

“The Weaver”
Rev. Susan M. Prichard
October 11, 2009
Job selected verses

Once in a while, someone makes a request for a sermon on a particular subject. Today’s selections from Job came up in the lectionary cycle. To it, I am adding some more of the story that are appointed for the next two weeks.

Job is the main character, not the author of this work. Scholars disagree about it’s authorship—they don’t know if it was written by a single author or school of authors, or if it is a compilation of several works from different times. Most believe it was written between the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.

The theme of the righteous man who suffers because he is being tested by rival deities or divine beings is similar to other folklore of the ancient East. It is a collection of poems and prose dealing with the meaning of life and religions.

Listen for and hear God’s message to us in these selections this morning.
Job 1:1; 2:1-10; 3:3-4; 38:1-7, 34-41; 42: 1-2

First of all, I want to be very clear about the fact that I am NOT going to try to make the Book of Job make sense for everyone, nor am I setting out to defend God. The story of Job is filled with many twists and turns. It is frustrating and tiresome in spots. The story of Job has been used as an all purpose explanation of the nature of suffering, a primer about the ways of good and evil, and a study on the virtue of patience. Blaahh!!

Since the beginning of time, humans have tried to make sense out of things. We have mastered ways to quantify and qualify things. We are not content until every tiny bit of information is catalogued or diagramed. We invent larger and larger telescopes and microscopes so we can inspect each subatomic particle and plot each celestial sphere. We dig up old bones and dissect living tissue. We try to manipulate DNA and delve the recesses of the human mind. We build bigger and faster computers to hold all the data we can compile. But even with all our striving and all our trying, we cannot explain much of why things happen in our lives, nor can we begin to explain or understand the ways of God.

We think that if we can just put all of the bits of our world into some kind of scientific order—life will make sense. We rationalize that if we rule out all known variables—life will be predictable. We imagine that if we are perfect and do all that is expected of us (and more)—we will be able to earn enough brownie points to be rewarded with a blessed, problem-free life. We magically believe that if we pray hard enough, or do some kind of special activity—we will be safe from all tragedy, along with all those we love. We think that because the advertising industry has brain washed us to believe that if we have the right job, live in the right neighborhood, have the right friends and belong to the right organizations, drive the right car and use the right toothpaste and deodorant, our lives cannot go wrong.

Friends, this kind of thinking is not real and only brings us heartache when bad things do happen. There is no sacred formula; there is no special incantation; there is no guarantee or promise of a perfect life.

The writer of Job uses the powerful tools of poetry and story to begin to get at some of these complex issues that plague human existence. Religion has always tried to help answer some of these questions; or at least tried to provide comfort and support when there are no answers to the questions.

The biblical commentaries acknowledge the preaching dilemma regarding this work. Not only does the lectionary chop it up into little pieces over several weeks, but the entire book can take years of study to understand. “Dr. Carol Newsom, speaking at the 1995 Stetson Pastors School, suggested that the book of Job is about more than simply getting across a message that God is just or that God is unjust. This book, says Nelson, is about no less than the recreation of our moral world.”

One of the ways we construct our world is by the way we talk. (If you think this is not true—go home tonight and listen to the spin doctors explaining the politics of the state or federal budgets). The book of Job consists of rival ways of thinking and different moral imaginations that are created. Each “voice” of Job expresses a different moral world.

One of the most difficult jobs we face as Christians and as parents, is helping our children become moral beings. We struggle to teach them right from wrong. We teach them to share and to play fair. To live in a just society, we have to do all within our power to make life as fair as possible. But life is NOT fair. Life comes with no guarantees, no promises of safety or even sanity. Ask Jesus, the disciples, the saints, or most biblical characters about the experiences of their lives. None were perfect or trauma free. How or why do we believe our lives should be easy? Where does that notion come from? Which voice whispers those lies?

Friends, don’t take the story of Job literally—it will make you crazy. Take it figuratively, as poetry with deep truths and higher meaning—with exaggeration and hyperbole, with wisdom echoing down through the ages.

Just like Job, we’ve had our ‘so called friends’ pointing fingers. Just like Job, we had sunk to low points where we tried to put the blame for our troubles on anyone—even God. Just like Job, we weathered the storms and have come out on the other side where we’ve seen rainbows and been able to remember God’s promises.

Over the time that I’ve been here, I’ve shared with you several things that have helped me keep life in perspective. I’ve passed on some of the best bumper sticker theology I’ve seen on the roads as I commute from church to church. Three stick out as I ponder the lessons of Job. “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” But nearer to my heart and I’d venture to guess Peg Carlton and others who quilt is: “When life gives

you scraps, make quilts.” And without a doubt: “He who dies with the most toys wins—nothing”.

One of the hardest things for people of faith to accept is that we will never have all the answers to our questions this side of heaven. We have to be willing to live in the mystery that is God. My favorite author, Madeline L’Engle says: “Each of us has a point of view, but only God has view.” We, as limited human beings are only given a small glimpse of what is. We can only see life from our limited perspective. But God sees everything—visible and invisible. God sees the tapestry of all of creation in its entirety—in it’s splendor with its heights and depths, it’s texture and color. We only see the smaller patches in front of our eyes, often without a definable pattern. We often see the backside where God, the Weaver, moves around the various colored threads and hides the knots and imperfections.

This poem called The Weaver says it all:

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.

Oft times He weaveth sorrow
And I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the lower side.

Not til the loom is silent
And the shuttle ceases to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver’s skillful hand,
As the threads in gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares,
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives His very best to those
Who leave the choice with Him.
(author unknown)

We have to be willing to let God be God, and not just a benevolent Santa Claus who we continually ask for one favor after another with a sense of entitlement that comes not from faith but from fear. It is in the facing of life and all its trials that we become the people God calls us to be. Life molds our character, tests our integrity, and strengthens our resolve.

When we ask God for the things we want in life, sometimes God says No. Instead God gives us the things we need in life, like his presence—God’s very self. What better gift could the God of all bestow on us? May God continue to bless us as we struggle to understand his will for our lives.

Thanks be to God. Amen.