

FOR DEEPER THOUGHT

The Bible is filled with expressions of human unhappiness. The Bible is filled with voices crying out to God: Why? How? Where are you? What are you thinking? Many of those voices are heard in the psalms, the songbook and prayerbook of the Jewish people, and most particularly in the specific psalms of lament. There's even a book in the OT entitled Lamentations. Other laments are heard in the voices of the prophets, and in the words of Jesus himself. As he dies upon the cross, he calls out in agony, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* the words of the first verse of Psalm 22. His words echo the lament of human beings for centuries before him. Where are you, God? Why have you abandoned me?

- Discuss a time when you felt these feelings. What did God cost you? Where were your friends?

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."

We are used to hearing those words sung – "I know that my redeemer liveth" – in the context of Handel's Messiah, which we sometimes hear at Christmas, and sometimes at Easter, and sometimes at funerals. But do we know that they come from Job? From the broken, hurt, bewildered Job, who has lost almost all and is set upon by comfortless comforters, but is insistent upon God's faithfulness?

The silence of God – it's very silent, indeed. And it's difficult for us to interpret. We are people of story, of narrative, of proclamation, of conversation – people of a multitude of words. We know, from the first verses of Genesis, that God spoke creation into being. We know, from the first verses of the Gospel of John, that Jesus is The Word – God spoken and speaking into humanity. And we know, when we, like Job, experience that vast silence in which God resides seems to reside in times of trial, that we, too, long to know that God is there. We long to know that God witnesses our suffering and hears the protestations we are called to utter. Job cannot find or see or hear God, but he remains undeterred.

- What is the great grace, the great gift of God, reflected in Job's words?

That he longs for God. That his hope in God, that his belief in God's care for him, persist. That he is certain that the silence of God is not the last thing that he will hear.

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JOB: *The Struggle for Truth*



St. Lucas United Church of Christ
St. Louis, MO

SYNOPSIS

When we left Job last week, he was huddled on his heap of ashes, the very picture of misery. His crops, his animals, his servants, his children – all had been taken from him as the Satan, the member of God’s heavenly court whom we identified as the Accuser, sought to demonstrate that, given enough provocation, Job would turn from God. Job hasn’t done that. As we watched, he muttered words which no doubt some of us have repeated. “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.” “Shall we accept the good and not the bad from the Lord?” “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” Phrases which have caused people for centuries to refer to “the patience of Job.” Is that enough? Is it enough to talk about God in times of trouble, to offer the teachings of faith in the face of catastrophe?

Today, we’ll hear one answer to that question and, as you might have imagined, it’s a resounding “No!” Job’s patience is at an end. Job is finished with platitudes. Job is finished pretending that what’s happened to him is in any way acceptable, or even tolerable. The pious, willing-to-bear-all-without -argument Job – he’s gone.

Two things have happened to Job in between last week’s reading and this week’s.

First, “Job’s friends,” have you ever heard that phrase? Have you encountered any of them? At first, Job’s friends are reduced to silence by the enormity and gravity of his plight. So much loss! They step away, and wait in silence, accompanying him in that manner which is so often the best of all – a quiet, sharing of grief, a stunned stillness of wonder that so very much can go wrong. But then they get restless. They, like us, believe life should be just, life should be fair. In our presumptive ideal world, bad things do not happen to good people. And so they begin to accuse Job: “You must have done something wrong. You must have made some terrible mistakes. You must have engaged in evils about which we do not know.” Job must have deserved what has happened to him.

Second, Job has begun to speak of his anguish and frustration with honesty. Job has begun, even, to speak to God. His so-called friends? Those he describes as “miserable comforters with windy words.” But God? God he wants to hear from.

CAST

God	Yahweh
Satan	The Accuser
Job	A Good Man
Elihu	Self-Described Answerer
Job’s Wife	Unnamed, Non-supportive
Job’s 3 Friends	Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar

SCENES

ACT 1: OCT 6-7Job 1:1, 2:1-10.....The Test

ACT 2: OCT 13-14.....Job 23:1-9,16-17....With Friends Like These

ACT 3: OCT 20-21 ... Job 38:1-7 (34-41).....

ACT 4: OCT 27-28 .. Job 42:1-6, 10-17.....

SUMMARY FOR ACT TWO

Job sits on an ash heap, bereft of children and wealth, covered by painful sores and surrounded by three “friends” who tell him that it’s all his fault.

In a way, a lot has transpired between last week’s reading and this one. In another way, nothing much has changed. Job is still on the ash heap. The companions who sat in silence with Job for seven days (2:13) now can’t seem to get it through their thick heads that silence was the way to go. They have accused him of terrible things (chapter 22), their worldview threatened by his inexplicable suffering. They believe, after all, that suffering is always the result of sin, and so they try to find some hidden sin in this innocent man to protect themselves from the threat of the chaos that has engulfed him.

Through it all, Job holds to his integrity. He knows that he has done nothing to deserve this suffering: *“Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days”* (27:5-6). Suffering is not always the result of sin, claims Job, a radical assertion in his day, and an important one to affirm even today.