

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Job 1:1, 2:1-10

There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." Then Satan answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The story of Job, which is long—42 chapters long, is for some people a troubling story, leaving more questions than answers. There's no way the lessons found in Job can be learned through one sermon or one bible study. But this morning, we are going to take a look at a few lessons—perhaps, the most difficult lessons—that we can learn from Job.

As we begin to look at this story of Job, we might ask ourselves first, what do we know about this man named Job? We are told he lived in Uz. The location of Uz is not entirely certain; but it most likely refers to an area south of Israel, so he was likely not an Israelite. Also pointing to the possibility that Job was a foreigner is his name. It was not a name used in Israel, but whether Job was an Israelite, or a Gentile has no bearing on the story itself. We learn in the following opening verses that Job had everything he needed and much more. He was married and had children. All this information that we are given about Job, conveys to us that he was typical example of a kind of person.

The important fact was that he was a worshiper of Yahweh, the one true God of Israel. We are told that Job was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." These four qualities are actually two pairings of similar terms and are all very general moral and religious descriptors.

The first adjective describing Job, blameless, carries meanings of wholeness and is often times translated as "integrity." This term becomes central to the story as both God and Job's wife characterize him as one who "persists in his integrity." The first adjective describing Job in the second pairing, "one who fears God," is a second theme that is carried throughout this story. "Fearing God" is a traditional Hebrew term for respectful and unsentimental piety. This then is Job—it could also be you and me.

We know from the beginning of this story, that all is going well for Job; but that quickly changes one day. What happens is described to us in this way. God has a get-together with some

divine beings who follow him...and along with these divinities comes Satan. Before we move on with the story, it is important for us to consider who this “Satan” is. When we dig into the Hebrew word for Satan, we discover he is not the guy with horns and carrying a pitchfork, tempting us with evil in mind and creating havoc in our lives, which are the typically descriptors we think of when we think of Satan.

The Hebrew for Satan is “*hasatan*.” I’m not sure this is the actual pronunciation of the word in Hebrew. “*Ha*” is a prefix that means “the” which then identifies “*Satan*” as a common noun and not a proper name. “*The Satan*” whom we are introduced to here in Job should correctly be translated as “the adversary or the accuser. The actual name Satan doesn’t come to us until much later in New Testament Scriptures.

The stories about the Satan being kicked out of heaven by Michael did not develop until long after the time when Job was written. The author of Job understands the Satan to be a respected member of the heavenly council. This council is made up of powerful beings variously referred to as angels, sons of God, etc. Though they are superior to that of humans, it is clear that God is in charge. To read back into Job 1-2 the much later notions of Satan-the-devil is to seriously misunderstand the story of Job.”

“The Satan” in Job runs to and fro throughout the earth to see who is and who is not obeying God. When he finds someone, he brings this person to God’s attention. Before God, he “accuses” that person of disobedience. This is what we see playing out in these opening scenes of Job.

Job never speaks of the presence of an evil entity attacking him when bad things happen in his life, as we sometimes do when bad things happen to us. Because Job does not understand a Satan who inflicts pain and suffering on people, he does not wrestle with the Satan. That seems to be a good thing in my mind, because the Satan then, did not become the star of the show, giving him the power to distract Job from turning to the One whom he needed to trust—God.

Job solely wrestles with God, and he says as much in his response to his wife when she tells Job, after he lost everything, he should forget about his God. We too wrestle with God when we try to understand why he would allow bad things to happen to us, and we may feel challenged to turn our backs on God. Job’s story points us a different direction.

As the story goes at one of the meetings of God’s council, God is the one who initially calls attention of the goodness of Job to the accuser. The accuser’s snide response is that anyone can be blameless when they have everything they could ever want and when everything seems to be running perfectly well in their lives. He then challenges God to allow him to make things go awry in Job’s life. He is certain that this will change Job’s tune. God allows this with the exclusion of inflicting bodily harm on Job.

In the story of Job, we discover his suffering gets incredibly worse after another meeting of the heavenly hosts takes place and God boasts about the faithfulness of Job...—even after losing everything. The accuser, confronts God’s celebration of Job’s goodness by saying, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” We find, much to our surprise and disliking (if we are honest), that God agrees to allow Job to be inflicted with bodily harm, however Job’s life was to be spared.

Job suddenly finds himself overcome from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head with detestable and painful sores. In pain, he headed for the trash-heap, sat among the ashes and used a piece of broken pottery to scrape his sores. Job’s life, overnight, changed from one of

prosperity and comfort to one of great suffering and he did not know why. He has no knowledge of what took place in the heavenly courts. What are we to make of this?

One thing we learn is that bad things, without question, can and do happen to good people—people with outstanding integrity, like Job, and who do good things; people who are faithful and obedient to God, and whose lives point us to God; people who seem to have everything going for them. Yet, in a moment, their lives are turned upside down by unwelcome and undeserved suffering.

As New Testament people, we know from the lessons of Jesus that we are never promised a problem free life. Suffering will happen, even as it did in Jesus' life as he endured ridicule and harassment from many people in his day; and ultimately, as he suffered unimaginably and died on the cross. We will face adversity. It's a given, but we do not need to live in fear of it.

We also learn from Job, that in spite of his suffering, he refused to denounce God. We find that even while he was sitting among the ashes in pain, he worshiped God, seeking to keep his focus on God who he believed would get him through his suffering. While it is true that later in the story, Job complains to God with bitterness in his soul, however, even then, he never denounced God.

The question of "why?" often times arises when suffering overtakes our lives. The unsatisfying answer can sometimes be that the reason for our suffering remains unknown. It remains a mystery, not for us to ruminate on over and over and over again, allowing it to be as a whirlpool that sucks us down into a dark abyss. The obscurity to the answer of why, as the Gospel proclaims, necessitates our reliance on God and to put our trust in God. We are directed to put our attention on God's faithfulness to be with us and lead us through our suffering.

I believe that in our humanness is a weakness that insists on having the answers to our why questions. Unfortunately, our insistence for these answers, leaves an open door for continuing adversity in our lives. Our determination for answers is a reliance on our own humanity and not on God. This undeniably strong force to know why is not often overcome overnight, and it requires something beyond ourselves to help us persevere without answers. God provides the Holy Spirit to us for perseverance and as a weapon to defeat our demand for answers. It is never easy, but the alternative is to live on the ash heap in misery for the rest of our lives.

Job never did get the answers and reasons for his suffering, but he did remain faithful to God. It was not without struggle, and his total honesty with God, as we discover in later chapters of the book of Job, but in the end, he was released from his suffering and the power it had on his emotions. His life, although different then before his suffering, did return to a prosperous and good life.

I came across this simple illustration about our response to suffering. You may explain to a child all the medical reasons why he must have a shot in the arm, but when the nurse gets ready to plunge that needle into his arm, he runs to Mommy. Comfort comes not in always knowing the reason, but in knowing the comforter. Brothers and sisters, when we find ourselves suffering and wondering why, may we run in faithfulness to God. Amen.