

This message was delivered by Rev. Pamela Graf Short to the People of Prayer at the Tontogany Presbyterian Church on October twenty-first, the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost in the year of our LORD two thousand and eighteen.

It is based on the entire book of Job, and most particularly on the beginning and ending chapters, and Job's laments in the middle. Included below are some key passages:

Job 1

1 There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.

That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters.

3 He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

4 His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

5 And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said,

"It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did.

6 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.

7 The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

8 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job?"

There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

10 Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side?"

You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

11 But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face."

12 The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, all that he has is in your power;

only do not stretch out your hand against him!" So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

13 One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house,

14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them,

15 and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword;

I alone have escaped to tell you."

16 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you."

17 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword;

I alone have escaped to tell you."

18 While he was still speaking, another came and said,

"Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house,

19 and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

Job 2

1 One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord.

2 The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the Lord, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."

3 The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.

He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."

4 Then Satan answered the Lord, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives.

5 But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

6 The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord,

and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8 Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Job 38

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

3 Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone

7 when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

8 "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?—

9 when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band,

10 and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors,

11 and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?"

12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place,

13 so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it?

14 It is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment.

15 Light is withheld from the wicked, and their uplifted arm is broken.

16 "Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?

17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

18 Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

19 "Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness,

20 that you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home?

21 Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!

22 "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,

23 which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?

24 What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,

or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

25 "Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt,

26 to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life,

27 to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass?

28 "Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?

29 From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?

30 The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.

31 "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?

32 Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children?

33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?

- 34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?
 35 Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, "Here we are"?
 36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?
 37 Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
 38 when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?
 39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
 40 when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?
 41 Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?"

Job 40:1-5

- 1 And the Lord said to Job:
 2 "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond."
 3 Then Job answered the Lord:
 4 "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.
 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further."

Our Bible story for today is among the most disturbing of all stories.

I confess it has been appearing in the lectionary for a few weeks now and I have been avoiding it.

But like a Tsunami it is unavoidable.

Like a Tsunami it disrupts;

it destroys;

it slurps up our understandings of God

and leaves us shivering...

moaning...

stunned!

It topples our presumptions

of how the universe functions

and sweeps into the abyss

our human hedges of security.

For all of its horror it provides some comfort for the suffering and some caution for the comfortable.

Too often the comfortable assume we are comfortable because we deserve to be;

we are entitled to be comfortable:

we have been good

and worked hard

and paid our taxes

and have decent credit scores

and supported the food pantry

and loaned our ladder to our neighbor

and taught our kids to pray

and showed up for worship.

Too often our theology goes something like this:

"I behave and therefore I am blessed.

I see that guy over there is not comfortable

so he must not be blessed.

It must be because he does not behave."

This is the predominate theology in the story of Job. And then there is Satan's personal jab toward God.

The only reason people want you around is 'cause you give them stuff.

God debunks the first way of thinking
and Job debunks the second.

Now in the part of the story that we did not read in this service, Job has 3 friends who want to comfort him.

They start out pretty well:

they show up;

they weep out loud;

they throw dust on their heads;

they tear their cloths;

and most loving of all,

they sit with Job in silence for 7 days.

But then they move from solidarity to solutions.

We hate to break it to you Job, but it is obvious that you have done some pretty grave sin.

Confess. Repent.

And surely God will be gracious once again.

Actually, Job shares the same theology;

he just doesn't come to the same conclusion.

I delivered the poor who cried,

and the orphan who had no helper.

I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.

I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.

I was a father to the needy,

and I championed the cause of the immigrant.

I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,

and made them drop their prey from their teeth.

(pause)

...I thought I was going to die in peace.

Now look at me.

No!

I have not sinned!

I don't deserve this!

Come on God!

Let's have it out!

Job wants to call God to court.

He wants a fair hearing to lay out his case
and be proved innocent.

He is not convinced he will get a fair hearing—
but that is what he wants.

Job wants God to show up

and Job wants to be acquitted.

