And yet...

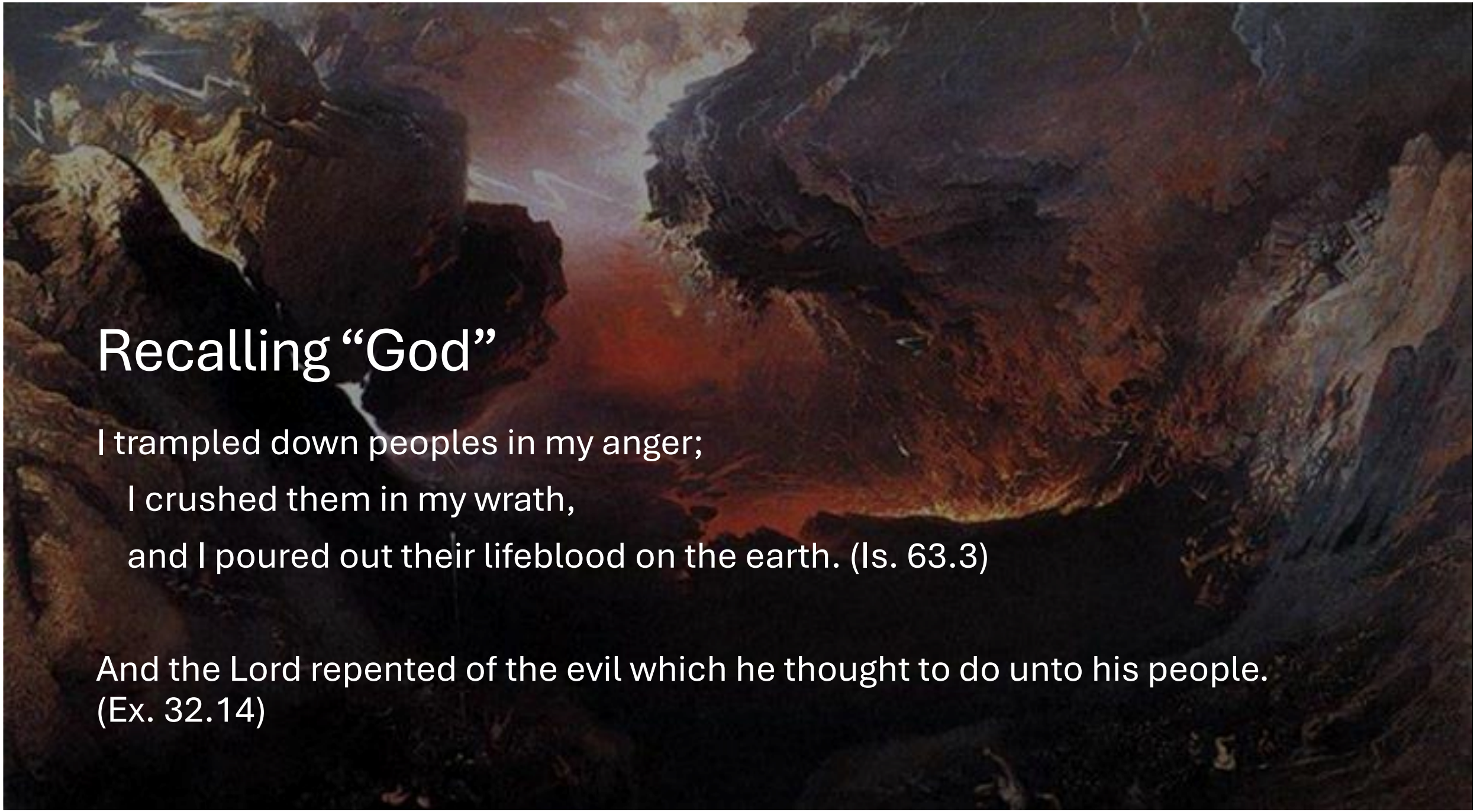
the Shadow Side of God

Mar. 17
St. Croix Church
Walter Thiessen

A funny thing about
an old lecture...

