

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Job"

Scripture: Job 1:1-2:10 (Job 38 & Job 42:1-6)

Hymns: How firm a foundation 685 (1-4), My hope is built on nothing less 349 (1-3)

Children's: Be still and know that I am God 64

Choruses: Blessed by your name, My life is in you, Lord, What a beautiful name, In Christ alone

May 13, 2018

Rev. Steve Filyk

[Jarrett Schill will be giving a personal testimony of some of the hardships he has endured and some of the questions that this has provoked.]

Thank you Jarrett.

Thank you for your willingness

To share openly and honestly with your church family.

To let us know more about you and your journey of faith.

The pain Jarrett recounted

is uniquely his own experience.

But that Jarrett has suffered, is not unique at all.

It is part of every person's experience.

We all suffer in different ways.

Sometimes we are aware of each other's suffering.

Sometimes have no clue of what the person sitting beside us

Is going through.

So what is your theology of suffering?

What is your theology of suffering?

How do you make sense of a world filled with both joy and trauma?

How do you reconcile this with a belief in a good and powerful God?

What is your theology of suffering?

I would wager that for many of us

Our implicit theology of suffering is a theology of retribution:

“What comes around, goes around” and

“You reap what you sow.”

“God punishes people in this world in direct response to their actions...  
if you get cancer, it’s a [and indication] that God is punishing you  
for something bad you’ve done.

If your business prospers,

it’s a sign that God is pleased with you.”<sup>i</sup>

It is not surprising that many Christians think this way.

This theology can be seen in Scripture,  
especially the book of Proverbs:

“The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked,  
but he blesses the home of the righteous.”<sup>ii</sup>

Scripture seems to teach it.

And this theology can be confirmed by experience:

that friend who smokes three packs a day

Eventually ends up in hospital with lung cancer.

But there are counter-examples

That would undermine this theology.

When George Burns was approaching his centenary,  
 When he was almost 100 years old,  
 Someone asked him what he thought about doctors.

He said: "I smoke ten cigars a day...  
 I have two double martinis every day at lunch...  
 I run around with women much younger than I am.

People ask me what my doctor thinks of this...  
 My doctor died ten years ago."<sup>iii</sup>

There are counter-examples to a theology of retribution in life.  
 And there are counter-examples in the Bible.

Arguing with the Proverbs, the prophet Jeremiah asks:  
 "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?  
 Why do all the faithless live at ease?"<sup>iv</sup>

And then we have the book of Job.  
 The book of Job questions that theology of retribution.  
 It questions it and upends it.

PAUSE

I've wanted to preach on this book for some time.  
 But it is an intimidating book to tackle.

It's a long book: 42 chapters.

While it begins and ends in a narrative.  
It is mostly comprised of poetry.  
Poetic argument. Poetic complaint.

And of all the books in the Bible  
It can raise more questions than it ever answers.

As one commentator has asked:

“What do we do with a story  
in which God and the Satan enter into a divine wager,  
using Job as an unwitting pawn in their game?”<sup>v</sup>

Lots of good reasons to skip over the book of Job.  
Added to that, today is Mother’s Day.

There’s probably a few people  
Who came to church just to honor their mothers.  
So why dive into some difficult  
When there are easier passages to preach?

Job may not be easy.  
But Job does speak to the human condition.

Job speaks to the bus crash in Humbolt,  
The mass killing in Toronto,  
Stories of broken relationships,  
And all those pains uniquely experienced by our moms.

But to let Job address these issues,  
we need to make sense of some of the book’s challenges.

Especially that backstory,  
the story of the wager between God and Satan.

It is helpful, when reading this book,  
To recognise that we aren't reading a CBC news report,  
but a folk-tale, a parable.

Just consider the introduction:

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job."<sup>vi</sup>

Unlike Jeremiah or Isaiah there is no mooring  
In history: "The word of the Lord came to him  
in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah..."<sup>vii</sup>.

And there is no connection to place:

Uz is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>viii</sup>

Job's introductory verse sounds similar to

The introduction to one of Jesus' parables:

"There was a man who had two sons."<sup>ix</sup>

Or even a more modern story:

"A long time ago in a galaxy far far away..."<sup>x</sup>

When we understand Job as a parable,

We can move past some of the challenging details

And focus our attention on the main purpose of the story

Which for Job is a meditation on suffering.

Which brings us to our story.

From what Erin read this morning

I would like to draw your attention to two important elements  
Of this parable:

First of all, how Job is described.

Secondly, what happens to him.

First it is important for our story to note

That Job is described as “blameless and upright;  
he feared God and shunned evil.”

This is repeated three times in our reading.

In chapter 1:1, chapter 1:8, and chapter 2:3.

Those latter two times, this description of Job  
comes from the very mouth of the Lord.

Job is described as righteous.

That’s the important first lesson.

The second lesson is that Job suffers.

This is also very clear.

In the introduction the Lord boasts about Job,

Which invites a protest from Satan

that Job is only honoring God for what it gets him.

This invites a contest with two rounds of afflictions:

Afflictions designed to test

whether Job’s honoring of God transcends his self-interest.

In the first round Job loses his property: his sheep and camels.

In the first round Job loses his children:  
seven sons and three daughters.

In the second round he loses his health: he is afflicted with sores  
From head to foot.

And then there is the question of whether he will lose his faith.

But despite these incredible afflictions

Job does not curse God.

Job's faith is resilient:

"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;  
may the name of the Lord be praised."<sup>xi</sup>

Now this could be the end of the story.

Job has withstood the test of suffering.

Fast forward to Chapter 42.

"And everyone lived happily ever after.  
The end."

But as with most stories the middle truly matters.

