

“Title of Sermon.”

As I mentioned last week, the book of Job came to us out of a culture that had been taught to believe that God rewards good people, and punishes bad people. And, therefore, should you see someone whose life is going well, you can be confident that they are good people, because their success is obviously God’s reward. But also, should you see someone whose life is going poorly, you can be equally confident that they are bad people, because their lack of success was God’s punishment.

So, that’s what they were taught to believe. But what they actually experienced was something usually quite different. Because what they experienced — and what they frequently saw — were good people having a tough go at life, and bad people doing very well for themselves.

And so, the book of Job was created to be this tool that could facilitate a conversation about the difference between what they had been taught to believe, and what they actually observed; a conversation about the true nature and character of God.

This morning, I want to touch on three things that Job learned from his truly unfortunate experiences. And the first thing that Job learned, is the importance of having (if you will) primary sources of information about God.

As our reading from Job began, God has concluded his “defense,” and it’s Job’s turn to reply to God. In that reply, Job says this cryptic thing to God:

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5).

What this essentially means is that, up until that very moment, whatever Job *thought* he knew about God, was based entirely on what *other people* were telling him. That’s what “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear” means. But now, in the 42nd chapter of the book that bears his name, Job has had this face-to-face conversation with God; now, has been getting his information about God . . . *from God!* — hence, “But now my eye sees you.”

And so, the first lesson that Job has taken away from his little tete-a-tete with God, is that when you base your notions of God

entirely on what others are telling you, it's easy to get bad information, or at the very least incomplete information. In other words, if you want to know what God is like, you might think about having a little talk, or a little walk, with God *yourself*.

And that turns out to be pretty good advice for us as well. Because there are a lot of descriptions of God floating about these days that are — at least to my mind — just plain nuts! For example, that hurricanes or tornadoes are God's punishment for something that's taking place in society. Crazy, right? But here's the thing: Sometimes, even the nuttiest descriptions of God are often being touted by the most serious and pious of people. Good people. And while I can admire the seriousness of their efforts to truly know God, some days I just want to say to them: "Please . . . stop . . . talking! You're not helping matters."

However, maybe the intensity of my reaction to them, is because I see a little bit of myself in them. Because I am only too aware of the fact that the God I worship in the sixty-first year of my life, is, in some ways, *vastly* different from the God I worshiped in my thirteenth year, when I started taking my Christian obligations seriously. And I'm entirely open to the

possibility that the God I will be worshiping in my eighty-first year of life, might very well be different from the God I know and worship now. And I think that's because I have finally come to really appreciate something that St. Paul once wrote: That "now I know only in part; then I will know fully" (1 Corinthians 13:12b).

And maybe that's what really tempers my desire to lash out at people who are promulgating what seems to me to be serious theological errors, and instead simply say a little prayer for them: like, "Lord, please help them see you more clearly." And also because, as I understand things right at this moment, that's probably what Jesus would do."

And so, that's the first lesson: when possible, get your information *about* God . . . *from* God.

The second lesson Job needed to learn had to do with time-frames. And that turns out to be a good lesson for us as well.

You see, and as we heard in our reading, at the end of Job's story, God restored everything that Job had lost. But we need to realize that restoration takes time, even for God. You see, when

God restored everything Job had lost, it involved giving Job ten new children, and twenty-three thousand new head of livestock. Something like that doesn't happen overnight. In fact, I would guess that Job's restoration took somewhere between fifteen and twenty *years*. And I can't imagine why it would be any different for us today.

Therefore, when we've suffered some loss or harm, and we're looking for God to help make things right, we need to be patient, and be willing to wait for as long as it might take. Because restoration takes time, and that's a message I need to hear over and over again.

And the third lesson that Job needed to learn — and which we need to learn — has to do with grace.

You see, when God blesses us, by restoring the things we've lost, I believe there is the expectation that we will likewise become a source of blessing for others. And I get that idea from a seemingly innocuous statement that occurs near the end of our reading. And it's this:

“In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers” (Job 42:16).

That is a remarkable statement! Because Job lived in a culture where only sons could inherit their father’s estate. But Job makes the unprecedented decision that his three daughters will inherit an equal portion of his estate along with their seven brothers. Why does he do that? I believe it’s because Job has finally learned something about blessing, and something about grace.

That is: Job has learned that grace is going beyond what is lawful; and that grace goes beyond what is fair; and that grace goes beyond what is expected. And because grace is what Job experienced from God, he decides that the grace and blessing he has received, will be something he shares with others. And in all this, Job becomes a model for how all of us should behave. For when God blesses us — and, make no mistake, God *has* blessed *all* of us — we should be willing to share that God-given blessing with others.

So, these are three lessons that we can take away from our reading from Job: First, learn *about* God through your own relationship *with* God. Second, be patient when waiting on God to bring about change in your life. And, third, be generous with the blessings that God has given to us.

In the end, our annual stewardship campaign is about a lot of things.

It's about enabling St. Andrew's Church to remain a place where our relationships with God can be nurtured.

It's about creating and sustaining a special kind of community, where we are welcomed and accepted and embraced.

It's about learning to appreciate people, and not because of what they possess, but because of who possesses them; that is, God.

It's about being a place where we can not only *learn* about the provision of God, but also *experience* the provision of God; in other words, it's about being a place where we can grow to trust God as we share the blessings we've received.

And finally, it's about being a place where we can grow in our knowledge and love of God, and in our knowledge and love of others (however different they may be from us).

However, in order for St. Andrew's to be all these things, we need your commitment of time, talents, and treasure. It's the only way to keep this ball rolling. Next week, on All Saints' Sunday, we will be passing out pledge cards to everyone who attends our worship services, and mailing them to those who can't. A quick response is appreciated. But in the meantime, please be in careful . . . and *prayerful* . . . consideration about how you should respond.

Amen.