, the only answer that makes sense and

satisfies is Jesus. He is Love Incarnate. He is Healing Incarnate. He is the

Peace which passes all understanding Incarnate. He is the fundamental

Truth of our faith. All conversations about suffering must begin and end

in Him and the Holy Trinity.

 During this Lenten season, I invite you to look deeply at those places

in your life where there is suffering, and dare to invite Jesus in. It’s OK

to whine and cry and feel doubts, but then rest in His wounds; he

was wounded for our transgressions and by His stripes we are healed.

 And ask Him to stir up compassion in and through you in new, creative

ways. Compassion means “to suffer with.” He suffered for us. He

suffers with us, and he calls us to suffer with others who are struggling

 with their sins, their brokenness and their mortality. And remember

our God is large and in charge. **May it be so.**