

## **Job 23: 1-17**

Oct 14, 2012

Let's hear the words of Job once more.

As background: this is a poem, about one of the mysteries of life. Why do the innocent suffer? Why does suffering exist at all, and if God is good, then why?

These questions have been at the centre of any thinking community's life since we were able to think. The author of this poem knows what it is to suffer as an individual And as a community, a nation. What do we say to that question? That's what the book of Job is designed to encourage. Asking the question again.

And what I like about it is that it doesn't try for easy answers. In the end Job says, basically "I have no idea why. I CAN make a choice about what I do in the midst of it, and I choose to praise God anyway".

The story is essentially this: Job is a good man. A God fearing man. A series of horrible things happens to him. He loses almost everything including his health, his children, his livelihood.

His friends come along and give him all the standard lines people give...perhaps you've heard some of them?

"God never gives us more than we can handle" "God is trying to teach you a lesson"  
"It must be something you've done"

Job rejects all of that. He also rejects his wife's desperate plea: "Curse God and die" she says. (I'd love to hear her side of this someday....I wonder what she'd say if she could tell her story?)

Job says no to all those things. No to the easy answers. No to cursing God. Keeps looking for God And it's here we find him....in despair because God is nowhere to be found.

READ 23: 1-9

I will not try to be Job's friend to you this morning, pretending I have some wisdom you have not. The truth is there ARE times when try as we might God is not to be found. Those times seem to be part of what it is to be human; to live on this side of the dream of God.

What we do in the midst is the question.

We're funny creatures, we humans, don't you find? We know suffering happens. We know that it happens randomly, it is no respecter of persons or anything else. And yet we keep being surprised by it when it comes close.

I had a conversation with a teenager not long ago. Her friend was going through something awful, and she came to me to talk. "I'm losing my faith" she said. And when we talked some more, she was able to say aloud that what she meant by that was that .. She prayed that her friend's troubles would end - they did not And she concluded that her faith was of no use to her.

That disturbs me at a number of levels. One, how close to my own reactions that can be  
But I asked myself – what have we taught that young girl, who has been a church person for all her life  
What have we taught her? That faith means nothing bad will ever happen to you? That praying is like  
putting a loonie in a coke machine...you put in the coin you get out what you select?

Is this what we've taught her in words or actions? That life will always be fair? That if you are a faithful  
person nothing bad will happen? Or if it does, it means something is wrong with you or with the faith?  
Here is a young woman who wants to follow Jesus in ways of justice and peace. She has told me that  
more than once. And yet – when something bad happens, she concludes there is something wrong with  
her, with the faith she once embraced....

And the truth is, this is not uncommon, in teens and in adults.

And yet we are the ones who follow and are named by, claimed by  
The man who was nailed to a cross.

This is the very symbol of our faith – we live in the shadow of the cross  
And we of all people should not be surprised when bad things happen to good people – this is the core  
of our faith. We live in the shadow of the cross where there is sometimes, often – silence  
And sometimes – often – a cry of “my God my God why have you forsaken me”

My question this morning is HOW we live there – with the sound and the silence of suffering  
I've been reading this week, groping for what to say to these things. Here are some things I learned:  
The prophet Jeremiah after being ridiculed by a crowd for preaching God's word, said in complete  
disgust: “I will not make mention of God, nor speak any more that name”. Job's wife as you know, after  
losing all 7 of her children and all her property to bandits and a tornado, turned to her ailing husband  
and said “curse God and die”.

Jesus on the cross says “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”

Recurring moments of doubt and despair are part of a life of faith. If Abe Lincoln were alive today, they  
say that many of his biographers suspect that he would be diagnosed as bipolar. He suffered more than  
one emotional breakdown and he has been described by some who knew him as one of the most  
depressed persons they had ever seen.

Martin Luther King Jr displayed signs of manic depression, including long lapses of despondency and  
attempted suicide in his younger years. Mother Teresa herself was apparently a portrait of self-  
contradiction, as her letter to a confidant reveals: “Jesus has a very special love for you. As for me, the  
silence and the emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear”.

All I can say is that we are all broken people, and we live together in the pain and the glory of what it is  
to be human.

And we stand here with each other.....my experience (and I can't claim to have been in the depths that  
some of you experience) but my experience is that sometimes I want to cocoon and withdraw

But when I come HERE in my pain, force myself to at times,

When I come here – to church – to my family of faith - what I find is - whether or not you are aware of the pain in me

I can stand here with you and when I cannot hear the voice that once called my name, I can hear you sing. And that for a time will be enough.

You can sing the words I cannot sing at that moment And you can pray for me when I cannot pray

And you will be my voice until I can speak once more.

I can be here where the very walls stand in witness to the fact that my pain is not the end. The art, the candle, the children, the very building testify to the gold that will come forth once again.

Let us be gentle with each other

And who knows what the person sitting next to you is going through?

Let us be gentle

And let us stand together in abiding astonishment

That pain, though real, is not the end

And that all of life is held in the hands and heart of a creator who is wholly mystery and holy love.