

Sermon for Proper 22, Year B

The Text: Job 2:10

But he said to her, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job was an exceptional man. He was extremely loyal to God. In chapter one of Job we are told that *“he was blameless and upright, who respected God and refused to do evil”*, his children liked to party and every morning after one of their parties, he got up early and offered a sacrifice in case *“they had sinned or silently cursed God”*, and that God himself has nothing but accolades to shower on Job. God says: *“No one on earth is like him—he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8).*

Job was a wealthy man. He was *“the richest man in the East” (1:3)* with thousands upon thousands of sheep, camels, cattle and donkeys as well as a large number of servants. God had indeed richly blessed Job.

We also know that Job was blessed with seven sons and three daughters, a number which seems to indicate that this was the perfect family, a sign of God’s pleasure. He was a good father and had taught his children about God. He wasn’t wasteful and was very generous and hospitable to those who visited him.

Job enjoyed a good life. God’s protection rested on his family and everything he owned. Everything he did prospered with God’s help. Job’s wealth continued to grow and grow. He was enjoying life, everything was just right, life couldn’t be sweeter, when bam, out of the blue, his life is turned upside down.

Raiders from the south stole all his stock and killed his servants. A storm destroyed the house where his children were having one of their parties and all ten were killed. The normally healthy Job broke out in terrible painful running sores. He now sits on a heap of ashes, the only place where he could express his grief after losing so much. Job is sitting alone—perhaps because he has been excluded from the community, who presume his wickedness for all of this to have happened.

In one day, Job has gone from riches to rags. From the story, we know that it was Satan that had inflicted all of this on Job, the most God-fearing and loyal man that one could find, while it seems that God has allowed this to happen.

We might well ask, “What had Job done to deserve all this?” “Why have so many disasters happened to a man who was so good?”

These are good questions that people are still asking today. We hear of the untimely death of a child and we ask, “What had that child done to deserve that?” Why should that happen to someone so young when there are so many other evil people who get away scot free?”

Jesus was confronted with the same problem (Luke 13:1-5). Some of those following Jesus referred to disasters that were headlines in the news. One tragedy happened at the temple. There were some pious and honourable folk offering sacrifices at the temple and yet they came to a cruel end. Pontius Pilate had them killed right there in the temple as they worshipped.

And then there was the collapse of the tower at Siloam. Eighteen people were in the wrong place at the wrong time and were killed. We are no strangers to that kind of thing. Like a surfer who has surfed on the same beach a thousand times, one day finds himself in the same spot as a hungry shark.

It’s reasonable to ask, “Why do these bad things happen for no obvious reason?” If we could say that they happened because bad people were getting what they deserved, then the problem would be solved and that would be end of it. But we can’t. We know that good people, people like Job, suffered. We are horrified and can find no logical explanation why a defenceless child should die at the hands of a parent.

Neither bad health nor the present drought have come as a result of some terrible sin. Neither can we say that because we are church-going and committed Christians, we will never experience any hardship.

The question that arises in our minds now is this – we can’t explain why bad things happen to us so then how do we cope with tragedies when they do occur? How did Job cope with the disasters that happened in his life? We hear:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;

may the name of the LORD be praised.”

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:20-21).

Job has two responses to all this bad news.

First, as can be expected, Job is grief stricken. He has lost so much so quickly. In record time, the once rich man has become a pauper. He has lost his most precious possessions of all—his children, all ten of them at once. No wonder his grief is so intense.

Job's second response is one of faith. While his wife and his friends tell him to give up on God, he doesn't focus on his grief but states clearly that God is Lord of all things. He gives freely and generously and he is able to take it all away again. We are told, "*In all that happened, Job never once said anything against God*" (2:10). Job grieves but he doesn't lose confidence in God's justice and love.

At times our response to events in life aren't Job-like at all. The events and the grief are overwhelming and we blurt out, "It's not fair! I don't deserve any of this! Why won't God do something and change things?" We question God's idea of what is fair and just.

Philip Yancey tells the story in his book, *Disappointment with God*, about a friend and faithful Christian named Douglas who went through a series of terrible events. First, his wife developed breast cancer. Then one night, he and his family were involved in a head-on crash with a drunk driver. His wife and daughter were injured in the smash. Douglas received a severe head injury that caused sudden and debilitating headaches that kept him from working a full day and enjoying his passion for reading. More than anything, it affected his ability to care for his wife. None of this made any human sense. If anyone had a right to be angry at God, Douglas did.

Yancey thought Douglas would be the perfect person to interview about being disappointed with God. So he began, "Could you tell me about your own disappointment?"

To Yancey's great surprise, Douglas said, "To tell you the truth, Philip, I didn't feel any disappointment with God. The reason is this. I learned, first through my wife's illness and then especially through the accident, not to confuse God with life."

He continued, "I'm no stoic. I am as upset about what happened to me as anyone could be. I feel free to curse the unfairness of life and to vent all my grief and anger. But I believe God feels the same way about that accident—grieved and angry. I don't blame him for what happened."

He goes on to point out that we believe that God is fair and so assume that life also ought to be fair. The fairness of life was disrupted when sin came into the world. Sin invaded the peace and harmony of our world and our bodies. All kinds of things come out of the blue that seem completely unfair but they have nothing to say about God loving us any less or that he doesn't feel the pain as any parent feels the pain of their child.

It's not God who is unfair—he is as loving and as just as he has always been. It is life that is unfair—our world and our lives have been affected by the disastrous consequences of evil.

The question that faces us is this: can we continue to love and trust God—in pain, in sickness, in grief and in any bad times?

Can we love God in spite of what life brings?

What will our reaction be when something hits us that really rocks us? It strikes us so deeply that our love and trust in God is shaken. We don't have the human resources to hang on to God and to keep on trusting. We don't have the trust that Job had that firmly believes that God's loves us more than ever.

When tragedy strikes, when we don't understand, when we think it is unfair and we do end up blaming God, thank goodness God keeps hanging on to us. Even when our trust is low and our doubts are overwhelming us, God keeps on loving and keeps on holding on to us and supporting us and helping us through that crisis.

The reason why God doesn't give us specific answers to all our questions is something we have to grapple with even though we would dearly love to know the answers to the questions that we have about the tragedies and crises in our lives. Maybe the answers are too complex for us to understand.

The answer we do understand though is the one he gives us in his Son. He gave his body and spilled his blood for us on the Cross. He is God's love for us. He is present for us right here with his mercy and compassion through his word, and in his body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. He will always be with us through times of hardship and tragedy. This is the way he responds to our questions—not with answers that make the world simpler, not with slick, neat answers to the question “why”, but he answers with his love, and with his life, given for us. Amen.