

INI

Job 14,1-6

3rd Last Sunday of the Church Year — 8 November 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Old Testament lesson from the Book of Job, which was read earlier:

Man, who is born of woman,
Is short-lived and full of turmoil.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: We have all heard of the expression, “Into each life a little rain must fall.” Perhaps on occasion we’ve even spoken like this. Perhaps we’ve felt that a bit of rain has fallen into our life, perhaps into the life of another. But in the case of Job, it seems as if the rain that fell into his life was of deluge-like proportions.

First, enemies attacked and carried off Job’s donkeys and oxen and the servants who were there. (1,14-15)

Then, “the fire of God” fell from the sky and burned up his sheep and the servants who cared for them. (1,16)

Next, other enemies carried off his camels and killed his servants. (1,17)

The next “bit of rain” than fell was when a strong wind blew over a tent where his remaining sons and daughters were feasting — they all died. (1,18-19)

Things did not improve.

Job developed some sort of skin disease that afflicted him from his head to his toes, and he wound up sitting on a pile of ashes scraping his itchy skin with shards of broken pottery. (2,7-8)

Job's wife told her husband to curse God and die. Job merely said, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not adversity?" To this Scripture adds: "In all this Job did not sin in what he said." (2,10)

In part, Job's troubles were attributable to God. The Adversary, which in Hebrew is "Satan," came to God and said that Job was only religious because Job enjoyed material prosperity. God said, "No." But God allowed the Adversary to afflict Job, but there was a limit: the Adversary could not take Job's life. Job, however, knew nothing of this, and neither did anyone else portrayed in the Book of Job.

Most of the rest of the book consists of various dialogues between Job and three of his friends.

The friends try to convince Job that Job's suffering is deserved and in proportion to some unknown and unconfessed sin. Now much of what they said to Job is found elsewhere in the Bible. But their advice is ultimately wrong. It is wrong, not because it is not Biblical, but it is wrong because it misapplies God's Word to Job's specific situation.

Job responds to his friends. It is no surprise that Job's moods swing between hope and hopelessness. On many occasions Job seriously questions God. At times he wants to communicate with God, and at other times he wishes that God would just leave him alone — if one wishes to be cynical one could say: "With a friend like this who needs enemies?" Ultimately, Job could not figure out why God was allowing this punishment to occur.

Throughout the book, Job never asked for a restoration of his worldly goods. He never asked that his family be given back to him.

What Job was seeking was vindication.

In his quest for vindication. Job posed some questions. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**No Easy Answers For Difficult Questions.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

1) Why Judge If Everyone Is Guilty?

2) Why Bother If Everything Is Predetermined? and,

3) What Is Vindication?

1) Why Judge If Everyone Is Guilty? Job knows what the Bible teaches: all people sin. Job says:

You also open Your eyes on [man].

And bring him into judgment with Yourself.

⁴ Who can make the clean out of the unclean?

No one!

This is the same sentiment that Jesus expresses in His conversation with Nicodemus:

That which is born of flesh is flesh. (John 3,6)

Man is born of woman and is flesh. Flesh — all flesh! — is destined to die. The only question is “when,” and not “if.”

Man’s brief span of life is known. The Psalmist says:

You — that is, God — have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep.

In the morning they are like grass, which sprouts anew,

⁶ In the morning it flourishes ...

Toward evening it fades, and withers away. (Psalm 90,5-6)

And again:

For they will quickly wither like the grass,

And fade like the green herb. (Psalm 37,2)

Isaiah says the same thing:

All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades.

When the breath of the LORD blows upon it;

Surely the people are grass. (Isaiah 40,6-7)

People die on account of sin and the misfortunes people experience in life are also due to sin.

In the section before our reading, Zophar, one of Job's friends, told Job that Job was experiencing all these misfortunes because Job did not repent and in effect was claiming to be sinless.

Zophar told Job: "Put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent" (9,14). That might have been good advice to someone who had led a life of sinful indulgence, but to Job's ears, his friend's comments were "pious prattle" (cf. Smick, "Job," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 4:917).

Not every misfortune, not every calamity, not every illness, however, is caused by a specific sin. Job says,

If it is a matter of power, behold. He — that is God — is the strong one!

And if it is a matter of Justice, who can summon Him?

Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me;

Though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.

I am guiltless;

I do not take notice of myself;

I despise myself. (9,19-21)

Job's frustration is evident. Job loathes his very life.

Job knows that before God all men are guilty. He says:

Who can make the clean out of the unclean?

No one!

No human being can make this happen. It is a theological point also made by Paul:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5,12)

Job knows this. But on another level he knows that he is guiltless in the sense that nothing he specifically did caused this disaster to come upon him. In fact, the reader of Job knows God knows and affirms this as well. But — and what a “big” but it is! — God did not tell Job this.

Job does not have a problem with God calling all people to judgment. But Job wonders about God’s silence in face of all the calamities that have beset him. He wonders. Is God still Job’s friend? Where is Job’s vindication?

Job’s next question in our text is:

2) Why Bother If Everything Is Predetermined? Job says:

Since his days are determined,
The number of his months is with You,
And his limits You have set so that he cannot pass.
Turn Your gaze from him that he may rest.
Until he fulfills his day like a hired hand.

Indeed, if all things are in God’s hands and He is indeed sovereign, then why bother? Why doesn’t God give Job a bit of a rest during this all too brief life and grant his request to die in peace rather than go on with torment?

