

Sermon 8-9-26
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY

Based on the first lesson for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Job 38:4-18.

Suffering

Job is considered the oldest book in the Bible. It's main character, Job, isn't Jewish. He's a Gentile who lived somewhere in the ancient near East, possibly before Abraham lived. But Job was a God fearer. He knew that there is a Creator of heaven and earth. He worshipped the true Creator, whether he knew God by the name of Yahweh or not. The book of Job concerns itself with suffering endured by the righteous; and with the nature of capital L type Love; with capital J type Justice; and with God's redemption for humanity.

The first chapter sets the stage for everything that comes after. For, the first chapter doesn't take place on earth. It takes place in the heavenlies, where Yahweh called a gathering of the spiritual beings He created that are called the "sons of God." At this great meeting, a mysterious figure named Satan showed up. The name Satan comes from a Hebrew verb meaning "to accuse, to slander, and to harbor animosity toward."

Now, in all talk about Satan, we have to remember that Satan is not Yahweh's equal. For Satan comes from a specie of spiritual beings that Yahweh created, although we're not sure which one. In Genesis Satan is called the Nachash or Serpent. Therefore, is Satan a member of a specie of very intelligent serpent like spiritual beings that Yahweh created? Scripture doesn't say for sure. But two things are for sure. First, Satan is one of Yahweh's creatures, not a fellow God with Yahweh. Second, as one of Yahweh's creatures, Satan exercised his God-given right to walk away from Yahweh and break the covenant of Love between him and Yahweh. Satan grasped at equality with Yahweh and Yahweh gave such equality to him. Satan is now his own god. But as his own god, he is completely separated from his Creator who is the only source of righteousness. Therefore, when Satan exercised his right to walk away from Yahweh, the result was that he fell from perfect righteousness into a perfect lack of righteousness — into complete evil. Therefore, when Satan grasped at equality with Yahweh, he grasped a false equality. And such is the fate of every one of Yahweh's creatures in heaven and on earth who make the decision to break the covenant of Love with Yahweh.

So, we read in Job 1:6-12, "6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' 8 And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?' 9 Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge 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 and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.' 12 And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.' So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD."

Every time I read this, I come to the same conclusion. You don't want Yahweh to brag about you. It elicits a vicious accusation from Satan, namely that you do what is right only because Yahweh rewards with earthly comforts those who do what is right in His sight.

So here is the big question. Did Job curse Yahweh as Satan predicted? In one day all of Job's wealth disappeared. His many animals were all stolen or destroyed. His ten adult children were gathered together in one place and all died in a catastrophe.

We read in Job 1:20-22, "20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. 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 wrong." Satan was proved wrong. But Satan never gives up.

Therefore, we read in Job 2:1-8, "1 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, 'From where have you come?' Satan answered the LORD and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.' 3 And the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.' 4 Then Satan answered the LORD and said, 'Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.' 6 And the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.' 7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes."

Our human bodies can survive a lot. But ultimately they are fragile. And when that fragility reveals itself through wear and tear, age, genetic weakness or susceptibility to disease, the result can be catastrophic. Job received the worst possibility — a painful, disfiguring disease that does not kill quickly. And it's from this point onward that the dynamic of the book takes place.

Job has three friends who come and observe his disastrous situation. They come to the logical fallen human conclusion that Job must have secretly sinned a great sin for God to send all this catastrophe upon him. They constantly urge Job to confess whatever this great sin is. However, Job valiantly stands against them, furiously insisting that he has no such hidden sin in his life. At the same time, Job demands an audience with Yahweh, who inevitably hides in the shadows during the sufferings of this life. He demands Yahweh's court of justice for himself. Yet, when Job's great demand goes unanswered, he does not lose faith in Yahweh.

For instance Job says in Job 19:23-27, "23 Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! 24 Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! 25 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, 27 whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another." Indeed, Job knew about Messiah. He knew about the work of redemption that Jesus would perform on our behalf.

