

Job - A Guide To Suffering

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[0 : 00] This is an important day in the life of the parish. I am torn as to whether... I'm very anxious for all of you to be at the 3.30 service. So whether to do that by keeping you here till then, or by being brief and letting you get home and get back, still wanting to hear more.

So that's one thing. Another thing is that we have a service of the laying on of hands after the service, sort of 10 minutes after the postlude is finished.

And that'll be in the chapel. Third thing is, and this is... Because in all the busyness of this month, you're liable to overlook this.

A week from Tuesday night is the vestry meeting. And we have some important decisions to make as a congregation. And we need your prayer and participation for that meeting on Tuesday.

28. Now, I want you to look at the book of Job, which is going to be the subject of the next...

[1 : 07] this and the following five sermons that I'm going to preach here at St. John's. And you... I'm torn because, of course, you all know the story of Job.

You've heard Marian read it this morning. You've heard Steve summarize it. And I want just to help you see that in chapter one of Job, you have a picture of an extremely wealthy man.

somebody who may have been a contemporary of Abraham, someone way back in the dawn of history from our perspective.

His wealth was in camels and oxen and she-asses and sheep. He had a large family of ten children. And if you look in chapter one of Job, on page 440 and verse five, you will see that it says this about him, that his family used to have cycles of feasts.

And in verse five, when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them. He would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all.

[2 : 37] So he was a wealthy man, but he recognized his dependence upon God, which differs from wealth as we understand it, which is in our society and culture, the opportunity to buy your independence of God.

He, in his wealth, was acutely aware of his dependence upon God. We, in our wealth, struggle to be independent of him.

So the life of his family was marked in this way. If you look in chapter two and verse 11, you will see Job's friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

And they came to console him after he had lost everything. There is a fourth friend, Elihu, and he doesn't appear till the 30th, or in the 30s, of Job's, of the book of Job.

The difference is that Eliphaz and his friends were old men who had accumulated great wisdom from long years of experience.

[4 : 04] And Job, in his difficulties, had the doubtful benefit of their advice. They all attended morning service at St. John's.

In the 30s, you come across Elihu, who was young, charismatic, and very strong-minded.

Need I tell you which service that reminds me? But it gives you a picture of the contrast between the kind of wisdom that was offered to Job, the effects of that wisdom, and the benefits of it, we will deal with in due course.

Not today, but along the way. So you have this magnificent poem, which is 42 chapters long, and everybody knows about Job, but nobody reads it.

Get a modern translation and read it. Look at it, because it's far better to read the book than see the movie, so to speak.

[5 : 22] Try and encounter the text yourself. It's very rich and very powerful. And I don't care how miserable and unhappy you are.

I don't care what tragedies may have befallen you in your life. They are more than equaled by the things of which Job speaks and the circumstances that he describes.

So if you want to find, as many people do, someone more miserable than you and far more articulate at expressing it, then read the book of Job and you will find that someone has been there before you.

You are not a pioneer in that territory. Job is a man of the Middle East and the questions that Job raises are in fact the Middle East crisis century after century after century.

Those questions have not been answered to most of the people of the Middle East. And so it continues to be the great Middle East crisis articulated over the centuries.

[6 : 41] That's the book of Job. It is a wonderful unified religion that is expressed here that includes everybody in the world.

Not everybody is a Hindu and not everybody is a Christian and not everybody is a Buddhist and not everybody is a Shintoist and not everybody is this sect or that. But everybody.

Life and heart echoes with the anxiety and the problems of Job. So if you want to start in our multicultural society sharing the riches of the gospel you would be well advised to show people the book of Job.

It's a wonderfully it's a wonderful story which takes all the dimensions of our multiculturalism and blends them together in the heart's cry of the whole of humanity.

A very important book. Mike Mason who used to be a member of this congregation is in the midst of getting a book published right now and the title of his book is The Gospel According to Job.

[8 : 02] It's not out yet but he says it might be out by Easter. Maybe by the time I finish this series which will be but that's the magnificent thing about Job is that it meets every man and woman at the depth of their own personal anxiety their own questions and Job is a wonderfully contemporary person.

You see Job is describing his own situation. What we mostly do is write a book on how to cope with depression written by somebody who's never experienced it and experiences it even less as the returns on his book come in.

Job describes it by going through the valley of the shadow of death. He's there and in order to understand it he takes you with him.

When God wants you to understand something he doesn't give you a theory he introduces you to a person. whether it's Joseph or Noah or Abraham or Job or Solomon or Jeremiah God confronts you with a person and much of the riches of our life spiritually you will discover when you discover the person of Job.

Well Job has four things that happened to him. One his prosperity which you've heard about in chapter one which was taken away from him.