Splitting

The simultaneous goodness and evil of a parent is psychologically unbearable



Recalling “God”

I trampled down peoples in my anger;

I crushed them in my wrath,

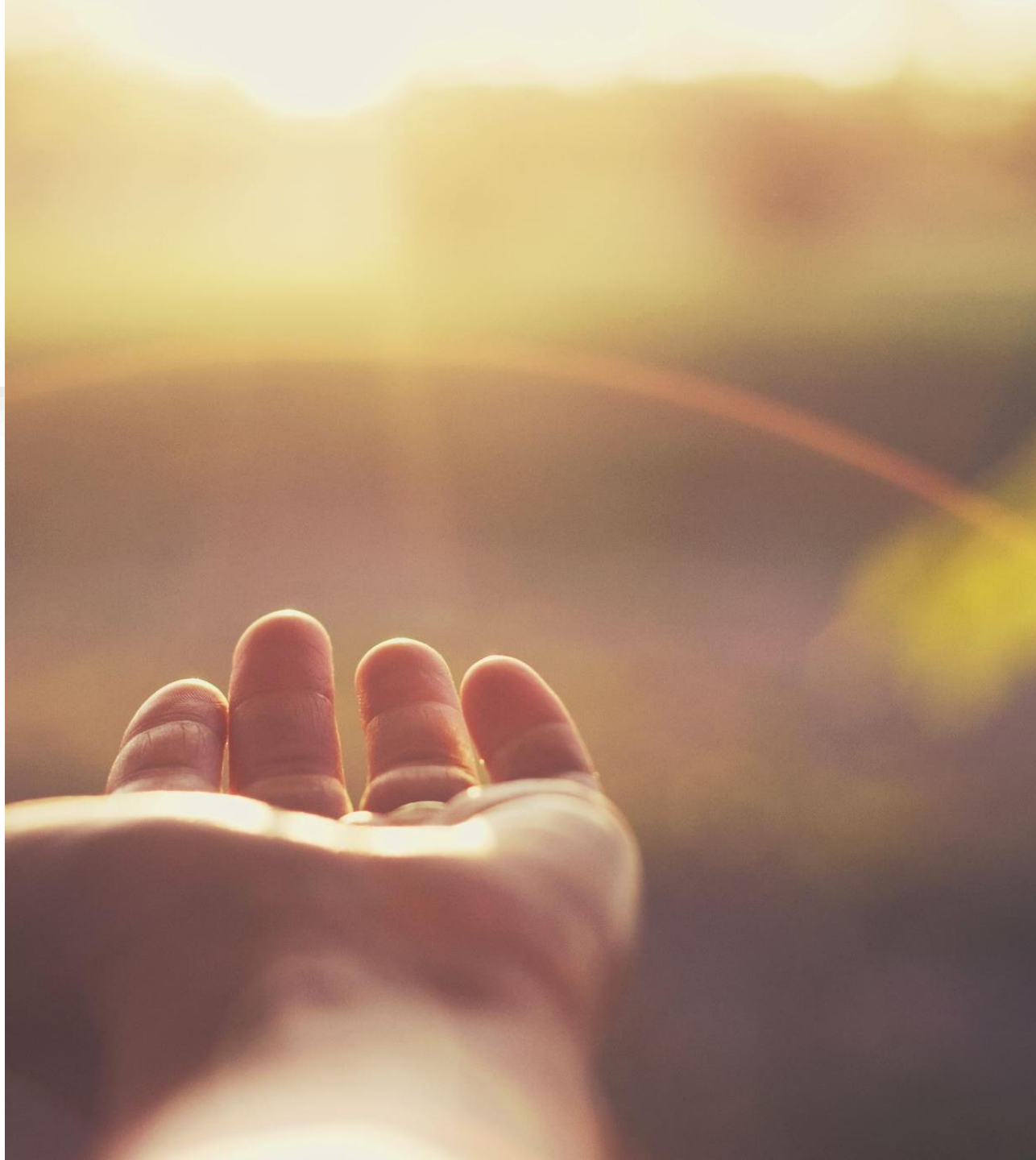
and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth. (Is. 63.3)

And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. (Ex. 32.14)

