

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, June 23, 2024, based on the book of Job

Job, or Job as I called him in confirmation class is one of my favorite pieces of wisdom literature in the Bible. It deals with the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" And yet, there is no direct answer in Job... just a promise that God, who made the universe and provides for us daily, won't abandon us.

You may have heard people say, "He or she has the patience of Job" about someone who has experienced great suffering or loss... but they maintain their faith in God. Or people quote Job after a loss saying, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

Throughout the book of Job, Job wrestles with his undeserved suffering. It also debunks a simplistic understanding of you reap what you sow theology. That is sometimes true, but not always. The sun still rises on good and evil says Jesus.

The book of Job starts off with Job's origin story. He had 7 sons and 3 daughters. 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many servants. He was known as the greatest person in all the east... a very wealthy man. He was so good, that after his kids would have big parties, Job would go out and make sacrifices to God for the sins they may have committed that evening. You could say Job was "God's Favorite."

That is at least according to Neil Simon's Broadway Play "God's Favorite", which is loosely based on the story of Job.

The setting of God's Favorite is in a Long Island mansion. The household consists of a pious, God-fearing tycoon named Joe Benjamin and his quirky/disfunctional family. One night a messenger, Sidney Lipton arrives, and, as in the biblical story, goes through all manner of temptations to get Joe Benjamin to renounce God. When he refuses, he is visited by all the afflictions imaginable. He stands firm in his faith and the messenger, Sidney, has to admit defeat in the end.

In the book of Job chapters 1 and 2, Satan was going to and fro on earth looking for someone to test. He asked God for a name. God suggested the righteous man, Job. You see, Satan had a theory that

Job only loved God because of how much he had... how blessed he was with children and possessions. So, God allowed Satan, which means accuser or adversary, to test Job, but not take his life. One by one, Job experienced disaster after disaster until he lost everything. Still, Job did not curse God or lose his faith. He questioned God why he even born, but never abandoned his faith in God. Even his wife got fed up and said, "Job, just Curse God and Die."

After Job's losses, he had three friends come and visit him. They sat with him in silence for 7 days. This is the best ministry they could have done... a ministry of presence. But then they opened their big mouths. "Job, you must have done something to deserve this." That was the theology of the time, if you suffered, had losses, or a disability like blindness, it is because you or your parents sinned. One by one they accused Job of sinning and not being faithful to God. They went back and forth for several of the 42 chapters. They definitely wouldn't pass as Lutheran. They espoused a works righteousness... not a salvation based on God's grace.

Then in chapter 19:23-28 of Job, Job writes his Epitaph. "O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! "For I know that my Redeemer lives." This inspired the famous hymn.

In those days, a redeemer was a next of kin who was expected to buy back property sold in desperation, or avenge a robbery or murder, and redeem one sold into slavery. Job believed one day his redeemer would come and vindicate him.

Job then speaks of a day after he dies, that he will put on a resurrection body. That he will see God face to face, ask his questions, and God will vindicate him. Job was one of the first in the Old Testament to put forth hope in a bodily resurrection.

We all can relate to Job, can't we. We all have unanswered "why" questions of God. We do experience loss and grief. We have friends that say things to us that aren't helpful and downright hurtful. Faithful people suffer for no rhyme or reason. And it is true, our fallen world still deals with horrible things like cancer, addiction,

natural disasters, evil, and war. Some suffering is explainable, but some is not.

The good news in our Gospel from Mark is that Jesus is in the same boat with us as we go through the storms of life. It may seem like Jesus is asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat like in Mark and that he doesn't care when we are fearful of perishing. But when the disciples woke Jesus up, when they asked for his help, he got up calmed the storm with a word, "Peace be still". And there was a dead calm. He said, "Do you still have no faith?" and for many of us we can't claim a faith that allows us to sleep in storms. That puts everything in God's hands and trusts. And yet that's what this text calls us to do. To call on Jesus when we are afraid or uncertain about how we can move forward in life. He's got you!

And here, Jesus doesn't just have power over human things, but over cosmic things as well... over the wind and the waves. Layered deeper in this text is that Jesus has ultimate power over evil. The sea in the Bible, was a place where evil resided.

His Word can bring a peace and contentment in your life during or after storms. Like job, even as you are up against it, you can proclaim, I know that my redeemer lives. Amen