

Jordan Station United Church

October 3, 2021

Worldwide Communion

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "Why me? Why not me? Taking the good with the bad!"

(Job 1:1, 2:1-10)

There once was a man name Job... This week's tale starts with a stark claim: "That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 1:1). In the very first line we, the readers, learn a great deal about the hero of the story. He is above all an absolutely righteous man, characterized as the epitome of what it means to be superbly and appropriately religious in his time. He is, "perfectly upright," meaning "blameless" and "upright" in the sense of "standing straight in the truth." When one looks at such a person, one sees a model to be emulated in every way. And then the model is more closely described as one "who fears God." This was the very origin of right and wise for those living in ancient Israel. One who "turns away from evil," is a person who rejects and avoids any wrong doing that might cause questions about your religious character.

Here is the most important thing to learn from this prologue: Job is magnificently righteous and therefore completely innocent of any deeds that could possibly elicit the horrors he is about to endure. The author announces here that the supposed connection between human evil and divine punishment must be rethought; Job will not find himself on an ash heap because he somehow deserves it. Plainly, the universe does not operate in that way at all.

Yet, he does end up on the trash dump of the city. In four devastating blows he loses everything: his livestock are gone, servants are gone, means of transport, gone and children gone. Job's reply is famous: "Naked I came forth from the belly of my mother, and naked I will return there. YHWH has given and YHWH has taken; may the name of YHWH be a blessing" (1:21). In the face of calamity, Job utters an astonishing statement of piety. Hence, the moniker for the book, the "patience of Job." Yet, it does not last. After further catastrophes deprive Job of his health, leaving him only with a smelly robe and a broken piece of pottery with which he may scrape his foul sores, his wife urges him to get it over with and "curse God and die" (2:9). Even though the Hebrew text actually reads "bless God and die" (perhaps a pious copyist could not bear to place the words "curse" and "God" in such

close proximity), it seems clear that Mrs. Job's intent is for her husband to make it stop. It has become a life she can no longer bear to witness. His wife is thereby not a bad person; she merely can no longer stand to watch the man she loves suffer so cruelly.

But he disagrees with her and calls her a "foolish woman." And rather than answer her demand for him to curse God with a powerful statement as he did at the end of the first chapter, he now asks a question, and it is that question that will lead us into the heart of the poem. "Shall we receive the good from God and not receive the evil?" This is also the question of the remainder of the book. Why me? or why not me?

I was fortunate enough to get a God-minder this week. It's like a reminder except given as a blessing from God. I was heading out for a change of scenery after getting stuck right here in writing this sermon. I wanted a story. An in the moment, right now 2021 example of what the bible is talking about. I only had to open the front door to be struck with relevance and a reminder of something that happened years ago. As I was driving down the road, I saw a young boy delivery newspapers. And suddenly I was transformed back 10 years and was reminded of this story. I looked across the street and saw my paper boy delivering the Burlington Post. He was in fact a man, not a boy. He has both physical and mental challenges including being deaf. As always, one of his parents was watching from a short distance away. This time it was his father, urging him on, offering direction to ensure the paper is placed just so in the mailbox and no doubt looking out for his safety. On this particular day, it was collection day. The day to pay our \$6 monthly fee which was of course optional but it was the way in which the carriers got paid. As he approached the door, I was welcomed with the same wonderful smile that I got every time I used his name and said hello. I stretched out the money and he reached for it and then held my hands for a moment, looked into my eyes and said thank you. I smiled and said you are welcome. In that moment, I was struck by how fearless he is. His Dad thanked me for coming to him and for knowing him. Not just for knowing his name but for taking the time to know him. I was struck in this God-minder moment that here was a young man, very much afflicted like Job. A man who suffers and struggles to do the simple tasks they we don't even take for granted because they are so insignificant. I was happy in that moment because I knew that this was a man and a father who weren't in the why me camp...complaining about how hard life is. They were in the why not me category. Embracing the joy that comes with life regardless of the struggles.

I no longer found myself questioning if God is author of all, good and evil, just what sort of God is it that brings suffering to Job or my paper man? Job's so-called friends in this story, believe that God is author of all, and as such, is punishing Job for some foul thing he has done. Good people, they say, do not end up on ash heaps with foul diseases. But we the readers know what they do not; Job is not on the heap due to some supposed evil deed. To the contrary, he is the most righteous man we know and a beloved child of God.

The book of Job is an incredible journey of richness and poetry. It is a text full of the wonders of God and the meaning of life. Unfortunately, that will have to be saved for another day and another sermon. If you want to know what happens crack open the book and find out how it ends. You won't be disappointed; it is an amazing story.

It is my prayer for this week that we might embrace the why not me that God is offering each one of us. That we won't judge why we are challenged or why our lives may be difficult. But that we might embrace the suffering knowing that God will hold us in our despair until such time as we can understand what it all means.

Thanks be to God, Amen