

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from The One who suffered for our Sins, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, amen.

As you can see from our scripture reading for today, we're not going to be reading every one of the 42 chapters of the book of Job during our worship time. Even though this is called the Narrative Lectionary, it still skips large sections. This format invites you all to do a little more participation or homework, if you will, ahead of each Sunday, if you want to get the most out of what these great epic Bible stories have to offer. For example, last week we read from Chapter 1, verses 1-22. This week we begin with chapter 3 and read chapter 4, then finish with chapter 7. We did not read chapter 2, 5, or 6. What you missed in chapter 2 was the dialog between Satan and God where God allowed Satan to afflict Job's health, but not to take his life. So, Satan gives Job horrible sores all over his body. Not only had Job lost his family, his possessions, now he had his health taken from him as well. Then toward the end of Chapter 2 Job's three friends; Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite arrive on the scene to console their friend. They stick around for most of the rest of the book as this epic story changes from the Folk Tale I spoke about last week to a completely different Literary Genre called a Wisdom Dialog. In a Wisdom Dialog two or more different perspectives, or philosophies, or theologies are held side by side and we get to experience them all. At the end of Chapter 2 Job's three friends; Eliphaz the

Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite arrive on the scene.

Together with Job they sit in total silence for 7 days.

This past week I had a small taste of what being afflicted with all those sores might have been like for poor ol' Job. As PJ and I were tending our beehives the girls got quite agitated with us and stung me on both of my lower legs. I then proceeded to get a secondary infection and had to go to the Emergency Room at Wright Patt. They gave me IV Antibiotics and a prescription for more antibiotics, which I'm still on. I don't know what Job's sores felt like, but I can tell you firsthand that mine ached, burned, and itched all at the same time. It was a horrible 5 days... At least I didn't have to wonder why I was being targeted by God for this affliction, it was my own stupidity. I wore shorts and brightly colored socks which attracted the bees to my ankles, which is where I got the worst of the stings and the infection. Anyway, our story of Job for today picks up at the end of 7 days of silence. The first thing you should know is that these friends were following the cultural rituals and norms of their time and religion. They would have sat with Job for weeks or for a year if that was what it took. The only time they can speak is after the one who is grieving begins to talk. Apparently, Job couldn't hold in feelings any longer and so after 7 days of silence he lets loose with a very dark, but beautiful poem. Job curses the day he was born and even the day of his conception. We can look at this beautiful, albeit dark poem as a personal

expression of the feelings Job was experiencing and we would get a lot of meaning and possibly understand the depths of Job's anguish, but the language Job uses moves us beyond experiencing Job's pain alone. His words are a reversal of the great creation story of the book of Genesis. Job points us to the great turmoil of the universe where logic and a sense of right and wrong have been flipped upside down, sideways, and inside out. We can limit our imaginations about Job as being solely about one man and what we can learn about suffering, or we can expand our imaginations to look at the bigger issues the writer of Job wants us to consider.

In the history of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition there has long been the idea that God rewards the righteous and punishes the sinners. Perhaps that might bear out in the long haul of eternity, but in the super short lifespans of humans nothing could be further from our reality. So, the writer of Job pits this epic story of Job over and against the mainline religious theory of his day. By cursing the day of his birth with words of anti-creation, "let there be darkness" instead of "let there be light," Job wants to call into question the whole order of the created world as was known at the time. Over the course of the next several chapters each of Job's friends tries to make Job's circumstances fit into the best Pastoral care advice they have to offer. Job answers each friend's proposal with his own perspective.

When I was in seminary we all had to do three months as a Chaplain at a hospital or Medical Center. I did my training at the Dayton VA. During that

training we would interact with hospital patients with every sort of malady. From chronic illness, to eminent death, to the aftermath of a death, over the course of the three months we saw quite a wide variety of human pain and suffering. Each week we had to pick one of our encounters and write up a verbatim of the interaction.

We would read them aloud in class and each of us, along with the instructor would critique every word, phrase, and feeling we had during the encounter. It was a grueling experience. When it was your turn to give the verbatim you could expect everything you said, did, and felt would be scrutinized and you had to explain why you said, did, and felt every word, action, and feeling. As humiliating and embarrassing as that was, we all learned a lot about how to be with the sick, dying, and grieving. As I read through these chapters of the interactions between Job and his friends it took me back to those days and some of the big mistakes we all made trying to be the best emissary of Christ we could. The main thing I learned was to listen, listen, listen and to never try to solve the person's grief like it was some puzzle to figure out. I learned there are no words to console someone in the absolute pit of despair. They used to tell us we were to be a non-anxious presence. I'll tell you it's really hard to not try to solve their problems and it's impossible to be a non-anxious presence. My best efforts, even today after, 4 years of Seminary, 12 years as a Pastor, and a lifetime of experience, is to try to be the least anxious person in the room. Even that doesn't always work out... We all have our

personal baggage we carry around and when we try to console our family and friends that baggage sometimes gets in the way. On top of the baggage we carry around we have all formed our own set of personal beliefs about God and why bad things happen. So, when we sit with our friends during times of grief and loss all of that stuff we carry around affects how we are able to comfort others.

The first of Job's friends to speak is Eliphaz and his first speech takes up 2 whole chapters. Eliphaz, starts out pretty humble asking if speaking would offend Job. Without waiting for an answer, he jumps in with both feet, reminding Job of all those times when Job had been with others who were suffering and his words to them helped strengthen them. Not too bad so far, but then Eliphaz drops the other foot and tells poor Job, you helped others and now you're being impatient and refusing to be consoled. Wow, I hope none of you would say something like that to a family member or friend in need... That's punch one of Eliphaz's one two punch volley. Right after telling Job he's being impatient with God he throws the right hook. Only the unjust, evil, vile, litesome, human beings suffer at the hand of God. The clear implication is Job has committed a great sin that landed him in such hot water with God Almighty... I'm pretty sure words like that would have gotten me an early exit from the pastoral clinical education classes...

So, other than don't say these awful, insulting things can we glean from this first volley from Job and Eliphaz? As we enter into the Wisdom Dialog, each of

Job's friends present a different sort of philosophy, theology, or perspective in Job's situation. On the problem of suffering, none of the attempts to explain or justify innocent, righteous suffering can give us a completely satisfactory answer. When you analyze any situation, you eventually reach the limits of reasoning from your specific perspective. The problem is that from your specific perspective you may not be seeing the entire big picture. It takes someone with a different perspective to see beyond where your limits end. Someone once said I can see perfectly everything in front and on my sides, but I need someone else to see the back of my head. When we encounter someone with whom we disagree, it might be possible they are able to see something you are unable to see for yourself. I wonder what our current cultural climate might be like if more people embraced differing points of view rather than seeing the opposing side as a threat or something dangerous to be destroyed. My guess is we might all benefit from such a wisdom dialog... Sometimes both views or even multiple views can be just as true and just as valid.

May you find blessing and meaning in different points of view, even if you disagree with them. May you always have someone who can see the back of your head when you aren't able to see beyond your own blind spots. May the wisdom of the Holy Spirit always give you the inspiration to be a least anxious presence in all highly tense and anxious times. Amen.