

## Pastor's Message - June 21, 2020

Greetings from my house to yours.

This week is the second part of our five-week 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 waived 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?

Harry Walters continues to tally up and “cash in” your Redner’s receipts. Please mail your receipts to the church at 4201 Stoudt’s Ferry Bridge Road, Reading, PA 19605.

The GSELC Church Council continues to review guidelines and recommendations for the possibility of returning to in person worship. On Friday, you should have received an email with a summary of our most recent conversation. At this time, we will continue with worship services via Zoom on Sunday morning.

Heather Garl will be leading an eleven-week Bible study entitled *Living Beyond Yourself* written by Beth Moore. The study will begin on either Sunday, July 12<sup>th</sup> or Sunday, July 19<sup>th</sup> from 6-8 pm in Heather’s home. If you would like to join this Bible study, contact her at (610) 698-3515 by Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup> for more details and so she can order the workbooks. The workbook costs \$15.99 plus tax and shipping (it should total less than \$20). If you have never done a bible study, Heather states that this is an AMAZING one to start off with and will set your standards high!

God’s Peace!

Pastor Denise

### Job 3, 4 and 7

3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. <sup>2</sup>Job said: <sup>3</sup>“Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’ <sup>4</sup>Let that day be darkness! May God above not seek it, or light shine on it. <sup>5</sup>Let gloom and deep darkness claim it. Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. <sup>6</sup>That night—let thick darkness seize it! let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months. <sup>7</sup>Yes, let that night be barren; let no joyful cry be heard in it. <sup>8</sup>Let those curse it who curse the Sea, those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan. <sup>9</sup>Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none; may it not see the eyelids of the morning—<sup>10</sup>because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb, and hide trouble from my eyes.”

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: <sup>2</sup>“If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended? But who can keep from speaking? <sup>3</sup>See, you have instructed many; you have strengthened the weak hands. <sup>4</sup>Your words have supported those who were stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. <sup>5</sup>But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. <sup>6</sup>Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? <sup>7</sup>“Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? <sup>8</sup>As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. <sup>9</sup>By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.”

<sup>7</sup><sup>11</sup>[Job said,] “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. <sup>12</sup>Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me? <sup>13</sup>When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,’ <sup>14</sup>then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, <sup>15</sup>so that I would choose strangling and death rather than this body. <sup>16</sup>I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath.

<sup>17</sup>What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, <sup>18</sup>visit them every morning, test them every moment? <sup>19</sup>Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle? <sup>20</sup>If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you? <sup>21</sup>Why do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be.”

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

*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 we will embark on this second leg of our journey with Job through his trials and tribulations – hopefully you have taken some time in this past week to reflect and explore how your faith is weathering the storms we have been encountering in these past few months or in other parts of your life

Has your faith waivered or strengthened in times of despair?

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

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

AS we begin our second leg of this journey with Job, we can definitely see that the Job we will hear from this week is asking heartfelt question and not only looking for, but demanding answers.

Let us quickly flash back to last week where God has met with his council and has praised his beloved child Job for his faithfulness and his righteousness. One of the members of God's council, the Chief Accuser, who has the responsibility of checking up on God's people and reporting back to God what he has observed on Earth, questions whether God's accolades for Job are warranted because Job has been blessed with the "good life." That is, Job has been blessed with a large family, blessed with enormous wealth and blessed with a stellar reputation of being a man who lives out his faith with integrity and compassion.

In last week's text, God had given the Chief Accuser permission to strip Job of his family and his wealth to see if he continues to live out his life with integrity and compassion. And as Job goes

from living the “good life” to a life filled with tragedy and misfortune, Job remains faithful. Job does not sin, that is Job does not turn away from God, but turns toward God

And as the Council meets for a second time, the Chief Accuser reports his findings that Job, in spite of his loss and misfortune has remained upright and faithful. But, the Chief Accuser is still not convinced about the true character of this man Job as the Accuser suggests that they continue to test Job; this time with his health. God agrees that the Accuser may continue his investigation, with one caveat, and that is that Job’s life must be spared.

