

Pastor's Message – July 5, 2020

Greetings from my house to yours.

My apologies for the confusion with the meeting link last week. Also, I have changed the password to GSELC (all caps). Here is the link:

Mary's Shelter needs your help!!! 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, we will be collecting donated items on the GSELC parking lot on Saturday, July 11th from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. This project is a joint effort between the Social Ministry Committee and our families with young children: the Krings, the Hollys and the Garls. The kids have been handing out flyers in their neighborhoods to request items for this ministry event. They are excited to see how their efforts will grow as their GSELC family adds to their collections. When you arrive at the GSELC parking lot, please wear a mask and maintain 6ft separation from others so that all who choose to participate may feel safe.

This week is the fourth part of our five-week sermon series on the book of Job, where God responds to all of Job's ranting and raving about his current situation. 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.

I will be taking vacation from Thursday, July 9th until Thursday, July 23rd. If you are need of a pastor, please contact Kristin Morrissey at 610-507-6124 and she will connect you with the pastor who is covering for me. We will continue to have Zoom worship services while I am on vacation. Rev. Thomas Irwin will be leading worship and preaching on July 12th and Rev. Grant Wickert will be leading worship and preaching on July 19th.

Have a happy and safe 4th of July!!!
God's Peace!

Pastor Denise

Job 31:35-37 and Job 38:1-11

A reading from the 31st and 38th chapters of Job.

JOB 31

“Oh, if only someone would give me a hearing!
I’ve signed my name to my defense, let the
Almighty One answer!
I want to see my indictment in writing.
Anyone’s welcome to read my defense;

I’ll write it on a poster and carry it around town.
I’m prepared to account for every move I’ve ever
made to anyone and everyone, prince or pauper.

JOB 38

And now, finally, God answered Job from the eye
of a violent storm.

He said:

“Why do you confuse the issue?
Why do you talk without knowing what you’re
talking about?
Pull yourself together, Job! Up on your feet! Stand
tall!
I have some questions for you, and I want some
straight answers.

Where were you when I created the earth?

Tell me, since you know so much!

Who decided on its size? Certainly you’ll know
that!

Who came up with the blueprints and
measurements?

How was its foundation poured,

and who set the cornerstone,

While the morning stars sang in chorus
and all the angels shouted praise?

And who took charge of the ocean

when it gushed forth like a baby from the
womb?

That was me! I wrapped it in soft clouds,
and tucked it in safely at night.

Then I made a playpen for it,
a strong playpen so it couldn’t run loose,
And said, ‘Stay here, this is your place.

Your wild tantrums are confined to this
place.’

“Have you ever traveled to where snow is made,
seen the vault where hail is stockpiled,
The arsenals of hail and snow that I keep
in readiness
for times of trouble and battle and war?

Can you find your way to where lightning is
launched,
or to the place from which the wind
blows?

Who do you suppose carves canyons

for the downpours of rain,
and charts the route of thunderstorms
That bring water to unvisited fields,
deserts no one ever lays eyes on,
Drenching the useless wastelands
so they’re carpeted with wildflowers and
grass?

And who do you think is the father of
rain and dew, the mother of ice and frost?

You don’t for a minute imagine these marvels of
weather just happen, do you?

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.

As we continue to walk with Job through the trials and tribulations of his suffering, we continue to hear Job ranting about his suffering, questioning his life, pondering his death, and chastising God for God's perceived absence.

And at this point of the story, we hear Job so confident that he is right – so sure he has not done anything to deserve this pain and suffering – so certain that once he gets to speak with God – this will be all cleared up and God will acknowledge that Job was right about everything he has been pontificating about throughout this story.

Job is ready to go toe-to-toe with God, and uses courtroom imagery as he challenges God to bring it on.

Job is confident that he will win his case. He has laid out his defense and he is ready – he is more than ready – he is eager to get this misunderstanding – this oversight on God's part corrected.

And now like a parent who has heard enough from their arrogant, self-centered and self-righteous child

God answers:

And if this was really a court room, you can only imagine Job's well thought out defense, his well designed plan being torn to shreds as Job takes the witness stand in his own defense and God serving not only as the judge, but also as the prosecuting attorney begins to interrogate Job, uncovering Job's lack of understanding of who God is, what God has done, and what and how God will continue to be the Lord over all of his creation.

As God begins his interrogation with these questions and comments:

Job, Where were you when I created the earth?

Tell me, since you know so much!

Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that!

Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?

How was its foundation poured,

and who set the cornerstone, while the morning stars sang in chorus and all the angels shouted praise?

And who took charge of the ocean

when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb?

Have you ever traveled to where snow is made,
seen the vault where hail is stockpiled,

Can you find your way to where lightning is launched, or to the place from which the wind blows?

No Job – you have not got a clue as to how and why things are the way they are.

You see Job, not only do you have a limited understand of who I am and how I do things, but you also have absolutely no control over the world that I have created

For all of this time you have been ranting and raving about your own righteousness and your own innocence you are speaking out of ignorance and fear.

And as God spoke to Job, God never mentioned Job's pain and suffering, God never responded to Job's plea to be vindicated and God did not take time to answer Job's many questions.

But God reminded Job of who God was, what God had done for humanity, and how God loved and cared for all of his creation including Job.

God's speech was not to intimidate Job, but to remind Job of the power of the one who loved Job. God ultimately would not forget Job, nor any of God's beloved creation. And Job's task was not to call out God when things had gone wrong, not to beg for answers, not to question his own existence, but to trust in the God who held more knowledge and power than humanity would ever know.

It can be tempting sometimes to challenge God as if we were equal to God. We curse God, we doubt God, we fall away from God, we try to figure out God, and we try to make sense of our circumstances based on our very limited understanding of God. Yet God reminds us just who God is. (Not to discourage our doubts, questions, or challenges, but to stand toe-to-toe with us as we challenge God.)

And that is what Job is experiencing in this part of the story, God looking straight into Job's eye and schooling him on the power of the one who is his creator. And reminding Job, that God's got this. Just as God tells the oceans where to cease and the rivers where to run, God also intervenes in our suffering.

Does this mean people don't suffer? No.

Does this mean that God is actively battling the forces that cause suffering on our behalf? Yup.

Perhaps in the end it is not for us to know why or how suffering comes upon us, but to cling even more tightly to the God that's on our side—to know that the one who is far more knowledgeable and powerful than us has got our back.

So, how are we doing with our trials and tribulations, our disappointments and our fears, our frustrations and our weariness with regard to the challenges we have encountered in the last few months with the pandemic.

I know I have had many a Job moment – how about you?

In the past four months, I have had many a time, when like Job, I have been frustrated, many a time when I have been frightened, many a time when I have been depressed, many a time when I have been angry – and I have cried out to God – just like Job – begging God for answers, just like Job pleading for God– to fix things

In these hard times it is in our human nature to put our focus and our energies on trying to make it through each new challenges, as we rant and rave

as we long for the life as it was just a few months ago.

Job longed for his trials and tribulations to end, regardless of the outcome, he just wanted his pain and suffering to end.

And now in this text we have heard God speak – as God reminds Job, that God is more powerful, more knowledgeable, and more righteous than Job can ever imagine and God will always have his back.

And as we begin a new brand new month, a brand new week, a brand new day – longing for each moment of each day to show signs of returning to “normal” – whatever that means. Let us find our strength, our courage, and our hope in our God, who is more powerful, more knowledgeable, more righteous and more compassionate than we can ever imagine –

Our God, who is the One who has everyone of us, every moment of every day in the palm of his hands.

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