

This We Know: Promises for People of Faith & Doubt *God is with Us*

Job 19:23-27

June 9, 2024

Our second scripture lesson this morning is from the Book of Job. But first, some background.

Once upon a time, in the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job. You know the story. Even if you don't know the Bible well, you know this story. Along with the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, the animals, the ark, Job has made his way into our imaginations and deep into our collective consciousness. Job is even in our language. We speak of the suffering of Job, the patience of Job, the integrity or faithfulness of Job.

"Once upon a time," the story begins. And like all good stories, if you listen and pay attention, you begin to see yourself in the story. You know it's *your* story, our human story.

Job, who was a good and righteous man his whole life, a prosperous and generous man, a pious and God-fearing man, a family man, a man loved by God and all who knew him. Job is struck by a series of disasters, both natural—fire, wind, and water—and man-made. The result is that Job loses everything. All his adult children, dead. All his property and wealth, gone. And then he's inflicted with loathsome sores, from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. And to find relief, he sits on an ash heap, taking a scrap of pottery, and scrapes himself all over to no relief.

It's not just that Job suffers. It's that he suffers without cause. It's that this suffering never seems to end. It's just one unthinkable horror after another.

And so, in this way, Job's story is *our* story. We all feel that way, both individually (with cancer diagnoses, loss of a loved one, ending of relationships, the list can go on). We also feel that

way collectively—for example, the endless, nonstop cycle of violence in the middle east.

And yet amid such ceaseless suffering, Job also shows a resilience, a strength. He gives evidence of a faith in both what he says and what he does—evidence that is beautiful. Job points us to the faithfulness of God. He allows us to see, even in his suffering, God's endless presence.

And most famously, Job says, "I know that my Redeemer lives." He is sure that God is not his adversary, but his friend. God is on Job's side. God is with him.

And this too, is part of our story. *God is with us in all things.*

Listen now to Job 19:23-27.

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, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This summer we are talking about the promises for people of faith and doubt. And the Book of Job brings up all kinds of doubt, but also rich promises. Promises from the Bible that are solid. Promises to build a life upon. These promises do not depend on us, rather on the faithfulness of God. Job's integrity, his faithfulness, points to God's faithfulness.

You see it in his outbursts of anger, his fits of sarcasm, his words of piety. In those actions, we see that God *does* hear our cries. We see that God *does* answer. We see that God *is* with us even in the midst.

In the meantime, Job has his doubts, and boy does he give voice to them. He never stops pressing. His honesty and integrity will not allow him to stop. He keeps asking the hard questions. And Job's friends—they are no help at all. They blame Job for his suffering. *You must have done something wrong to deserve this. If not openly, then secretly. If not you, then someone in your family.* But Job stands firm on his integrity.

"How long will you torment me?" he asks his friends. "How long? You are breaking me in pieces with your words." Words are powerful. Think of that. *Breaking me into pieces with your words.*

The friends' condemnation of Job—they only grow in their heated and heartless anger. But Job's anger and outrage grows as well. The friends' pat answers are a way of distancing themselves from Job. Understandable. Job's suffering is terrifying. If this can happen to him, it can happen to anyone.

But Job knows that he is clear in God's eyes. He doesn't deserve this. This is wrong.

What if Job's friends had been able to be quiet and listen? Think about what it's like when you have something heavy on your heart, and all you hear from your friends are words? What if we could be quiet and listen to one another? What if we could allow someone the understanding that comes from simply being heard? No justification, no condemnation. Was it a warm feeling that came over you when you knew that you were understood? Friends, that is what Job is demanding.

He wants to be heard and understood. He is convinced of one thing: there is only one whose answer can be an answer, and that is God. Job wants to speak to God. He wants an answer. *I would like to speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God.* That's bold!

He tells his friends to be quiet so that he can speak to God, regardless of the outcome. *Let me have silence from you, and I will speak to God. And let come on me what may. See, God may kill me. I have no hope. But I will defend my ways to God.*

Job knows that God is present. But why won't God speak? To see God face to face is all that Job wants, even if it kills him. ("See God and die" is an old Biblical proverb.)

And then there is a moment of silence, and Job and his friends begin to hear the whirlwind, faintly. But soon it is upon them, and they cannot hear a thing. The whirlwind blows. God is in the whirlwind. The friends are gone, and Job is swept up.

God speaks: *Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? I will question you and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined the measurements? Surely you know. Or who stretched the line upon it? Or what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?*

Friends, God is just warming up here. He has a lot more to say. Four more chapters. But the question is: does God's answer *answer* Job? He's been asking: *why am I suffering so much without cause?* And all God does is point him to the impressive creation.

Has God been listening to Job? I think so. Listen to what God is saying, and remember it is God who says it. Then, like Job, you will see the glory of it all and the glory of God.

God gives examples to Job. The whale's sneezing flashing forth light into the sea, the rain falling, one example on top of another, from the dwelling place of light to the gates of death—all designed not to speak to Job's reason but to evoke his awe and wonder.

The glory of God is what answers Job's question. The glory of God. Next to the glory of God, there is nothing

else that matters. It is the beginning and the end. The fulfillment of all things. In the whirlwind, God gives himself to Job. He has an audience.

Job finally sees God. He knew that God was with him through it all, but now he sees. Job says, "Before I heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now I see you." Job has seen God. He has lived. And he will prosper.

It is a story, and like all good stories, if we listen and pay attention, you will begin to see yourself in Job's story. You know it's your story. You know that you want to cry out to God when you're in trouble. Friends, it's all of our stories. It's the human story.

So where do we, at Second Presbyterian Church, where do we see the glory of God? Where do we know beyond a shadow of doubt that God is with us?

In every sunrise and sunset. We see God in every bag of groceries that is shared at Northside Food Pantry. We see God in every anthem sung. In every prayer lifted. In every kind word spoken. In every hospital visit. In every meal that is shared or served.

We see that God listens and God speaks. We see that God is with us. We see that God shines in one another. May it be so. To God be the glory. Amen.