

The book of Job is unique in the Canon of Holy Scripture. What makes it unique is that it tells us a dark story. The man Job is a faithful man, an ethical man, we are tempted to describe him by saying...”he is a good man.” He was a man who is blessed by God. And as a man blessed by God he accumulates much. He has a wife who loves him, children to whom he is a good father, wealth, land, and herds and flocks. He is living the good life. And then, suddenly and calamitously, he loses it all. The Sabeans and the Chaldeans, raid his lands, and rustle his flocks and herds. Natural disasters destroy his flocks of sheep, and destroy the building in which his children as adults are having a celebration and no one survives. Job grieves, and professes his faith in the Lord his God. And then he becomes ill. It's serious. He thinks he is going to die. His wife says its over.

We are told 2 things by way of explanation. We are told that Satan is real. And that it is his desire to reduce Job to the point at which he will renounce the way of faith, and blame God for everything that has occurred. Secondly, we are told that one of the spin offs of free will, is that evil cannot be prevented from invading our lives, only that it can be limited by the grace of God. God has told Satan (Job is not in on the conversation) God has told Satan pointedly, that he cannot have Job's life.

Job's friends come to visit him. They set out to comfort him in his grief and his distress. But the fact is they react to his professing that he has done nothing to deserve what has befallen him, these trials and tribulations. In the endeavour to be good friends, they point out that Job is on dangerous ground if he is going to argue he has not sinned. The result is that to be a Job's comforter

means to be somebody who in the attempt at helping, makes the situation worse...creating more pain.

Just when it seems that there is no reconciling these two points of view...that the innocent suffer unjustly, and that all pain represents God's punishment for sin, God Makes his presence known. He speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, out of the storm. God reminds Job that He is the Lord God who made everything that is, and that nothing that exists in creation does so without His permission...including Job. And when Job replies to God, it is to admit...he knew about God, but that this encounter, face to face as it were, is a new experience, a revelation if you will. And seeing God in the midst of Job's storm of grief and suffering, Job says, it changes everything. He repents of his sins...whatever they are...and he bows like the wise men of the Christmas story...to worship the God who gives life, and life eternal and sustains it.

In some ways, we are tempted to react to the ending of the story. It seems too easy. It does not answer all the questions we would like to have answer to, like why is this good man permitted to suffer? Made to suffer. And if God can limit the terrible things Satan would encourage, why doesn't God take him out once and for all? And suddenly we notice something. We have taken on the roll of Job the sufferer. We are demanding that God answer our questions, because if we understand everything we will not have to simply...believe. And marvelously, while we are trying to engage God in a debate...Job is on his knees, repenting of his sins, before the God who is real, and who saves, and who restores.

You see, I make this confession because I live in a world where bad things happen to good people. I live in a world where I

3.

see things happen, that cause death and suffering, and I cannot make sense of it all. You have heard me use this quotation from a movie numbers of times. I use it because it is a truly profound and Job like insight. Harry Calaghan is a homicide detective played by a very young actor by the name of Clint Eastwood. The words the script writer places in his mouth are these..."A man's got to know his limitations."

The book of Job, in the Old Testament of the Bible teaches us these things with utter clarity and without apology. The first is that God is real. And it is God the book of Job tells us, who made everything that is. If it causes mankind any sense of wonder or awe...whether it is a creature or a mountain, the raw power of the wind and the wave, the beauty of a bird in flight or the horse thundering around the final turn and heading for the finish line, or the ability of men and women to make life altering discoveries in science, or inventing gadgets that make it easier to open a can...God is still the Creator with a capital C. All must answer to Him, including the angels, even including Satan.

The second thing that the Book of Job tells us is that Satan is real. That evil exists. You would think that was obvious but we humankind have tried extensively to explain it away. We have tended to make entertainment out of the demonic. We have come dangerously close to convincing ourselves that Satan looks like one of our neighbours and wears a 3 piece business suit. And sin? Why does the church want people to feel guilty all the time...it is probably about money and even worse, control. The book of Job dares to make the claim and to insist Satan is real. He does evil in the midst of the world. And sin is real, even in the lives of good people, in the life of the best of good men. Job repents because standing before the

Lord his God, Job knows he cannot defend what he has dared to say and think. It is not that some need to repent of their sin. It is that all need to repent.

Third thing that the Book of Job teaches us, is that good men are only good in comparison to those who have done worse things. Job's doubts, and if they are not doubts, Job's careless words in his state of discomfort, in his ability to see that he could very well die, leave him utterly convinced that he is a sinner in need of the saving grace of the Lord his God. He repents in dust and ashes. He wants to be revived, raised up, cleansed as only God can cleanse the soul of man...even a very good man. Sin is real. We are sinners. No exceptions. There is reason for every one of us to pray, "Forgive us our debts." And remember, Jesus has taught us to pray that prayer, because a few good men who were sinners, had the good sense to ask HIM to teach them and us how to pray.

God is real, and He is God. Satan is real, and while he has the power to tempt and let all manner of chaos loose among us, he is not a god. His power does not compare with the power of God. And man is a sinner. Not just capable of sin. A quote from another movie comes to mind. In the Civil War movie entitled "Glory" which tells the story of the first all black regiment on the Union side in that conflict to be engaged in combat against the Confederacy, a young Denzel Washington plays a black soldier asked by his commanding officer to carry their flag. He respectfully declines. He and the white colonel get into a heavy discussion of good and right in a time of war. The young black soldier is very skeptical that anyone has clean hands. He says, "We all in it, aint nobody clean." We are not clean. We are not innocent. All of us. All.

And here at the end of the book of Job, things change dramatically. Why does Job repent as he does? It is not that he has reread the book of Genesis. It is not that he has reconsidered his own position as one who demands answers of the Living God. It is because God speaks to him out of the heart of the storm. A holy moment. A moment of revelation. Suddenly he is in God's presence and Job, dear Job, knows it. He knows that he is Job. And he knows that God is the ONE and the ONLY God. This is the Fourth and final point of the book of Job. When God addresses us, when we hear HIS voice and know we are hearing HIS voice, nothing else matters. The questions that seemed so urgent just moments before, the issues we wanted settled, the justice we were wanting to demand, is suddenly and totally unimportant. Those things are swept off the table. All the heart of mankind wants in such a moment is to bow before the Lord and to worship HIM. To serve HIM. To go whithersoever he asks that we go. To do whatsoever HE asks us to do.

That is why Job says, "My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." The Rev. Rebekah Mitchell, my daughter calls this the God Moment. Forest Gump called it the moment "when God showed up." The revelation of God by Himself, changes everything, and it changes everyone who is human. The Book of Job tells us such things happen. The book of Job tells us such moments are real. The stories of such experiences are real. Therefore a reluctant and hesitant Moses will go to Egypt and demand of the Pharaoh..."Let my people go! In the name of God." Therefore a man named Paul will go to Rome, and declare the truth, that is the Gospel before the Emperor, even though it may cost him his life. Therefore, Daniel will pray to God though it has become against the Law to do so, and will submissively enter the lion's den

6.

and be saved by the presence of God. Therefore a Thomas who has demanded physical proof of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, will fall on his knees and proclaim, "My Lord and my God," as the risen Christ offers his wounded hands and the huge wound made by a Roman spear in HIS side.

I have said Job is not my favourite book in the Bible. Yet the truth is it alone explains why I have done what I have done and been where I have been for the last half a century. The moment when God speaks out of the storm. The moment when we hear God's voice. After that nothing else matters for He is the Lord.

Let us pray;

Dear Lord, and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways,
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence praise.

Breathe through the hearts of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let praise be dumb, let flesh retire,
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm.

Amen