So, we meet up with Job in this week’s text as Job’s body has been covered with sores and he is suffering because the sores are festering and will not heal, causing unbearable pain. And at first, Job is still faithful as his wife suggests that he should abandon God, but Job replies to his wife saying that we “take the good days from God, why not also take the bad.” But shortly after that, we find Job distraught as his condition worsens and his pain increases. We find that indeed Job is no longer the patient Job of last week who worshiped God in spite of his suffering, but we find the angry, the distraught and the disillusioned Job, who can no longer contain his anguish.

The scene for this week is in Job’s home as three of Job’s closest friends arrive on the scene to offer some pastoral care and advice. They are repulsed at the sight of Job’s sore infested body and are deeply concerned that their friend Job is in such dire straights as he just sits in silence staring into space.

So they sit in silence with their friend Job, with no one speaking a word for seven days and seven nights, until Job finally breaks the silence and begins ranting and raving at God.

In this morning’s text from Chapter 3, we hear Job speaking to God. He questions why God would have ever let him be born if this was to be his fate in life; that is a life of loss, a life of despair, a life of physical pain and suffering

As Job took a break from ranting and raving at God, his friend Eliphaz spoke up; at first offering him words of comfort, followed by words of advice.

Eliphaz reminds Job of all the times that Job had been the voice of clarity, and wisdom and support to others who were experiencing hard times in life. And then Eliphaz suggests to Job that now that he has found himself in dire straights, Job should live out the advice he has shared with so many others; that is to reconnect and to reclaim the confidence and hope that he himself exemplified when things were going well.

And instead of stopping right there and letting those words of comfort and compassion sink in to give Job time to ponder and time to wrestle with his own relationship with God, with his own

understanding of the character of God and with his own belief of how God relates to God's people, Eliphaz keeps going.

As, Eliphaz proceeds to offer Job his own personal understanding of the ways of God, as Eliphaz portrays for Job a vengeful and vindictive God who blesses "those who do good" and curses "those who do evil."

Instead of comforting and consoling Job in his hour of need, his friend Eliphaz is actually condemning Job with the insinuation that he must have done something wrong to deserve this suffering.

And if that is not bad enough, then Eliphaz encourages Job to get on with it and fess up; go to God, confess your wrong doing, so that God can forgive you and fix things.

Now we all know from the beginning of this story, that it really was not anything that Job did that caused this loss, this misfortune and this physical pain and suffering in Job's life. It was in fact the over zealous Chief Accuser, who was out to prove to God that this man Job was not the upright and faithful man that God had proclaimed him to be. But Job doesn't know that and neither do his friends.

Now Job is not only feeling abandoned by God, but also abandoned by friend Eliphaz. Job responds to his friend Eliphaz's response with more ranting and raving as Job tells Eliphaz that he wants God to step on him and squash him like a bug so God can be done with him once and for all.

And then Job pleads to God to tell him the truth about what he has done wrong. Job begs God to help him understand and to give him answers.

And hearing no response – Job continues to argue and plead with God to let up on him, let him spit in peace

Not at all the patient Job of last week, but a Job who has lost confidence in his ability to cope, lost faith that God is with him in his suffering, and lost hope that God will stop this pain and aggravation.

So, as we hear this story of this distraught man Job, we get it. Job's world has been turned upside down and he is struggling with trusting in God to get him through all of these hard times.

But what we don't see in this story, is a man turning away from God. We see a man stepping into the ring and with all that he still had, fighting the good fight with his God who is really mad at.

Job turned toward God, not with worship and praise like he did last week, but with anger, frustration and desperation; sometimes yelling at God and sometime pleading with God. Which I believe means, Job has not YET sinned. That is Job has not YET turned away and renounced God.

What do you think?

Is Job really the man that God espouses 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 Job looking to God for answers or for an embrace?

This week think about how your circumstances are impacting on your faith life and come back next week for part 3 of the adventures of a man named Job as Job's friend Bildad steps up to "help."

AMEN.

### ***BLESSING***

The holy Three, the holy One

increase your hope,

strengthen your faith,

deepen your love,

and + grant you peace.

**Amen.**