

“*God is not angry.*”

The book of Job came to us from a culture that was taught to believe that the gods basically controlled everything. Furthermore, they were taught that if a person was good, the gods would reward them; but if they were evil, the gods would punish them. Bible scholars label this system of thought the deuteronomic theodicy.

Now, on the other side of that same coin, was the assumption that, if a person seemed to be enjoying good health, a large family, and success in their business, it must be because they were good people, and the gods were rewarding them. On the other hand, if a person suffered from poor health, had no family, and was a failure in business, it must be because they were bad people, and the gods were punishing them.

That’s what the culture, that gave us the book of Job, *believed*. However, what they often *experienced* in their own lives, and witnessed with their own eyes, was that there were a lot of good people who weren’t doing so well, and a lot of bad people who were doing really well. In other words — and to put it in modern terms —

what they learned in church about the way life works, didn't match up with life as they saw it. And that was a problem.

And so, to try to resolve that disconnect between what they had been taught to believe by their religious leaders, and what they experienced as individuals, the book of Job came about as a way to enable a conversation about expectations versus reality.

I imagine that most of us, at some point in our lives, have been taught — and by people we trusted and respected — that if we did all the right things, that life would turn out well for us. But I also imagine that most of us have learned that it “ain't necessarily so.” Therefore, the book of Job may have something to say to us as well, as we have our own conversations about our own expectations versus our own experiences.

So, let's talk a bit about Job. In chapter 1 of the book, Job is described — *by God* — thus:

“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8).

That's an outstanding reference. I mean, when *God* brags about you, that's really something. And in that ancient culture, you'd expect that Job would be a really successful man. And he was. This is how his success was measured:

“There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that [Job was considered] the greatest of all the people of the east” (Job 1:2-3).

But suddenly — and we're still in the first chapter, mind you — Job's perfect life comes completely apart. This is how it was described:

One day ... a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.”

While he was still speaking, another came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you” (Job 1:13-19).

Wow! And if that’s not bad enough, at the beginning of chapter two, Job himself becomes afflicted with “loathsome sores ... from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.” And that’s how this good man, Job, loses everything.

And then, for the next 36 chapters there is this extended conversation between Job and his three closest friends. Each of those friends takes a turn at trying to persuade Job that he has obviously sinned, and is being punished justly by God. But throughout the conversation, Job maintains his innocence. And finally, Job demands a hearing with God himself, and demands that God answer for all of the misfortune that Job has suffered.

And that brings us to today's reading from Job. And God's initial response is hardly satisfying, and actually seems to be devoid of any empathy. But I'll have more to say about Job, and about how things work out for him next week.

But for now, I want to draw your attention to something that Job says, in the middle of his long conversation with his three friends. Now, remember, his friends have been telling Job that he's a sinner, and that all of the loss he has suffered has been a just consequence, administered by God, for all of his sinfulness.

But Job resists that notion, and insists that God is not like that. And that's when Job says something that we repeat at the beginning of all of our burial services, which is why it may sound familiar. Job says

“As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body I shall see God. I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger”
(Job 19:25-27).

I think that’s lovely! But it also gives us insight into why Job refuses to blame God for all of his misfortunes: It’s because Job, in his relationship with God, sees God as his friend. And friends don’t do things like that. And yet, Job still doesn’t know why he has suffered through so much loss and heartache. But this he does know: the theological worldview he once held — that the good are rewarded, and the evil are punished — no longer holds any water. And so, Job begins a new spiritual journey in search of new information, and a new understanding, of his relationship with God, and of his place in the world.

Now, I mention all this, because probably everyone here has suffered in some form or fashion. Whether it’s been the loss of family members, or friends, or coworkers; or the loss of property or possessions; or even the loss of personal health; we’ve all experienced it. And, like Job, maybe we had friends who thought they had a

rational explanation for why we experienced that loss, but those explanations just didn't seem to work. And so, like Job, we too have been on a spiritual journey, seeking knowledge and understanding, and hoping for some resolution and assurance.

Here's the thing: that spiritual journey begins in a relationship with God; a relationship that is nurtured by prayer and worship. And that spiritual journey begins in a community of like-minded believers, who provide opportunities for prayer and worship, and who provide the resources to grow your knowledge and understanding of God; to help you realize what God wants for you, and what God hopes for you, and where God wants to lead you.

Two weeks ago in my sermon, I told you that the annual stewardship campaign at St. Andrew's is all about creating and sustaining a very special kind of community; the kind we have here.

Last week, in his sermon on the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man, Fr. Jeff said that our stewardship campaigns remind us that the only thing worthy of our faith and trust ... is *God*, and *not* any wealth or possessions we might have. And that the challenge is for us to so orient our lives that we cease to be known by

what we possess; but rather; that we become people who are known by who possesses us, God.

Today, I want to remind you that our annual stewardship campaign is about enabling St. Andrew's Church to be a place where we can encounter God, and learn about God, and grow in our "knowledge and love of God."

And in order for these three things, that I've just mentioned, to take place, we must have your commitment of time, talents, and treasure. It's the *only* way to ensure that St. Andrew's Church can continue to be what it's always been for whomever comes through our doors.

And so, I'll end my sermon by asking you the only thing I can ask at times like this: Please be in prayerful consideration about how you will help to support the mission and ministry of our beloved church.

Amen.