

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Wow is it ever good to be back here in person worshipping with all of you! I've never really done a Sermon Series and the Narrative Lectionary allows us to dig quite a bit deeper into the Bible because we'll be concentrating on the epic stories of both the Old Testament and the New as this Narrative Lectionary moves over the course of its 4 year journey. So, let's jump in and see what we can milk out of the book of Job.

Job is a marvelous book. At 42 chapters the Book of Job is one of the longer books in the Bible. Some of the commentaries I read compared it to the great works of William Shakespeare. Job is an epic drama played once upon a time in the land of Uz. It's majestic and profound. It's deep theologically and asks its readers to ponder great and troubling questions of life. Every commentary I read said the Book of Job is a Folk Tale. It starts out sort of like Star Wars. In a Galaxy Far away... Once upon a time in the land of Uz... Uz is only mentioned 2 other places in the Bible and both refer to it as a land far away. The point is, this is a story set outside of the Jewish territory of Israel and Judah. That makes sense since most scholars say it was written some six hundred years before Jesus during the time when the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon. The book is filled with irony. In fact, how ironic is it that Israel and Judah, including the precious city of

Jerusalem had been overthrown and largely destroyed because of the terrible sins committed by the people of God. They had worshipped foreign gods, then had ignored the widows, orphans, and the poor. They had disregarded God's Laws to the point that God had left the Temple and as a result, Israel's and Judah's enemies came roaring in. So, while Job might have been this totally innocent, righteous man who was enduring such great suffering, the Israelites certainly were not innocent nor righteous... If Job was written to help the Israelites understand their suffering during captivity, it's ironic they would choose an innocent, righteous man as their prototype.

When I read the book of Job in the past, I always tried to get Job to answer the question of why righteous, innocent people suffer. If you look around our world, you'll notice suffering isn't just a punishment for evil people. On the contrary, at least my unscientific observations seem to tell me the innocent and even the righteous suffer more than their fair share compared to people I would consider to be bad or evil. So, if Job wasn't written to answer the question of why innocent and righteous people suffer than what questions does it address and why should we care about a book that was written over 2600 years ago during the time when the people of Israel were in captivity?

If you're anything like me, when someone says let's read through the Book of Job, I immediately think why would anyone want to read something so

depressing. I mean, did you hear all that bad stuff that just happened to him and we're only in the first chapter! He went from being the most influential person in the East to a man who literally had nothing. Not only were his thousands and thousands of livestock and his servants killed by either nature or by enemy attacks, all 10 of his children were killed when the house they were partying in was destroyed by a tornado... I can't imagine falling from such a high pedestal to the ground and being left with nothing... Yet, despite all these bad things happening, chapter one ends on a high note. Upon learning all his children are dead, Job falls to his knees and Worships God. He acknowledges God is the one who gives good blessings and God also can take them away. Yet in all that trouble and despair, Job worships God and does not sin.

If we're looking for the answer to why bad things happen to good people, at least this first chapter leaves us empty and still searching. That doesn't mean we can't get something useful for our lives out of these first 22 verses. The main question posed in this first chapter of Job is not why bad things happen to good people, but rather how do God's people react in the face of calamity and suffering? Clearly Satan, the great accuser thought once God's protection was removed and all those goodies were unceremoniously taken away, Job would shake his clinched fist at God and curse God. That's not the reaction I just read. I might have done some of that fist shaking, finger pointing and bad word shouting, but not Job. The

writer of this Book wants us to see that no matter what situation we find ourselves in God is always with us and our faithfulness to our Father and or Savior, to our creator, and the one who sustains us can remain constant even in the midst of extreme loss and suffering. Luther said it in the hymn I lovingly call our Lutheran National Anthem, A Mighty Fortress is Our God. In that hymn Luther writes, “Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom's ours forever!

Now, 2600 years after the book of Job was written, we have the benefit of knowing about Jesus, his life, death, and the resurrection. We know God sent Jesus because God so loved the world, but Job took place in a Galaxy far away and in a time long ago. Job only knew God had promised to be his God forever and that promise was enough for Job. Yes, he had lost everything, but God was still God and Job trusted God. We call that faith!

In this life we will all suffer. I speak for myself here in that I know I’m not totally blameless, nor am I completely upright in the sight of God. I’ve got plenty of sin that I regret and of that sin I try to repent and confess and ask for God’s forgiveness. I’m no Job and neither are you... Nor do I believe that I’m specially blessed by God because I have 3 children, 7 grandchildren, 7 head of livestock alpacas, and too many cats to count. God doesn’t work that way, giving good things to good people and reserving bad things just for the bad and evil people. I

can't imagine losing one of my children or grandchildren let alone having them all taken away at once. Even though I might not have suffered nearly as badly as Job my suffering and your suffering is no less dreadful. We all suffer to some degree. Right now our country is reeling from the actions of some very bad police officers who murdered a young black man by the name of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Our country still suffers from the sins of our past. Racism and white supremacy are sin stains that we as Americans must come to grips with. Violence and rioting are not the answer. I understand the frustrations of the African American community. I hope and pray that senseless racial killings and the backlash we've been seeing this past week never happens again. My heart breaks for the George Floyd family. I know they're suffering. My heart breaks for all the families who have been treated unjustly because of the color of their skin. I hope yours does too...

My hope is that when my turn to suffer comes around again, and it will certainly come, that I can remember this story about the most influential man in the East by the name of Job and in the midst of my pain and agony, maybe I too will be able to fall to my knees and worship my God, who promised to never leave nor forsake me. May you also keep Job as your example when life gets messy. May your instinct be to turn to God in prayer and worship not in anger and despair. May the God of Job and the God and Father of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

keep you and guard you in during all the times of your life, including your time of suffering. Amen.