But…

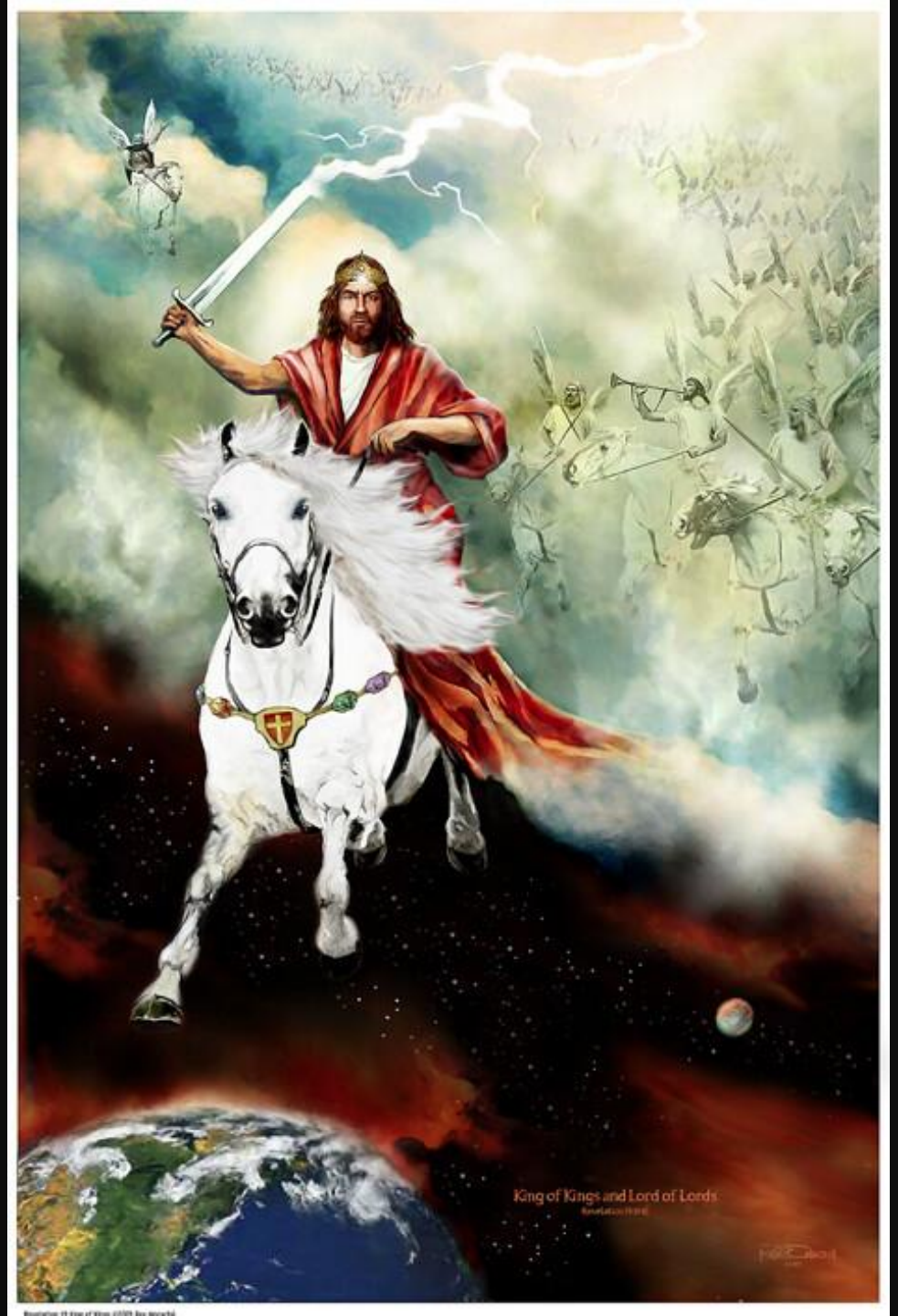
This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1.5)

Hhmmm…. How does this work?



(and Jesus is not a simplistic escape clause):

- “…where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”
- “…until you’ve paid the last cent”
- “he who lives by the sword will die by the sword”
- And, of course, “I will spew you out of my mouth… I reprove and discipline those whom I love.”



Splitting

The simultaneous goodness and evil of ~~a parent~~ GOD is psychologically unbearable

So what the hell do we do?

Strategy One: <u>Call evil good</u>

- Defend eternally conscious torment in hell
- Defend a wrathful/punitive God
- Defend a God who needed blood sacrifice in order to forgive
- Defend genocide
- Say that if we understood God, we would realise that this is all love

Got a problem with that?

So what the hell do we do?

Strategy Two: <u>Minimize/Deny Evil</u>

- God is Love (and only Love)
- God is not *really* wrathful, punitive or genocidal (human error in violent culture)
- And there is no hell
- God is not omnipotent (or “lays down omnipotence for the sake of love/freedom”)
- or forget about God altogether
- Minimize/deny “the fall” (sin, evil)
- “everyone is doing the best they can with what they’ve got”

Got a problem with that?

