

2018 10 21 – Love

Job 28:1-7, 34-41

So it seems that we are not finished with poor, suffering Job. First, I want to thank Norma Hain for doing such a great job on last week's service. During her sermon she introduced the story of Job and reflected on his tremendous patience in the face of great suffering. Patience is just one of the fruits of the spirit, one of the gifts that we are given by God.

Today, we are moving a little further along in the story. Job is still clear that he is innocent and has done nothing wrong, certainly nothing that would deserve the kind of punishment from YHWH that he has received: the loss of his entire family, all his belongings and even his health. His three friends have finally given up trying to convince him that he must be guilty and they are silent. At one point Job says to his friends, "Who then can arrange a hearing with God for me? Look – here's my signature on my defense! Now let [the Almighty] answer me; get my accuser to draw up a bill of particulars!" (Job 31:35) Job is convinced that if he just had an opportunity to talk to YHWH that he could plead his case and God would realize his mistake and reverse his fortunes. But, as far as Job is concerned, God has been silent throughout his entire ordeal. Job feels that God has abandoned him.

I'm sure we have all felt that way at some point in our lives. How many of us have suffered pain or loss through no fault of our own? How many of us have gone through dark times when it felt like God had abandoned us? How many of

us have railed at God complaining about how unfair life can be? How many of us have waited patiently or impatiently for God to answer our prayers?

Well, after a long silence YHWH finally answers Job saying,

Who is this obscuring my plans with such ignorant words?

Hitch up your belt like the fighter you are;

Now I will ask the questions and you will answer me!

Where were you when I created the earth?

If you know the answer, tell me!

Who decided its size? Do you know?

Who stretched the measuring line across it?

And YHWH goes on and on describing the wonders of creation, the mystery of thunder and rain, the blessing of food provided for every creature on earth. He reminds Job, over and over again, that there is no way that he can understand all the workings of the world. A little further on, past today's reading, YHWH even remarks, "Do you still want to argue with Almighty God? If you have something to say, speak up!" (Job 40:2)

Obviously, this was not the response from God that Job was expecting. Job wanted to talk to YHWH the judge. He was probably picturing a man in robes, sitting in a large chair, someone who would calmly listen to his argument and then make a decision based on evidence and logic. Instead, Job got YHWH, the

benevolent dictator, a guy in an ivory tower who makes all the decisions and expects his people to accept what they have been given and ask no questions.

These two images of YHWH were common amongst the Hebrew people who would have heard this story beside campfires as they watched over their sleeping herds of goats and sheep. They also believed that the earth was flat and that God lived above the dome of the sky in a place called heaven. They believed that God was like a puppet master and controlled everything that happened on earth.

But I don't believe in a God like that. I believe in a God of love, the kind of God that Jesus preached about, a God who is the essence of love. I believe that the suffering in our life does not come from God and that it is certainly not a punishment from God. I believe that when we suffer, God suffers with us.

Sometimes we struggle to see God, we think that God has abandoned us because we are looking for God in the wrong places, and in the wrong people. I get a daily blog from a minister named Steve Garnaas-Holmes. A couple of weeks ago he wrote his blog in response to Job. In it he said,

But who do you think God is anyway? Some guy?

God is not a person. God is Love.

Not just a loving person, but Love Itself.

The Divine Energy, the Heart of All Things,

not some guy at a control panel.

Love manipulates nothing but changes everything.

www.unfoldinglight.net

So instead of God the judge, or YHWH the benevolent dictator, we have a God that is the essence of love. And yes, even with a God of love, bad things still happen to good people. When bad things happen to us one of the ways we know that YHWH is there is because we are surrounded by the wonder of God's creation: because the sun still rises every morning; because the rain still falls to nourish the grass; because we can still experience the beauty of the summer flowers and the autumn leaves.

Harold Kushner, a Jewish rabbi, wrote a famous book called, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People." In it he gave the following description of why we know God is with us when we pray to a God of Love. He wrote:

Like Jacob in the Bible [Genesis 32], like every one of us at one time or another, you faced a scary situation, prayed for help, and found out that you were a lot stronger, and a lot better able to handle it, than you ever would have thought you were. In your desperation, you opened your heart in prayer, and what happened? You didn't get a miracle to avert a tragedy. But you discovered people around you, and God beside you, and strength within you to help you survive the tragedy. I offer that as an example of a prayer being answered.

(When Bad Things Happen to Good People (Avon Books: 1983), page 131)

I'm sure Job's experience would have been different if he could have opened his heart to the God of love, if he could have looked for the beauty around him instead of focussing on getting his day in court, if he could have felt God's presence in the people who helped him and in his own inner strength. Job's circumstances would have been the same, but his understanding, his outlook on life, would have been very different.

We experience the God of Love, the Ground of our Being, the Heart of All Things in many different ways and, as the people of God, we are called to live God's love in the world. I'm going to end with another quote from Steve Garnass-Holmes:

Stuff happens. Germs happen. Earthquakes happen.

Evil happens. People who hurt do awful things.

You know, don't you, God does do something about that.

God has sent you to heal, to do justice.

www.unfoldinglight.net

May we all be God's messengers of love in the world.