And after Job has experienced his initial trauma,

He enters into extended lament and mourning

Where he begins questioning and challenging God

Where he experiences the depth of his suffering,

Where he even longs for death.

Job isn't alone on this journey.

He is joined by friends who initially support him in his grief

By keeping vigil.

They initially support him,  
 But they eventually they tire of his protest of innocence,  
 And start arguing against him.

In her essay “The Sufferer’s Wisdom” American theologian Ellen F Davis  
 Argues that “from theological standpoint,  
 Job and his [friends] have much common ground.

They all hold the same belief system;  
 they are committed to the idea that the universe operates  
 according to a system of just deserts.

The initial point of difference between Job and the others  
 is that Job identifies a glitch in the system:  
 he maintains that he is being punished in gross disproportion  
 to any wrong he ever did.<sup>xii</sup>

Job protests against God  
 And Job despairs of God’s treatment.

While the Psalmist delights in God’s notice of humanity,  
 In chapter 7 Job despairs of being under the eye of God:

<sup>17</sup> “What is mankind that you make so much of them,  
 that you give them so much attention,

<sup>18</sup> that you examine them every morning  
 and test them every moment?

<sup>19</sup> Will you never look away from me,  
 or let me alone even for an instant?

<sup>20</sup> If I have sinned, what have I done to you,  
 you who see everything we do?

Why have you made me your target?  
 Have I become a burden to you?.”<sup>xiii</sup>

As the book proceeds,  
 Job rails against God and argues with his friends.

It’s a lot to take in.  
 Job’s friends tag-teaming him  
 Trying to get him to admit his failures.

Then Job, responding to them,  
 protesting his innocence.

It goes on and on.  
 For chapter after chapter after chapter.

But then in chapter 38 the Lord himself appears.  
 The Lord has heard Job’s complaint  
 And has responded to Job’s request for an audience.

But the Lord doesn’t come with any answers.  
 No, the Lord has questions for Job.

First the Lord questions Job  
 about his understanding of creation:

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?  
 Tell me, if you understand.

<sup>5</sup>Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!  
 Who stretched a measuring line across it?

<sup>6</sup>On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone—  
 7 while the morning stars sang together  
 and all the angels shouted for joy?"<sup>xiv</sup>

Then the Lord questions Job  
 about his ability to control God's creatures:

9 "Will the wild ox consent to serve you?  
 Will it stay by your manger at night?  
 10 Can you hold it to the furrow with a harness?  
 Will it till the valleys behind you?  
 11 Will you rely on it for its great strength?  
 Will you leave your heavy work to it?  
 12 Can you trust it to haul in your grain  
 and bring it to your threshing floor?"<sup>xv</sup>

God displays for Job the awe-fulness of God's creation  
 In that display Job is invited to reconsider  
 how he can call God to account.

I mean if Job can't even understand let alone control this wild creation  
 How can Job make any claim against God.

Hearing God's speech is an eye-opener for Job.

He responds with repentance:

"I know that you can do all things;  
 no purpose of yours can be thwarted.  
 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'  
 Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,  
 things too wonderful for me to know."<sup>xvi</sup>

## PAUSE

What does Job learn through the course  
Of his complaint and his encounter?

Before he was “convinced that his moral innocence  
should have warded off disaster,  
because he [believed] that the world is a manageable place  
run by a demanding but nonetheless predictable God  
who owes the righteous a good time.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Now he realises that the world, and the Lord,  
Is wilder than he ever imagined.

He sees that he is not the center of the universe.  
Job can only complain because God has given him breath  
And placed him in the world that God sustains.

God waters the wilderness where no person will ever venture.<sup>xviii</sup>

Hearing from the Lord,  
Having God respond to him,  
If only to rebuke his impertinence,  
is enough for Job.

Enough for him to begin to live again.  
He can move on from his suffering  
rejoin life and have more children.  
This was enough for Job.

But if the Lord will can restore the faith of one who has suffered like Job  
 Simply through the revelation of God's majesty,  
 Then how much more might our faith be restored by a God  
 Who doesn't just respond to us,

But who in Jesus Christ has come among us  
 to experience the human condition  
 in all its joy and calamity.

A God who walks alongside each of us a fellow-sufferer?

May we complain and lament.

May we question and challenge God.

And like Job, may we find in God reason to live again.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> "What is retribution theology?" [www.gotquestions.org/retribution-theology.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/retribution-theology.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Proverbs 3:33 NIV

<sup>iii</sup> Larry King, "How to Talk to Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere: The Secrets of Good Communication" p88

<sup>iv</sup> Jeremiah 12:1 NIV

<sup>v</sup> Kathryn M. Schifferdecker "Commentary on Job 1:1; 2:1-10" [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1421](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1421)

<sup>vi</sup> Job 1:1

<sup>vii</sup> Jeremiah 1:2 NIV

<sup>viii</sup> See Kathryn M. Schifferdecker "Commentary on Job 1:1; 2:1-10" [workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1421](http://workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1421)

<sup>ix</sup> See the parable of the two sons in Luke 15:11 NIV

<sup>x</sup> The intro to all nine Star Wars films

<sup>xi</sup> Job 1:21 NIV

<sup>xii</sup> Davis, Ellen F.. *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (p. 129). Cowley Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>xiii</sup> Job 7:17-21 NIV

<sup>xiv</sup> Job 38:4-7 NIV

<sup>xv</sup> Job 38:9 NIV

<sup>xvi</sup> Job 42:1-3 NIV

<sup>xvii</sup> Davis, Ellen F.. *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (p. 137). Cowley Publications. Kindle Edition.

<sup>xviii</sup> Job 38:26 NIV