- Harsh (and sometimes even unfair) natural consequences seem to be an important/ necessary part of reality (e.g. even “live by the sword, die by the sword”?)
- There is a limit to how much mercy is merciful (as many people working or living with addicts have found out)
- There *is* hell (great suffering when we’re cut off from love)

In the face of this kind of evil – to be *with* someone who has experienced this kind of evil – we need something less naive

Creation (Reality) is beautiful and full of life &

Creation (Reality) is full of suffering, pain and malice

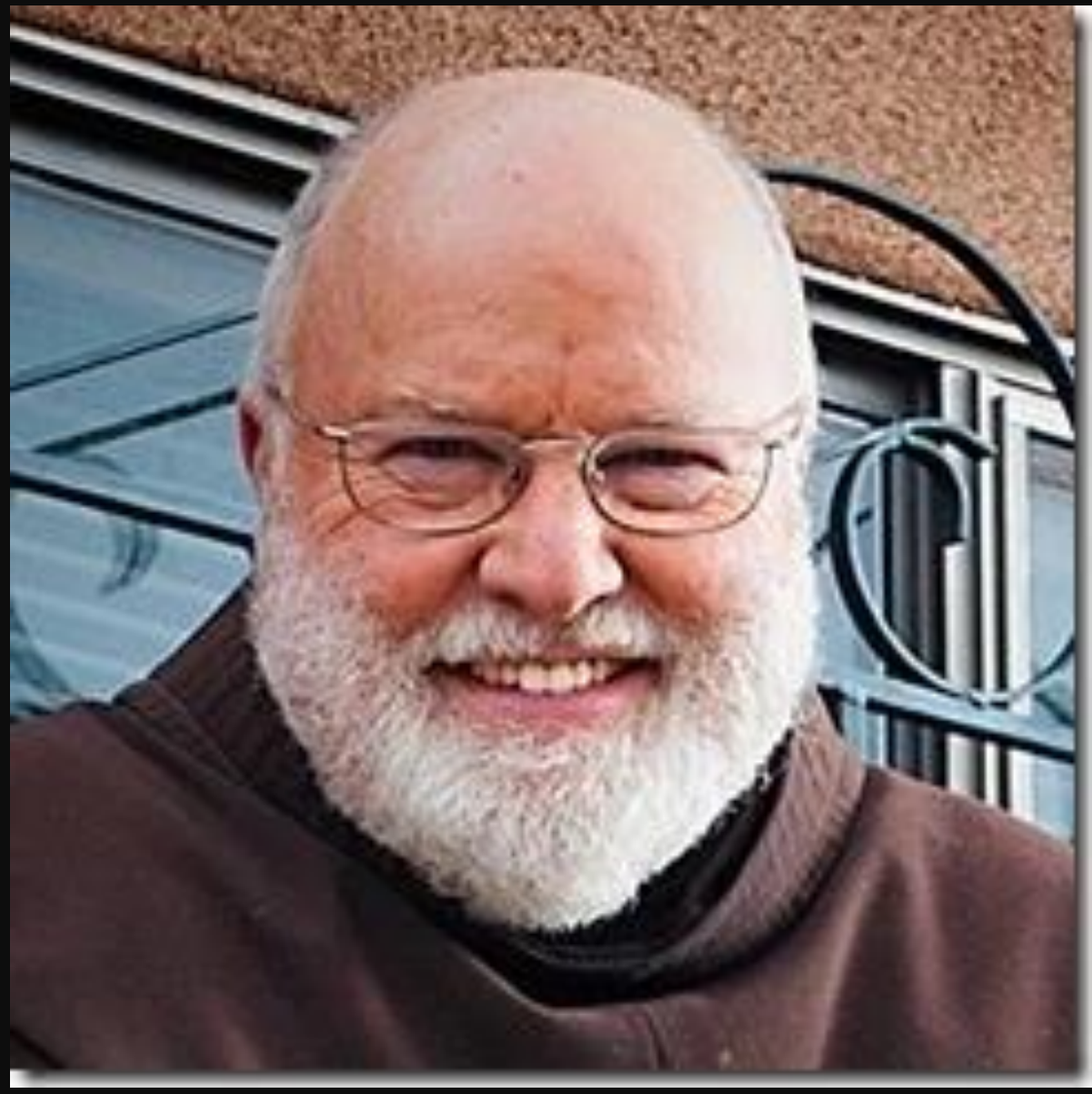
- We can’t deny that God is mixed up in and responsible for both
- It won’t work to let God off the hook too easily
- We have to work through the ambiguity and mystery of this – even while trusting and loving God

