

MORNING PRAYER
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
04.28.24

There is a tendency in human nature to consider suffering to be abnormal and to look for a reason for it. In modern America, the tendency is to look for a reason in the behavior of the one who is suffering. We call it “blaming the victim.”

A woman is raped, and we blame her for being provocatively dressed. A man is mugged and we blame him for being in a bad part of town. We even blame ourselves when we experience some kind of misfortune. We ask, “What did I do to deserve this?”

The idea that bad things sometimes happen to people who do not deserve to suffer is one that we find hard to accept. One reason for that, I think, is that we want to feel a sense of control. If life is logical and justice is somehow guaranteed, then it should be possible to avoid pain. But if life is chaotic and capricious, then we have no control. So we need to find an explanation that will reassure us that we can, in fact, control our destiny if we behave properly.

Hundreds of years ago a man named Job ran into that way of thinking. I don't need to go over all the troubles he had. It is enough to say that he suffered far more than most men could bear. And when some friends came to console him in his misery, they simply added to his burden.

Job's friends were convinced that no one ever suffers unjustly in this world. So they insisted that Job must have done something terrible at some time in his past that no one knew about. Job himself, they thought, might not even be aware of what he had done to make God angry. So they kept urging him, one after another, to examine himself more closely to discover his sin and confess his guilt. But Job held fast to his protestation of innocence.

Finally, when Job saw that his well-meaning friends were not going to be of any help to him, he decided to make his appeal to posterity. "O that my words were written. Oh that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever. For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

We sometimes appeal to posterity when people will not listen to us like our children for instance. "Some day you'll look back and see that I was right."

Job believes that justice will ultimately prevail, and so he decides to take his appeal for vindication directly to the God of justice. But how can he do that. God is so inaccessible, so holy, so remote, so transcendent. Job is finite, and the finite can never reach the infinite. That is Job's problem, and it is the problem of every man. But Job is ultimately a man of faith, and he foresees a solution. He comes to believe that somewhere there must be someone who will come to his rescue, intercede for him, and plead his case before God. And he comes to believe that this someone will one day walk the earth. "I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

This is a remarkable spiritual insight. Job has seen that human wisdom cannot help him. Only God can help him. But God is the one with whom he has a quarrel. So if justice is ultimately to prevail, there has to be someone who can make a connection between God and man and can rectify what is wrong with the world. This “redeemer”, as Job calls him, must already exist and must himself partake of the divine nature. No doubt you can see here the beginning of incarnational theology.

As Christians, we believe that God is actually three persons in one united entity. The second person of the three does exist from all eternity and is in fact the mediator of whom Job speaks. In the person of Jesus the Jew, the redeemer of all men stood upon the earth. He died, was buried, was raised from the dead, and intercedes forever, not only for Job but for all mankind.

There was no way Job could have known all that, but, alone in the universe, alienated from his friends as well as from God, this man of faith realized that the only way to God was by way of a divine redeemer, and he believed that such a redeemer already lived and would one day appear on earth. And Job was right

Even as I speak, the redeemer stands before the throne of divine justice interceding and pleading for you and for me. Even now we are being forgiven because of that pleading. Even as I speak your sins and mine are being put aside and removed from the sight of God because our redeemer has paid the price and born in his own body the punishment for those sins.

We cannot, like Job, claim that we are innocent. But we can and must recognize that suffering in this world is not an indication of guilt on the part of the one who suffers. We have to stop blaming the victim. Our divine redeemer did not deserve to suffer, but “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” The Gospel is for those who believe that.

The friends of Job were wrong. We cannot control our own destiny. Life is illogical, and justice in this world is not guaranteed. We are up against a cosmic enemy who delights in chaos and makes every one of us a victim in one way or another. We need the redeemer of whom Job speaks, and the good news is that we have him and we know who he is.

If you are one who still feels that you can control your own destiny by your behavior and you can escape suffering by living right, then this good news is not for you. But if you are one of the people today who can see what Job saw centuries ago, and if you can say what he said, then say it in faith because the gospel is for you. “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the last days he shall stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been destroyed, I will see God in my flesh, with my own eyes, and he will be on my side.”

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