More than anything else, know this: the power of Divine Love is trying to find a way to be more present in your life. The power of Divine Love is already at work in your life.

But today is dark and cold. We are separated from our families and our friends by the years or the miles. And we ask, “When will I see this power? When will I feel the work of Divine Love in my life?”

This is one of those ‘Bad News, Good News’ stories. First, here is the bad news. I am very sad to tell you that at some point you will go through a time of great suffering in your life. It might be that you suffer terrible pain from a disease. It might be that someone you love dies long before you expected. You might have to survive a savage, brutal war. You might be poor and hungry and without shelter for a long time. You might find yourself deeply affected by powerful people who are selfish, narcissistic and belligerent. You might be attacked or abused by a stranger, or even worse, by someone you thought you could trust.

This is the bad news. At some point you will go through a time of great suffering in your life. This is part of the main ideas of the Gospel of Mark.

We haven’t read very much of the Gospel of Mark during the past two years. We just finished our year with the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew is rich with images and parables and quotations of the Hebrew Scriptures. One of the main themes of Matthew is the rich and fruitful connection between the revelation of God in Christ and the continuing revelation of God in Hebrew scriptures and traditions.

Mark is not so concerned with connecting the life of Jesus to the traditions and people of Israel. The Gospel of Mark is shaped by one main idea, and the idea is more challenging. Mark often does not feel rich. Mark often feels abrupt and bare bones and raw.

Here, in chapter 13 of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus describes an extremely difficult time. Beginning at verse 24 of the chapter, as we did today, is sort of like walking into a movie theater halfway into the showing of an extremely scary movie. Here are just a few of the verses we missed from the first part of the chapter: Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days. Pray that it may not be in winter. For in those days there will be great suffering. . . And if anyone says to you . . ‘Look, there is the Messiah!’ . . do not believe it. False messiahs . . will appear and produce signs to attempt lead astray God’s people. “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven.

There is going to be a time of great suffering and the suffering will be real. The pain will be real. The tears will be real. The loss will be real. The grief will be real. Your journey in life, and even your journey in the way of Divine Love will not always be easy or comfortable or safe.

This is the main idea of the entire Gospel of Mark. Mark knew, better than just about anybody, that the journey in the way of Christ was going to include times of great suffering, because that is what happened to his group of people, to his congregation. We do not know everything that happened to Mark’s people but we know that some people died, and some
people were betrayed by their friends or family members, and many people were hurt, physically and emotionally.

At some point we will have to endure a time of suffering, and we may have to endure a time of terrible suffering. This is the bad news. But there is good news.

First, contrary to popular misconceptions about what it means to be a Christian, the fact that you are going through a time of suffering does not mean that you are not following the way of Divine Love. That was a double negative sentence which is confusing, so let me say that again: the fact that you are going through a time of suffering does not mean that you are not being faithful, it does not mean that you are not one of those children God watches over day and night.

In fact, the reverse is true in some way: if you are faithful, you will go through a time of suffering. You can see why I am taking some time to say this, because it is a stronger statement, it is more controversial, to say it with positive words. But I am pretty sure this is true: if you are trying to follow Jesus at some point you will have to endure serious pain or serious loss or serious hardship.

I will admit I do not know exactly how this works, but the story of the Gospel of Mark and the story of Christ Jesus and the story of your life point to this truth: the way of faithfulness always includes struggling through a time of pain and suffering. This is the first piece of good news: If you are struggling through a time of pain and suffering I suggest that could be a sign that you are following the way of Divine Love.

This is the second piece of good news. In the Gospel of Mark we read these words describing what happens right before the season of fruitfulness: From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. When you see these things taking place, when you see darkness surrounding you, when you hear false messiahs uttering foolish and evil words, when you see the suffering in your life, know that the power of Divine Love is near.

This seems backwards to many of us. The rest of the world usually tells us that when things are good they are good, and when things are bad they are bad. Mark tells us that the bad time leads to a time of fruitfulness. Our suffering leads to a time of new growth. Our suffering leads to the increase of God’s strength, of God’s peace and God’s love in our lives.

We must be changed. We cannot stay the way we used to be. We must be changed by the love of God. The change will come through the suffering we endure.

Today is dark and cold. We are separated from our families and our friends by the years or the miles. We ask, “When will we feel the work of Divine Love in our lives?”

Know this: the power of Divine Love is trying to work her way into your life. The power of Divine Love is beside you today, in your weakness, in your pain, in your separation from the ones you love.