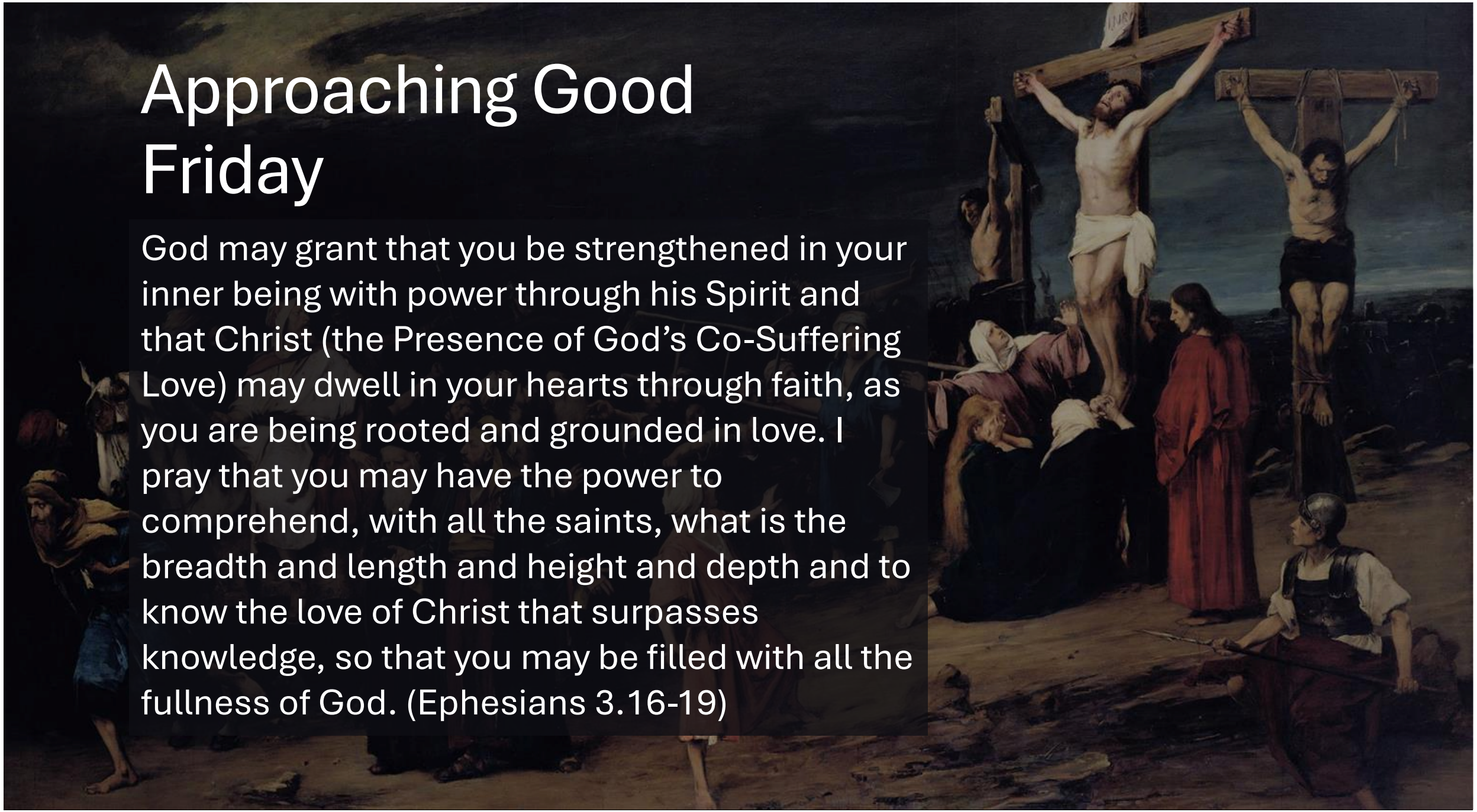
One way that we do this is to lament… and wrestle

- “Why, O God!” “How long, O Lord!”
- We need an anguished wrestling with a “co-suffering” God (i.e. a God revealed by Jesus in his crucifixion)

A word from Richard Rohr

- I believe we are invited to gaze upon the image of the crucified and to realize that God the Father suffers with Jesus. This softens our hearts toward God and all of reality. We see that God's heart has always been softened toward us, even and most especially in our suffering. This softens us toward ourselves and all others who suffer.



Approaching Good Friday

God may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ (the Presence of God's Co-Suffering Love) may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3.16-19)