

February 25, 2024 -- The 2nd Sunday in Lent
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Job 1:13-22

¹³ One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. All who do his precepts have good Understanding." (Psalm 111:10)

Praise God Even When the World Crashes In

Ever just have "one of those days"? When nothing seems to go right? The flashing light on the dash says "tire pressure sending unit." You take it to the shop and the light is off. Ten minutes after you leave the shop it comes back on! Or the dog throws up in the house! Why does she always do that on the carpet rather than on a non-carpeted area? Why can't the children learn to take off their wet, muddy shoes by the door, no matter how many times I have asked?

Maybe your day-to-day environment doesn't look exactly like that, but you know the feeling. We've all had days where one thing after another goes wrong and begins to fill your well of frustration. And what happens when that continues to happen? Eventually you can blow your top, right? Something might happen that day, maybe something very small that sends you over the edge— the straw that breaks the camel's back.

But a lot of time our troubles are not as little and overall insignificant as the examples given. Sometimes the things that pile on our plate are massive—a worst-case-scenario diagnosis from a doctor, unexpected bills that simply must go unpaid, strife or other hardship within our families. Those are the things that can lead us to begin to ask, "Why, God? Why me?" And the answer to those questions is not always very apparent.

How about that day in Job's life which our text tells us about. I read that in 2011 someone did an estimate of what that day cost Job – in excess of \$50 million. And then the heartache of the sudden, tragic death of his ten children and all but three of his servants.

As we see Job go through what might be one of the worst days that could happen to a person, we can learn a valuable lesson by the way he handles himself. We take God seriously at his promises and his power and we trust his wisdom as we bear the crosses he allows for us patiently. But especially notice Job's reaction in

verses 20 & 21. Our text says, ²⁰ *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship* ²¹ *and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."*

Job shows us that it is okay to grieve over loss. That's what he was expressing by tearing his robe and shaving his head. What grief pours out from his heart as he laments his losses! Our Savior himself wept as the grave of Lazarus. He felt the pain of Mary and Martha and expressed that with his tears. When your world crashed in it's okay to express your grief, at the same time remembering the Lord's promises of compassion and care.

The big lie that the sinful nature (and even the world) likes to tell is that if we're Christians, if God really loved us, our life should just be happy all the time. There should never be a moment's worry over health, or finances, or relationships. If God really wanted to show how much he cares for us, then he should provide the things and events for our life that make us truly happy.

Of course, we see that clearly *not* happening to Job—a man whose trust was so strong and God's love for him was so great that God even bragged about him! Instead, we see playing out what Jesus said would happen in our Gospel for this morning: **"If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).** "Bearing crosses" doesn't sound like fun. "Bearing crosses" connects us directly to crucifixion, one of those most horrendous forms of execution ever concocted by mankind. "Bearing crosses" means that life might go well some days, but others are going to be terrible.

Job bore some serious crosses. In the span of mere minutes, he got word that all of his worldly possessions were gone and his children had all died. Imagine getting a bunch of rapid fire text messages or phone calls telling you that you were fired from your job, someone stole your identity and drained your bank accounts, the stock market crashed and your retirement accounts were at zero, and your children's school had burned down and they were all confirmed dead. Would we react like Job? I'd like to think so, but at least for myself, I'm not so sure.

We as sinful human beings, when we're faced with difficult situations, we like to look for someone to blame. Sometimes we blame ourselves, trying to tie some hardship into something bad we did or something good that we failed to do. We can start to think that God is some sort of trading post, where we trade in the good things that we do for blessings and trade in the bad things that we do for trouble. It is true that trouble is sometimes an unavoidable consequence of sin. If I drive while intoxicated and hurt someone while I do that, there will be consequences for that action that won't be especially happy or fun. But that's not the way God always operates—in fact, it's probably the exception rather than the rule.

But then that leads us to start looking for another scapegoat for our trouble. The next likely target for our accusations is often, frighteningly enough, God himself. We look to blame God for troubles in our life or at least blame him for not swooping in and rescuing us the moment we thought he should. Even the very natural-sounding question that we asked a few minutes ago, "Why, God? Why me?" is blaming God. It's demanding from God rationale and reasoning for what he's done to us. It's saying, "Why would you be so mean to me? Why do you hate me?"

We know that God does not hate us, and yet trouble is still our constant companion. As soon as one cross is lifted off our back, it seems like another one (or two) are put in its place. What possible reason could God have for allowing hardship to come into our lives? In our second lesson this morning, the apostle Paul gives us one reason for the hardship in our lives. He said, **"we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, 4 and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. 5 And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).** Suffering, in the long run makes us stronger.

We might think that's a pretty miserable way to get stronger, but sometimes God deems it the best way. When you do something for the first time, it's always a little bit scary, isn't it? Maybe a new job, or a school event, or something else. But after you've done it a couple of times, you learn the ropes, you know what to expect, you know how everything works, and it becomes much more comfortable.

The same is true of suffering. Think of a time in the past when you had to go through some type of suffering or hardship in life. Undoubtedly, it was scary and left you feeling a bit empty and alone. But what happened? God saw you through it. And maybe to this day you don't know why it happened, you don't know exactly what good resulted from it, but you know that God did not give up on you through it. Having that in your past instills endurance, confidence, and certain hope that God will continue to carry you through anything else that comes your way. The God who loves you did not abandon you then, will not abandon you now, and will never abandon you in the future.

And that, perhaps, leads us to the most important aspect of suffering in this life. There is suffering, grief, and pain in this world because of sin. Sometimes God allows suffering in our lives to remind us just how horrendous this life is and reminds us of what is to come. That was why Job could say, **"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be blessed."** He had lost everything he had in this world, but he knew that this world was not all that he had to look forward to. Job's story continues beyond our lesson, his story gets much worse and he wavers at times under the horrendous council of terrible friends and family, but a high point comes in **chapter 19** when he boldly proclaimed with the eyes of faith: **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25–27)**. Job saw past his suffering, past his sin, and to the triumph of his Savior and his own resurrection from the dead as a result.

That is the same conclusion that Paul got to in our Second Lesson. Where as our sinful mind can interpret suffering in our life as God hating us, Paul reminds us of why we know that it is absolutely and always false: **For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7It is rare indeed that someone will die for a righteous person. Perhaps someone might actually go so far as to die for a person who has been good to him. 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)**.

How do you know God loves you? It's not the reliability of your car, the size of your home, or the health of your body. You know that God loves you because Jesus sacrificed his very life to save you from your sins. That means, every time you've blamed God for trouble or accused him of treating you wrongly either in your heart or in your words, those sins are gone. Every time you've shunned the suffering that he allows to come into your lives and tried to throw off the crosses that he, in love, places on you to bear—for those times Jesus died.

Suffering, then, serves us by not allowing us to focus all our attention on this dreadful, sin-stained life here, but to stay focused on and eagerly look forward to the perfect eternal life that God has given to us. Even utter calamity like Job faced cannot rob us of heaven. Even the more horrendous pain and turmoil we can imagine will not change God's love for us.

This trust in the Lord, this acceptance of the course of life on which he directs us, this focus on the cross of Christ and the glory of heaven – That's all worshipping God even when your world is crashing in!

So, when suffering rears its ugly head, lean on your God who loves you. Lean on the God who has rescued you. Bear those crosses with patient trust knowing with certainty that God actually has your best eternal interests in mind with that suffering and will bring you out of it, likely in this life, but ultimately in the perfection of eternal life. In this life, the Lord may give and he may take away. But today and always, may the name of the Lord be praised! Amen.