[10 : 13] A second was his profound satisfaction with life and if you want to know how profoundly satisfied with life he was listen as Steve reads chapter 29 of Job and you can turn to chapter 29 and follow it.

But here's a man who is profoundly satisfied with life and this is Job speaking so we'll get Steve to read it for you. chapter 29 verse 1 And Job began to come his discourse and said Oh that I were as in the months of old as in the days when God walked over me when it shone upon my head and by his night I walked through darkness as I was in my autumn days when the friendship of God was upon my tent when the Almighty was yet with me when my children were about me when my steps for the water to build and the rocks poured out for me streams of oil when I went out of the gate of the city when I prepared my seat in the square the young men saw me and the droop and the egg encroved and stood the prisoners were drained from talking and laid their hands on their mouth the voice of the nobles were touched and their tongues cleaved to the roof of their mouth and the ear heard it called thee blessed when the eye saw it approved because

I delivered the thought who cried and the fatherless who had time to help him the blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me and I caused the widow's heart to sink to joy I thought of righteousness and it drove me my justice was like a robe and a servant and lies to the line at the feet of the lady I I thought I thought and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know I broke the fang to the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth but I thought I shall die in my neck and I shall multiply my days as the sand my roots spread out to the waters and the dew all night on my branches my glory fresh with me and my bow ever hid my hand then listened and waited and kept silence on my counsel after

I spoke they did come speak again and my word dropped upon them they waited for me as for the rain and they opened their mountains for the spring rain I smiled on them when they had no confidence and the light of my catalogue they did not come down I chose their way and sat at the chief and dwelt by the king amongst his troops my word and comfort of allness so you have a tremendous catalogue there of reasons for a man to be totally satisfied with the way he has lived his life reasons to feel that he's done every good thing that could possibly be imagined reason to feel that he was profoundly acceptable to God reason to feel that he should be very much under the blessing of

God continuing in that way and yet having achieved that God took it all away because he had something even better and that satisfaction turned to ashes in Job's mouth when on a day which is recorded in Job chapter 1 news came to him of the loss of all his camels the loss of all his oxen the loss of all his sheep and she ashes the loss of his servants and the death of all his children and that all came in on Job in one day Job at the end of that day I guess he went to church but that's you know

[15 : 14] I don't want to say that too lightly but it's such a magnificent picture and one that I don't know that can be I mean if you could just sort of grasp the picture listen when all this news came to Job then Job arose rent his robe shaved his head fell upon the ground and worshipped and said naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away blessed be the name of the Lord there was the rich man when on a day everything he owned was swept away shows that at least there's an indication that there's something more to life doesn't it

I mean that's why it was written but then if you will that having happened then God was very pleased with Job's response as we must be very impressed by Job's response and Satan said to the Lord touch his health and you will find another side of the man and so Job was stricken with a terrible disease so that his skin was so raw that it ran with blood and he picked up tortured pieces of sharp clay just to scrape the material of disease that accumulated on his body and his friends came and were so shocked at the sight of him that they didn't say anything to him for seven whole days and in the midst of that

Job's fairly famous wife had something to say to him do you still hold fast your integrity curse God and die but he said to her you speak as one of the foolish women would speak shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil in all this Job did not sin with his lips this is all prelude to the story to the great dialogue between Job and his counselors but he is a man who suffered profoundly and he is a universal man who gave expression and articulation to human suffering and it's an incomparable picture in many ways but it is a prelude to the picture of Jesus Christ on the cross Job having lost everything his body racked with disease then Christ went one step further in terms of experiencing human dereliction you have the picture of him having gone the step beyond where Job could ever go and having given up himself to death and on the cross more eloquent than Job and more profound even he cries my God my God why hast thou forsaken me now the whole point of the book of

Job and we're going to I hope move towards this is that the Lord God is very interested in who you are the deepest and most profound questioning of your life is the only way in which you can draw near to God and allow him to draw near to you and Job becomes for us a guide into the unintelligibility of human suffering and and Job and Job confronts us with what you do when the dark night of the soul is at its darkest and Job way back in history goes through that and in that anticipates the cross cross of Christ cross of Christ which we participate in from privacy if you want of your own hearts and your own thoughts when in the course of a service like this you put out your hands and receive the bread and take into your hands the chalice and hear the words as from [21 : 54] Jesus Christ this is my body which is broken for you this is my blood which is shed for you and at that point of human extremity we enter into the point of divine humility and come together with the person of Christ and I think Job whom a lot of people think is an unsatisfactory book because it doesn't have the answers but Job is a great book because it articulates the questions of which the only answer could ever be Jesus Christ the word of God made flesh Amen