

Pastor's Message
June 14, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings from my house to yours on this gorgeous summer day.

This week we will begin a five part sermon series on the book of Job. Although this series was recommended long before the pandemic and the national outcry for justice were front and center in our lives, it is a good time to reflect on the relationship between our faith and the circumstances that surround us. Three great questions for you to ponder and reflect upon over the coming weeks are: 1) How has your faith waivered or strengthened in times of crisis? 2) Do you turn toward God or away from God when you are hurting? 3) Are you looking to God for answers or for an embrace?

Sunday morning Zoom Worship at 10:30 until further notice. If you would be willing to read the lessons or be the "voice of the congregation," please let me know.

Hope to see you Sunday. God's Peace

Pastor Denise

Job 1: 1-22

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that

he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken

away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen

Let us pray

Dear Lord,

Help me to see that you are sovereign over the circumstances of my life, even over suffering that seems impossible to understand.

Help me to see suffering as a sacrament, something that can be a means of grace, drawing me closer to you, and you closer to me.

Grant me the honesty to ask heartfelt questions.

Grant me the humility to realize that what I need isn't so much an answer but an embrace.

Embrace me, O God. Please

Lift me from the ash heap and gather me in your loving arms.

Hold me close. Wipe my tears. And make me whole.

AMEN.

Today is the first of a five part sermon series on the book of Job. A book where the man named Job suffered terrible loss and misfortune. Throughout these five weeks, as we journey with Job through his trials and tribulations – it gives us food for thought to consider and explore how our faith is weathering the storms we have been encountering in these past few months or in other parts of our lives

Has our faith waivered or strengthened in times of crisis”

Are we turning toward God or away from God when we are hurting?

Are we looking to God for answers or for an embrace?

The book of Job is an Old Testament story, which is believed by many Biblical scholars to be based more on the folklore of the time rather than the retelling of actual events that occurred in the life of an actual man by the name of Job; as the story starts with the words: there was once a man in the land of Uz, which gives us that “once upon a time” tone or feel that we have often heard in the opening of familiar fairy tales and fables.

So, think about this story of Job beginning in this way – once upon a time there was a man named Job, who was blameless in the sight of God. He was known by all to be a man of deep faith, who aligned his life and his actions in ways that honored and pleased God. He was the one, who feared and revered God and turned away from evil.

As we meet this man of great faith, we immediately see a man who has been abundantly blessed; blessed with a large family as he has seven sons and three daughters; blessed with wealth as he has accumulated seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; and blessed with an unwavering faith in God. Job was considered by all who knew him to be the greatest of all the people of the east.

Now this story starts out with God meeting with his angels. And although the text does not tell us anything about the reason for this meeting on this particular day, we are told that the one member of God's council with the title of Satan is present.

Now, this is a small, but important detail of this story. This being is not the evil one named Satan, who is referred to in other parts of the Bible. This being has the title of Satan. Which means, he is the one who has been given the role and responsibility of being the Chief Investigator for God's Council. He is the one who goes out among God's people and checks up on them – kind of like Santa's elves checking out who is naught and nice.

Again, keep in mind this story is based on the folklore of the time.

At this particular meeting, God asks the Chief Investigator how his faithful servant Job is doing. Before the Chief Investigator has a chance to respond, God reminds the other beings in the room that Job is the one who is faithful and righteous and that there is no one like him on the earth, for Job is a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.”

But, the Satan - that is the Chief Instigator has his doubts about God's pronouncement that Job is this exemplar of faith and righteousness. The Chief Investigator asks God whether Job is so very faithful and righteous because that is the very essence of who he is OR is Job so very faithful and

righteous because he has been so abundantly blessed and is living the “good life?”

So, in response to the Chief Investigator's question, God gives the Satan, his consent to do what has to be done to figure out the answer to that question. Is Job, this man looked up to by all for his deep and unwavering faith, faithful and righteous because he has been abundantly blessed or is that who Job really is at his very core.

And so now, given the power by God, the Chief Investigator begins his work of transforming Job's life from the “good life” that he had been living to a life of hardship, loss and misfortune to see if Job truly is a righteous man with unwavering faith.

First, Job's oxen and donkeys were stolen and the servants tending to them were killed.

Then a fire fell from heaven and burned up the sheep along with the servants tending to them.

Then the Chaldeans made a raid on the camels and carried them off and killed those servants who looked after them.

And last, and certainly most tragic of all, as Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, there came a great wind across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and the house fell on all of the people, and only the messenger who had come to share this devastating news with Job survived.

The Chief Investigator watched carefully to see if now that Job's " Blessings" were gone, would the faith of this man be snuffed out and would he turn from his righteous ways.

But, to the surprise of the Chief Investigator; Job, this man of great faith followed the religious practices of his ancestors as he mourned the great loss and misfortune that had afflicted him.

Job stripped naked, he shaved his head, and he fell with his face on the ground and worshiped.

He reached out and worshiped God. He did not curse God as the Chief Investigator thought he might.

NO, Job humbled himself before God as he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

In spite of all that Job had lost, he did not turn from his righteous ways, he did not curse or blame God for all that had gone wrong, he did not turn away from God. Instead, in the midst of his pain and suffering in what seemed to be his darkest hour, Job turned toward God and cried out to God and praised him saying, Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Well that certainly was not the outcome that the Chief Inspector had expected. So, with

the first round of testing completed, the Chief Investigator had only to conclude that Job had passed this first round of testing with flying colors.

But the Chief Investigator was still not convinced Job really deserved the accolades that God had given him.

So next, the Chief Investigator heads back to the heavenly counsel to report what he had found and to request permission to continue his probe into the faithfulness and righteousness of Job.

Which leads us to scenes from next week; as Job's health takes a turn for the worse and his closest friends come to advise and console him.

Is Job really the man that God sees him to be; a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?"

Will Job's faith waiver or strengthen?

Will Job turn toward God or run away from God when he is hurting?

Is he looking to God for answers or for an embrace?

Come back next week for part 2 of the adventures of a man named Job.

AMEN

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