

2021 10 03 – The Good and the Bad

Job 1:1, 2:1-10 (The Inclusive Bible)

Our scripture reading today is just a small excerpt from a long and beautifully written poem that tells the story of a man named Job. In today's scripture we hear that Job has been stricken with painful boils that cover his entire body. But it's important to know that this wasn't the first calamity that Job had to deal with. In fact, Job has already lost all of his ten children and all of his wealth. His suffering is indescribable.

I'm sure we all know what suffering feels like. We suffer when we are sick. We suffer when we lose those that we love. We suffer when we lose our financial security or physical safety. We suffer when our lives seem to have no sense of purpose. As humans, our suffering can take many forms: physical, mental, emotional or even spiritual.

Job is suffering. His world has been torn apart and yet, up to this point, Job has refused to curse God. Instead he says, "If we accept happiness from God, we should also accept adversity." In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible his words are stated even more plainly, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

Job believes that Yahweh is the cause of his suffering, that God has control over all facets of his life. He believes that his health, his wealth and all of his children were first given and then taken away by God. He makes that clear when he

says, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?"

Up to this point in the story, Job seems to be accepting his suffering with incredible patience and fortitude but, if we read further, it becomes obvious that Job is both frustrated and angry. At one point further on in the story, Job asks,

But what is our agreement with God above?
What are we promised from Shaddai, from on high?
Isn't it that calamity comes only to evildoers?
Doesn't God observe my behavior,
and take note of my coming and going? (Job 31:2-4)

Job is frustrated and angry at God because he believes Yahweh has treated him unfairly. Job has tried hard to be a good, honest, caring man and he doesn't understand why God is punishing him so cruelly.

First of all, I need to state that I don't believe in a God that sits on a throne in heaven deciding what is going to happen to each one of us. I believe in a God that is the Essence of Love. I believe in a Creator God that is present in the world, but allows nature to take its course. I believe in the laws of physics which tell us that there is a randomness in the universe and that some things happen for no particular reason. Our insurance companies may call fire, flood, and earthquakes, "Acts of God;" but I don't think that God has anything to do with them.

I also believe that, as human beings, we have been given free will. We have the ability to understand the difference between good and bad and to make choices in our lives. And the choices that we make can often result in suffering. For example, someone who chooses to be unvaccinated against the COVID-19 virus

is more likely to end up in the ICU on a ventilator struggling to breathe. If this happens, their choice may be a part of the reason why they are there, but I would never suggest that they deserve to suffer or that God is punishing them because of the choice that they have made.

We make choices every day that could lead to suffering. Every time we choose to love we do so knowing that the pain of loss and grief could be the end result. But that doesn't make that particular choice wrong. Suffering is a part of being human. Bad things do happen to good people. Even innocent children get sick and die.

I believe that each and every one of us is a beloved child of God and that God's love is unconditional and everlasting. I believe that God is a God of love and peace and justice. I believe that when one of us suffers, God is suffering with us. And I believe that God's love, can help to heal our pain. Harold Kushner, in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, put it this way:

If God is a God of justice and not of power, then [God] can still be on our side when bad things happen to us. [God] can know that we are good and honest people who deserve better. Our misfortunes are none of [God's] doing, and so we can turn to [God] for help. Our question will not be Job's question "God, why are You doing this to me?" but rather "God, see what is happening to me. Can You help me?" We will turn to God, not to be judged or forgiven, not to be rewarded or punished, but to be strengthened and comforted. Kushner, Harold S.. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (pp. 50-51). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Job believed that God was causing his suffering and so, in his initial attempt to remain pious and good, Job put on a stoic face and told his wife that we all have to take the bad with the good. I believe that is only partially true. Yes, some suffering happens for no reason, but when suffering occurs because of cruelty or injustice, then we have every right to speak loudly with word and action. We have every right to create positive change in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an example of ways that we can make a difference for those who have been wronged. And we can take this path of justice knowing that the Essence of Love, the Holy Mystery is with us in this work.

Harold Kushner also suggests that when we are in the midst of pain and suffering, whatever its cause, one of things we need to ask ourselves is “What do we do with our pain so that it becomes meaningful and not just pointless empty suffering? How can we turn the painful experiences of our lives into birth pangs or into growing pains?” Sometimes the dark times in our lives are opportunities for growth and re-birth, opportunities to re-think our choices and possibly even start on a new path, a new of being.

Kushner, Harold S.. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (pp. 72-73). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Finally, we also need to understand what to do when someone that we love is hurting. What they don't need is us telling them that must have done something wrong, that somehow they deserve to suffer. What they don't need is us telling them how to fix their problem. What they do need is our empathy, our

compassion and the reassurance that they are a good person, a cherished friend or family member and a beloved child of God

One of the ways that we are reassured of our own place in the family of God is through the celebration of communion. Let us now listen to our choral offering as we prepare to share the bread and the cup.