

Pentecost 23 (B – 2018)
Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Before we get into the meat of today's Bible passage from the Book of Job, I have four things I'd like to have you consider:

- Recall, first, the largest amount of food you have ever seen, perhaps in a buffet at a wedding or restaurant;
- Secondly, remember the longest distance you have ever walked or run, maybe you've trained for a mini-marathon;
- Third, what were you doing when you worked the hardest you've ever worked in your life?
- And finally, who is the most powerful person you have ever met and what was the situation?

With the above in mind, we have come to the end of our 4-Sunday journey through the Book of Job. We have witnessed Job in the best life can offer and also seen him in the worst. Through it all, Job has struggled to understand and struggled to live a life faithful to God.

Ask most people who know it to paraphrase the story of Job and they will often offer a rather perfunctory outline of an innocent man who is abused by God, or at least whom God allows to be abused. The man argues with his friends about whether or not he deserves what has happened to him. Then, when the man gets fed up and rails at God, God answers him by reminding him that God is God and he is just a puny little man to whom God owes no explanations. Job, overwhelmed by God's magnificence, apologizes to God and humbles himself -- and God gives him new wealth and a new family (as if that solves everything)... and everyone, unbelievably, lives happily ever after.

Seems to me a highly unsatisfying ending to a highly troubling story. I kind of wish that ending had been left off; it just doesn't seem to fit everything that has gone on before.

Job has gone through highs and lows – confused, angry, depressed and despairing. How would you feel if you were Job after your encounter with God and then the restoration of your property and relationships? (Remember, Job's sheep have been doubled, his camels have been doubled, his oxen have been doubled, his

female donkeys have been doubled! And he has again 7 sons and 3 daughters.) How would you feel?

Justified,
 Perturbed,
 Confused,
 Blessed,
 Acquitted,
 Humbled,
 Something else?

I'm wondering if all this made up for what he lost. Did Job ever forget his first children? God gave Job a tremendous legacy here, but does that make up for what he lost? Most of us have ten fingers and if you lost one, you would always miss it. The other nine don't make up for what you lost. A child who has died or a relationship which has ended is never forgotten. What seems like a tacked-on ending just seems too good to be true. Because this happened to you, you are rewarded. For most of us, it just doesn't happen that way.

So, do you think that the abundant gifts in the end make up for the trials Job endured? Why or why not? If not, why do you think God blest Job so much?

Does Job get what he wants from God? For many chapters now, Job has been demanding/requesting an audience with God. Not only that, he wanted an acquittal from God that he was innocent. Does Job get more or less than he desired?

In the end, Job is changed. He now understands in a more powerful way just how wonderful God is which he did not understand before. He has learned the immensity of God, the ability of God to help us overcome difficulties that, whatever we face in life, whatever Job faced in life, God was with him. Job learns that although God can be trusted (and encountered), God cannot be manipulated or controlled. Likewise, it is not that our faith is rewarded with heaven or is our ticket through the heavenly gates. Faith does not protect us from the chaos or hurt that persists in this world. Whatever trials or suffering we experience here, our hope is that the God of resurrection will be at work in all things to bring ultimate redemption (Romans 8:24-28).

Life for Job has changed. Things have changed for Job and things have changed in Job. Says Job in verse 5, "I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes." "Seeing" may be at the heart of the message in Job. Job has new eyes: a new way of knowing – a new way of understanding. Having seen God in power and authority, Job repents. Perhaps, having seen the power and mystery of the Creator, as well as the complexity of creation, the reality of Job's repentance is hinted at in his unusual acknowledgment of his daughters' worth in verses 13 and 15.

There is something interesting in the story of the three daughters. The three daughters are named - Jemimah which means "dove," Keziah which means "cinnamon," and Keren-happuch meaning "bottle of perfume" – all names celebrating wonderful things in life. The book doesn't name the sons at all which is strange and contrary to what you would expect, considering the importance of having sons at that time. And furthermore, Job left the daughters an inheritance, an equal inheritance with the sons, where normally only the sons would receive an inheritance and the eldest son would receive a double portion. Job has been changed.

Job has been blest again and you might hear in the end an echo of how Job responded to his wife when she encouraged him to curse God and die. You might remember his answer from chapter 1, "The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!" The LORD has given again.

For me, this is comforting. In the beginning of the Book, you can read how God allowed ha-satan license to afflict Job in greater severity. That's not the God I know. I want no part of a God who causes problems just to teach lessons. But if God has given us free will, God is out of the loop. It is not possible to grant free will and then essentially suspend it or take it back to pull puppet strings on the affairs of the world. Can God really be in control of our lives down to the smallest detail? The comfort we are given here is that God is good, and God's goodness does not abandon us, even when reality attempts to throw its worst. Job learns – and we learn – that God never leaves.

God accompanies us through the valley of the shadow of death – a Hebrew euphemism for “the darkest, scariest place you have been or can imagine.” Or, to put it another way, when we find ourselves in that place and cry for God to remove us, God says, “No, I will not take it away. But I will hold your hand and we’ll face this together.” Through it all, God has never left nor abandoned Job.

Job, I think, gives us reason to envy and look to our elders. Job “died, an old man who had lived a long, full life.” (vs. 17) He had lived in the extremes of exultation and pain, and somehow managed to navigate it all in good faith. You have probably known older people like that? Perhaps you can look around and name those older, wise ones right here, right now. It wasn’t an easy life, but there was an admirable depth and richness to it. Our elders have both an opportunity and a privilege to set an example for us younger ones. That fullness of days comes from living in relationship with God and believing that God is present in the best and the worst of times.

I struggle with the idea of a God who causes war and famine and pain and suffering, but the important thing for us to remember, I think, is that we can find God within all of it – the good, the not-so-good, and everything in between. It is there, in the presence of the holy, when we see God in our midst, that we, like Job, will find the richness and fullness of our days.