

Pastor's Message - June 28, 2020

Greetings from my house to yours.

This week is the third part of our five-week sermon series on the book of Job. As we walk with Job through his pain and suffering I invite you to continually reflect on these three questions:

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?

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.

Mary’s Shelter is running low on personal items (Toothpaste, Toothbrushes, Deodorant, Shampoo, Conditioner, Body wash, Hand sanitizer, Laundry detergent, First Aid Kit items, NEW towels, NEW washcloths) and food (Protein bars, Snack bags, Crackers, Water bottles, Canned soup, Tuna, Cereal) for its residents and clients. As we continue to be church in a new way, this project has been coordinated by some of our families with kids: the Kings, the Hollys and the Garls, who are also collecting in their neighborhoods. Let’s support their efforts by donating some items for our sisters and brothers in need at Mary’s Shelter. Bring donated items to the GSELC parking lot on Saturday, July 11 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. When you arrive at the GSELC parking lot, please wear a mask and maintain a 6ft separation from others so that all who choose to participate may feel safe. Attached to this email is a flyer you can use to spread the word.

If you would be interested in calling in to listen to the service, but do not have unlimited long distance phone service, let me know (610-750-6432) and we will look into getting a 1-800 number.

God’s Peace!
Pastor Denise

Job 14:7-15: 19:23-27

A reading from the 14th and 19th chapter of Job.

14:7 "For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.⁸ Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground,⁹ yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant.

¹⁰But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they?¹¹ As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up,¹² so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep.

¹⁵O that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and

remember me!¹⁴ If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come.¹⁵ You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands.

19:23 "O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book!²⁴ O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!

²⁵For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God,²⁷ whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"

L: The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God

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.

This is the third of our five-week sermon series on the book of Job. A book of the Bible that many Old Testament scholars believe is based more on the folklore of the time than an actual event in the life of a man named Job.

As we begin the third leg of this journey with Job, we can definitely see that Job is struggling to figure out why God is punishing him, struggling to figure how God's creation may inform his current situation and struggling to come to terms with his relationship with God.

This story of Job began as God met with his council and had 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 on Earth and reporting back to God what he has observed, questions whether God's accolades for Job are warranted because Job had been living the "good life." That is, Job had been blessed with a large family, had been blessed with enormous wealth and had been blessed with a

stellar reputation of being a man who lives out his faith with integrity and compassion.

At the first meeting of the council, 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

The council then 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.

As we meet up with Job this morning, his loss and his physical pain and suffering have become unbearable and he is stuck trying to make some sense of his current circumstances – as he questions Why he has even been allowed to be born? What has he done to anger God? Why would God, who creates and cares for all of creation reign down God’s wrath on him?

We hear in this section of the book of Job, Job begging God to speak to him and tell him where he has gone astray. We also hear from Job’s friends, who have been more hurtful than helpful.

Last week, even though Job swears that he has done nothing wrong to deserve God’s wrath, his friend Eliphaz does not believe him and insists that there must be something Job is not willing to own up to. Eliphaz insists that Job must now do the right thing, confess and repent to make things right with God. But, Job stands firm in his claim that he does not believe that he has done anything wrong.

Then Job’s friend Bildad pores salt into the wound as he confronts Job, saying that Job must have done something very wrong. Bildad asserts that there could not possibly be any other reason for Job’s suffering, because he believes that God loves and cares for the faithful and obedient and God rejects those who have gone astray. Again condemning Job for not taking responsibility for owning up to his mistakes.

When I hear this advice from Bildad, I see that Bildad’s understanding of true character of God is so very different from my own – because what I hear is Bildad talking about is a

legalistic way of being in relationship with God. God loves me and blesses me when I am faithful and obedient and punishes and throws me aside when I am not. Bildad talks about a God, who puts conditions on his love, his mercy and his grace.

As opposed to the God that Jesus revealed to us through his parables – a God of second chances who welcomed home his wayward son, a God who did not abandon us when we had lost our way, but a God who left the other 99 to go searching for the one had lost their way. Jesus taught us that God's love and God's mercy is not withheld based on our actions. God's love, God's mercy and God's grace is freely given to us, not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of whose we are, a beloved child of God.

And that's what we hear in Job's laments about God and to God, belief in a loving and gracious God. In spite of Job's suffering and in spite of the advice of Job's friends, Job does not sin. Job does turn away from God nor does Job waiver from his belief in who God is. But what Job does seem to give up on is trying to make sense of his current pain and suffering.

Up to this point, Job had been consumed with trying to figure out the reason for his pain and suffering with regard to the way that he has

chosen to live his life. And at this point in the story, there is a transition as Job begins to shift his focus from life here on Earth to what becomes of him after death.

Now, according to Jewish tradition the dead are sent to Sheol, a place of darkness for both the righteous and unrighteous. It was where life ceased to be until God would redeem all of humanity.

Job's shift of focus from his existence here on Earth to existence after death reveals to us that Job has not given up hope that one day he will indeed meet God and his prayers will be answered.

As Job proclaims:

²⁵For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God,²⁷ whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"

Job, in the depths of deep despair, still trusts that one day God will indeed break the silence and be there for him .

AMEN

Blessing

May the God of covenant faithfulness enfold you;
The beloved Son encourage you
And the Holy Spirit descend upon you
in blessing you this day and forever more.
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
AMEN