

## “Why Did It Have To Be Job?”

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Job 1:1, 2:1-10

I have always had issues with the story of Job and I groaned when I saw that this was the first reading in the lectionary. But even after reading the rest of the scriptures for today, Job is sitting there, center stage. I could talk about Jesus blessing the children, that the Psalm reading makes me think about Earth Day, but no; there's Job. So, after watching the video from the Bible Project on Esther last Sunday and struggling to figure out why Job was sitting there, I read more of Job's story and watched the Bible Project's take on Job.

Job is one of the three books of the Old Testament that are called the books of wisdom. These are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. Proverbs says that God is wise and just and people get what they deserve. Ecclesiastes says, not so fast; life isn't always fair and you don't always get what you deserve. Job explores the question Is God Wise and Just? The main characters are God, Satan and Job. Satan is called the “designated accuser” or the chief questioner of how God has ordered the universe. He is the actual Devil's Advocate!

Satan responds to God's boasting about Job by saying that Job is only good and obedient because God has molycoddled him and given him every blessing imaginable and challenges God that if those blessings were taken away, that Job would curse God; that basically Job's faith is only skin deep. God disagrees and gives permission for all Job has to be taken away. When Job loses all his possessions and children he does not curse God as Satan said would happen, so there's more needed. Satan again tells God that things didn't go quite far enough, that Job would curse God to save his own life. God gives Satan permission to inflict illness but not death on Job.

The next twenty-seven chapters of Job are a back and forth between Job and four of Job's friends. They basically tell him that he must have done something to deserve all this and he needs to confess his sins so God can restore him. Job adamantly defends his innocence and says he can't confess to something he hasn't done. This continues for a while and Job falls into self-pity saying he wishes he were never born and begs for his life to end. Then Job gets bitter and he

questions God about why this has happened and mounts a defense of himself as an innocent man. God comes to Job and demands to know why Job has the nerve to question God and lays out all that God has done and created and continues to do and create. Job is put in his place and agrees that he knows nothing compared to God's wisdom and he falls down and worships God.

My initial problem with Job is that it's like God and Satan are having this contest and Job is the bone between the big dogs growling at each other to show mastery over each other. The bone, or Job, in this instance is the one that pays for the difficulty when all he did was be humble and true before God. As I thought about this further I realized that my issue isn't with Job, but with God. I'm sure I do not want a God that allows Satan to nearly destroy someone, anyone, especially me to prove a point. God gives Satan permission to do anything short of killing Job in this contest of wills. Job loses everything; his family, his fortune, his health.....his friends mock him for being true to the God who has in many ways betrayed him. How can this be?

But what really struck me was realizing that I do not want to be in Job's shoes. I'm sure I do not want to lose my loved ones, my possessions, my health as a test of whether or not I would continue to praise and bless God. I looked inside myself and I could not see me sitting on the pile of ashes in rags and covered in sores after losing all I hold dear and praising God. I'm not even sure that it would take that much extremity for me to turn bitter and question why God was punishing me. It made me feel small and ashamed and terribly human.

And the kicker of it all is that Job never knows how it all began. God never explains and Job is restored. His health returns, his wealth is doubled, and he has more children and he lived happily ever after for another 140 years.

This all very unsatisfying. Children are replaced like possessions. I don't like it.

The Bible project sums the book of Job up by saying that the loss of all Job had was not a punishment and the restoration of all Job had was not a reward and I say the lesson is bad things happen to good people. And where is the Good News in all of this? The trouble with basing a sermon on the Old Testament reading is that you have to dig for the Good News.

Nowhere in Job does it say that God didn't love Job. I believe that God loved Job so much that God took Job on a mind-blowing journey through God's universe and shared so much with Job that Job was gobsmacked and landed on his face in complete and total awe. I don't know how

Job even was able to get back up on his feet after God showed him all of everything. It also doesn't say that Job's faith was restored because through it all, Job never lost his faith. He questioned and wanted to know why, but he never turned his face away from God. How many of us can say the same? Because bad things happen to good people and we have no understanding of why that is. The simplest thing to believe is that those people must have done something wrong and we are like Job's friends saying or thinking that they must have deserved this calamity that has befallen them. But the love of God doesn't work that way; at least not the way I believe the love of God works. It must be comforting in some way to feel that a flood happened because people living there "weren't right with God" because blaming the other is such a human condition.

The truth is, God allows us to make choices and so many times we make the wrong ones and have to live with the events that flow from those wrong choices. The Good News is that we can turn to God in all our wrongness and God loves us no matter what. We don't have to make daily sacrifices in case we might sin that day to ward off God's anger. Jesus came to show us that God loves us despite all our flaws, all our humanness. I am still sure I don't want to be in Job's shoes, but now it's for a different reason. Not because I live in fear of all that I have being taken away and being left in rags and covered in sores, but because I'm not sure I could survive the journey at end of the story that Job and God take together. And that is what makes me feel small and human. But not ashamed. I'm not ashamed because I know that there is so much out there that I don't understand and it's not my place to understand it all. I just know that God loved Job, God loves me and God loves you. And that's really all we need to know; and that my friends, is the Good News. Amen