The following analysis is based on Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (1:492 ff):

People are not robots. Even though they live and have their being in God, they remain moral human beings and are free from coercion. They are responsible to God for their thoughts and actions. This both is the teaching of Scripture and as well as man's conscience. People who break God's written or unwritten Law know they are guilty and deserve death (cf. Romans 1,32). Man's responsibility and his freedom for coercion are facts — however, we do not know these facts agree with the fact that God works in all things.

Now there is a question which follows from this. Must all events in the world occur exactly as they do, or, could they happen otherwise?

Scripture teaches both necessity and contingency. What do I mean?

From God's viewpoint, all events occur exactly as they do. But from a human viewpoint, however, things could happen otherwise.

Jesus' Passion provides us with a demonstration of both necessity and contingency.

Scripture says that the betrayal of Christ by Judas and Jesus' subsequent crucifixion had to occur according to the "determinate counsel of God" (cf Acts 4,27-28). When Jesus was apprehended. He said, "Thus it must be" (Matthew 26,54).

But Scripture also presents these events from a human viewpoint. Jesus warned Judas, the Jews, and Pilate in order to keep them from committing betrayal and murder. Jesus said:

The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It had been good for that man if he had not been born. (Matthew 26,24)

Jesus did what He could to keep Pilate from pronouncing an unjust sentence. Jesus warned Pilate: “He that delivered Me unto you has the greater sin.” Pilate was thus warned that he would be sinning if he complied with the demands of Jesus’ accusers. The words made an impression on Pilate, for “from thenceforth Pilate sought to release Jesus” (John 19,11-12).

Lutheran theologians from the Age of Orthodoxy thus state:

According to the law of divine providence, which rules all things, it is correctly said that all things happen of necessity; from the standpoint of man everything in human affairs is done freely and contingently.

We uphold both necessity and contingency to guard against two errors: atheism and fatalism. On the one hand, we say things do not happen by chance and on the other we say people are responsible for their actions, and not, whatever happens, happens.

Thus we see this at work in the Kingdoms of Power and Grace. For example, when we are ill we go to the doctor. In seeking salvation we make use of the Means of Grace, God’s Word and the Sacraments, through which God creates and sustains faith.

So in all this, is this what Job is doing? Job does not believe that things happen by chance and he is no fatalist.

Job is asking for vindication, for a respite from his earthly woes and sorrows. Mind you, at times his words verge on hopelessness. But Job is seeking a redemption in God. Job wants God to break His silence. Job is looking for vindication. So,

3) What Is Vindication? In the face of earthly calamity, prattle from his so-called friends, and a seeming silence on God’s part, what constitutes vindication for Job? We may go on to ask: what constitutes vindication for us as well?

In the concluding chapters of the book, God does break His silence and speaks directly with Job. But rather than giving answers, God gives Job a series of unanswerable questions and statements. God does not really offer Job an explanation for his suffering and does not even mention the Adversary.

Job's greatest anguish in the dialogue with God was over the thought that somehow Job had been separated from God. Usually, the reason for such separation is sin, as Job's friends were all too eager to point out.

It gradually dawned on Job that without knowing why he was suffering, he could face the suffering so long as he was assured that God was his friend. Through the dialogue with God, he found out that God has not abandoned him.

God put so many questions to Job that Job begins to doubt his doubt. Job was simply overwhelmed by mysteries and paradoxes for which he had no answer. In the midst of this dialogue, Job came to understand what was too good to be told, that God knows what He is doing in the universe. Instead of God trying to prove that the world is inexplicable, God insisted that it is stranger than Job had ever imagined.

Yet in all the strangeness there is a brightness and a joy and an opposition to all evil and wrong. We come to understand that Job is suffering not because he was the worst of all men, but because he was one of the best. Indeed, Job is a grand type. In all of Job's wounds he prefigured the wounds of the One who was the only truly holy and good man ever to live — Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In fact, earlier in the book, in a dialogue with one of his friends, Job even comes to this realization. One of the high points of the book — indeed, of the entire Old Testament — is when Job says:

As for me, I know that my Redeemer — or, "Vindicator" — lives,
And at the last, He will take His stand on the earth.
Even after my skin is flayed.

Yet even without my flesh then I shall behold.
And Whom my eyes shall see and not another. (18,25-27)

We know of Whom Job was speaking.

I know that my Redeemer lives!”
I know that my Vindicator lives!”

As St. John said:

We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
(1 John 2,1)

And as Paul said:

Jesus was delivered up because of our transgressions — that is, He was crucified — and was raised [from the dead] because of our justification. (Romans 4,25)

Conclusion: It is only in Jesus that we have the clear voice of God, Who in the midst of the inexplicable in this life speaks the word of reconciliation and forgiveness.

So much in life is a paradox for which we have no easy answers. But in the midst of calamity, God speaks to each believer. He assures us that in Christ, the sinless Son of God, we are His, we are reconciled, and we are vindicated.

Is the Evil One still active in our world? Most assuredly, yes!

But in spite of evil, sin, and death, we take heart that Jesus died and rose for us. We take heart from the clear teaching of the Scripture, “greater is He [Jesus] who is in you that he [the Devil] who is in the world” (1 John 4,4).

In Word and Sacrament Jesus is ever near us.

In the face of any calamity, Jesus is the Victor, the Vindicator, and our friend.

What can separate us from the love of God in Christ? Nothing!
Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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