

Easter 4, 2016
Jesus, The Hope Found In Job

By Rev. Mr. Bill Baker
St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR
Job 19:21-27a

“Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?”

Have you ever experienced the displeasure of being kicked when you were down? “Being kicked when you are down” is a common phrase used to express the unnecessary pain caused by those who want to make a point or even by those who are trying to help. I am going to expect that you are somewhat familiar with the gist of the Book of Job; the conversation between God and Satan, and the tragedies that befell Job. Prior to our reading from Job this morning are several examples of criticisms condemning Job in light of the several tragedies he has had to endure as Satan puts Job to the test. Job, knowing that he himself is a Godly man, feels the need to defend himself against ‘friends’ who want to blame him for his wretched state...and why not? The tragedies that have happened in his life were not of his own doing but simply results of living in a world where sin has a foothold and bad things happen to good people.

Some criticisms that come from an innocent assessment can still remind us that we are always subject to pitfalls and accidents that are out of our control. One day last week, while eating pizza with Lizzy (my 6 year old daughter), I got pizza grease on the tablecloth that Andrea had just washed and ironed. Andrea didn't make much of a fuss but...Lizzy took the opportunity to let me know I had done wrong. And after lunch I decided to get a haircut and I thought it would be fun to take Lizzy with me. So off we went. What prompts the thoughts of a six-year-old girl is beyond me. While we were on our way Lizzy used the time to berated me with a litany of my most recent faults; “dad, you get blood on mom's sheets, grease on the table cloth, you backed out of the driveway before I had my seatbelt on and you got smoke in the house when you barbequed last night...why do you do these things? How do you fight against a 6 year old who is only stating the facts? Even though I could have counter-argued each of her statements, I let it go.

But Job, under severe scrutiny and tragic circumstances could not let it go. The accusations were serious and concerned events that were out of his control, and he begged them; Have pity on me, my friends...can you judge me as God? Job is looking for support...a little compassion. But instead, his friends are making him feel alone.

"Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" Job knows that he has done no wrong in the eyes of God and he wants his testimony to this fact to be a witness for all the ages to come. And it is at this moment where we see Job stand up to the ignorance of worldly opinions and express his faith in the only thing that matters...hope...hope in the Redeemer! *"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. An though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."* If there were only one thing we could learn from Job's story it would be hope in the face of adversity.

Suffering isn't always an issue of sin in ones life. Sometimes suffering is a result of the spiritual battle that persists outside of our complete understanding. The inappropriate reaction of Job's friends and their mob mentality, stress to us the importance of engaging the battle from the right perspective...to step in and engage the fight in sacrificial love, to step in and engage the fight for ultimate truth, to step in and engage the fight in support of our friends...our brothers and sisters in Christ. Job's story is part of scripture illustrating that there is an unfairness that pervades life in this world and...Job's story gives us hope...hope, that in the end, all the burdens of this world will be worth it.

So, here we are beginning the fourth week of Easter and it seems our exaltation has turned to sorrow from the inclusion of the Book of Job as part of this Sunday's reading. What could be the purpose of such a reading at this time? Well...I wondered the same thing. Finally I saw that, like Easter Sunday, hope in the resurrection is the focus of Job's story. Despite the despair and unfairness that are part of this life, we are part of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and remaining faithful to Christ is necessary if we too are to overcome the burdens of a merciless world. Job's story is the story of Jesus being our refuge in times of trouble...a place to go to be set free.

It is Jesus who lies between the lines of Job...Jesus who pours out to us, guiding us through our ignorance's. *"Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?"*

Remember Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane? Drops of blood running from the pours of his head while those who are set to keep watch lay sleeping. Then the hour came and the arrest made. Jesus, who was daily in the temple and did all things in the light, is chained in the dark like a common thief...ridiculed and mocked by those he came to save; friends who have turned their backs on a brother to follow the crowd. Have pity my friends. Jesus understands the unfairness that has weaved it's way through our lives. It is through Job that the Almighty shows the way through the several trials we must endure. But Jesus does what Job could not.

"Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!"

What Job wanted was a good thing but it was a task that only Christ could accomplish. Job, despite his godliness, was still a sinner. It would take the perfectness of God found only in the sinlessness of Jesus to set the record straight. The authority of Jesus transcended mortal man and fulfilled what Job could only elude. The Words of Jesus, recorded for all time, as a defense of the Gospel truth...the Holy Bible; a gift from God that we might not forget the Way. The Words of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost paving the way for a deeper understanding of the truth and a guide as we journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. But books can be forgotten, books can be lost...books can be burned.

But WE know that the Word of God will last forever. *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."* (Matthew 24:35). God has implanted His Word in the hearts and souls of the church; those who believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who come to hear the Gospel preached and partake of the Holy Sacraments of His body and blood. It is here; in the body of Christ that His Word is *"...graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever!"* Job could only dream of such a possibility in his life, but through Christ all things are possible. The word of God printed in a book and engraved on the hearts of mankind forever

as a testimony to the Truth!

Our reading from Job teaches us the importance of navigating the affairs of this world through the hope we have in our Redeemer. It is our faith that keeps that hope alive and that only by the Grace of God. We should all fall to our knees when we acknowledge that it is Jesus who stands in the void, when we acknowledge “...that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” When that time comes...were will your faith be? Will you be worrying about what others say? Will you be caught in the entertainment of immoral gossip? Will you be one of the slanderers?

“...An though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” Sin, for those who are in Christ Jesus, only goes skin deep. And once our bodies lay in the ground and are consumed by worms it is God who will raise us to glorification that we may see and behold Him as He truly is. *“Beloved, now are we the sons of god, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:2).

So, we see through the eyes of Job that sometimes our suffering is not the result of the sin in our lives but of God defeating Satan through us. The war against Satan was won on the Cross-, but the spiritual battle for our souls persists. Jesus has gained salvation for all and overcome death, the penalty for sin, and Job is calling out to each of us to hold out for hope...to fight the good fight.

“Fight the good fight with all thy might, Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right; Lay hold on life and it shall be Thy joy and crown eternally.”
(hymn 560, hymnal 1940).

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.