And then what happens?
God shows up.
But instead of Job getting to lay out his case,
God shows up in a whirlwind
with fierce and wild and mysterious images of creation filling the court room.
God show up and audaciously says
“you called me here; now I’m callin’ you out.”

While God’s speech is a mastery of creation poetry,
it seems brutal to me to yell at someone who has lost everything.
Likewise, it seems like a red herring—
that is, it seems to me that God is not even addressing the trouble at hand
...or maybe God is...

You see Job’s case is based on the world view that the universe swirls on this basic premise:
*Behaving leads to blessing
and sinning leads to suffering.
I did behave, so I should not suffer.*

And basically, God says,
“What do you know of the universe?!”
*Were you there when I laid the foundations of the world?
12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?
16 "Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
19 "Do you give the horse its might?
Do you clothe its neck with mane?
20 Do you make it leap like the locust?
26 "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,
and spreads its wings toward the south?
1 "Can you draw out the great sea dragon with a fishhook, or press down its tongue with a cord?*

I find Job’s response to God’s poetic rant odd.
Somehow for Job this is enough.
God showing up is enough.
It is like Job thinks,
*Okay. I can live with this.
I don’t understand it, but God and I are okay.*

God isn’t quite done.
God turns to the 3 friends and chastises them and says they have not spoken rightly of who God is.
Their theology is wrong. Their world view is wrong.
And Satan too was wrong.

For though Job fought with God
and questioned God
and made charges against God,
Job never broke relationship with God.
And well-before his fortunes were restored Job says “my eyes have seen you”.
“my eyes have seen you”
Somehow for Job, this was enough.

Perhaps you know the story of Horatio and Anna Spafford (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Spafford).
They were quite a happy family with 4 girls and a boy; exceedingly prosperous and good Presbyterians.
They lived in Chicago,
owned vast real estate
and were friends and supporters of D.L. Moody.

They suffered a great loss in 1870.

Their little boy died.

In 1871 the great fire of Chicago left the city in ashes and destroyed most of the Spafford’s investments.
Still, they must have had bank accounts that survived, for they decided to take a break and go to Europe.
Horatio purchased tickets for his family and himself on a steamship, the Ville du Havre.

But just before it was time to leave,

there was some sort of bank crisis and, as an attorney,

Horatio felt he must stay behind and catch up with them later.

On November 22, in the year of our LORD 1873 the steamship was accidentally struck by an iron sailing vessel.

226 souls were lost, including all 4 of the Spafford daughters: Anna, Margaret, Bessie and Tanetta.

Their mother was picked up by a life boat.

When she arrived in England she sent a telegram to her husband with the words “saved alone”.

Spafford set off for England and while sailing across the Atlantic he wrote this poem

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

Now may Christ Jesus,
the One who knows your pain
Groan with in love
Weep with you in honor
And come to you in
Mystery, beauty, truth and peace
Now and for a thousand generations.

840 When Peace like a River

It Is Well with My Soul

1 When peace like a riv - er at - tend - eth my way, when
 2 Though Sa - tan should buf - fet, though tri - als should come, let
 3 He lives: O the bliss of this glo - ri - ous thought. My
 4 Lord, has - ten the day when our faith shall be sight, the

sor - rows like sea bil - lows roll, what - ev - er my lot, thou hast
 this blest as - sur - ance con - trol, that Christ hath re - gard - ed my
 sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I
 clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trum - pet shall sound and the

taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.
 help - less es - tate, and hath shed his own blood for my soul.
 bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
 Lord shall de - scend; e - ven so it is well with my soul.

Refrain

It is well with my soul;
 It is well with my soul;
 with my soul;

This text is a remarkable expression of faith born of grief. The author, an active Presbyterian layman who had just lost four daughters in a tragic shipwreck, wrote it while sailing to Paris to meet his wife, who had survived. The tune was named for the ship that sank.

TEXT: Horatio G. Spafford, 1876, alt.
 MUSIC: Philip P. Bliss, 1876

VILLE DU HAVRE
 11.8.11.9 with refrain