At the end of the book of Job, Yahweh finally reveals Himself and satisfies Job's demand for an audience in the highest court of justice. However, Job's time in court doesn't go how

Job expected. Instead of Job getting the opportunity to question Yahweh about His Justice, Yahweh questions Job about the creation itself. Thus, we read in Job 38:1-3, “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 2 ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’”

So let’s quickly diagnose what Yahweh says to Job in today’s first lesson, Job 38:4-7, “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 sons of God shouted for joy?’”

Architects, draftsmen, engineers and construction laborers will all be familiar with this language. For it’s all construction language. Here Yahweh is using a parable, comparing Himself to an architect. Only we’re talking about the architect of the entire creation — both seen and unseen. In addition we have the intriguing seventh verse. Apparently stars can sing in some way. More importantly we again see the spiritual beings known as the sons of God. For, it is these spiritual beings who have had great interaction and great effect with humanity down through history. According to Deuteronomy 32:8 and Psalm 82, it is these beings who led humanity into the pagan worship of gods and goddesses after the disaster at the Tower of Babel.

Nevertheless, in these verses, Yahweh, the Creator, makes Himself known as the only one who knows everything about the present creation — how it was formed and how it presently operates and why it operates the way it does. Yahweh makes Himself known as the source of all knowledge and all wisdom.

Job 38:8-11, “8 ‘Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, 9 when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 and prescribed limits 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 stayed?”’”

What’s interesting about verse 8 is that it acknowledges what we’re told about the flood of Noah in Genesis 7:11-12, “11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.” In Sunday School, kids used to learn about it raining for forty days and forty nights. Indeed, that’s what I first heard about the flood. But more importantly, the text says that the earth’s crust broke open in a colossal way allowing great fountains of water to burst forth from below the surface. This same thing is confirmed in Job 38:8.

Oceans cover like three fourths of earth’s surface. Why? It’s the water left over from the flood of Noah. At the end of the flood, Yahweh lifted the present continents out of the flood. And as all the square miles of glacier created by the flood melted in the hundreds of years that followed, the sea level rose to its present height. The text of Job tells us that without Yahweh’s permission, the sea can’t rise any higher.

It’s verses 8-11 that were included in today’s lessons to complement our Gospel lesson where Jesus walks on the waters of the Sea of Galilee. By the way, you and I can walk on water also. But, only when it’s frozen. To walk on the liquid form, you’ve got to know the secrets of the universe. You’ve got to be water’s Creator. That’s why the men in the boat worshipped Jesus after He got into the boat.

Job 38:12-15, “12 ‘Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, 13 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 its features stand out like a garment. 15 From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken.”

Here again, Job is questioned about the mechanics of earth’s rotation and seasons. Yahweh also proclaims Himself the One who refashions the surface of the earth. But then Yahweh gets to the important point. Yahweh uses the earth itself to reject the wicked humans who live upon it. The wicked have no understanding of Yahweh or the way things really are. They have no understanding that they will all face Yahweh’s eternal judgment. The only thing Yahweh will show the wicked in this life is that no matter how great their power, it will be broken — either when they die or they will see it taken from them while still alive. Therefore, in these verses, Yahweh proclaims Himself a God of real and true Justice.

In the final chapter of the book, Job says to Yahweh in Job 42, 5-6, “5 ‘I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Throughout the book, Job pleaded for an audience with Yahweh in His court. But when Job’s request was granted, the spectacular majesty of Yahweh was too much for Job to bear in a live audience. All Job could do was repent. For, without the righteousness of the Image of God, it is impossible to stand comfortably in the presence of the only true God. Because of Adam’s Original Sin all of us humans have the status of the Likeness of God. In other words, we constantly sin by having to define good and evil for ourselves and then acting on our own definitions. This is grasping at equality with God.

Despite the severity of the audience Yahweh gave Job, Yahweh nevertheless had compassion on Job. For, at the very end of the book, Job is healed. He again is wealthy. Children have again been born to him and his wife. His status as an honorable and devout man is restored. Yahweh’s Justice has sided with Job. Satan and all his accusations have been defeated.

Therefore, Job is a type of Christ who suffers but is declared victorious. He is also a type of the Christian saved for righteous eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus. Like Job, the Christian may have to suffer in this life because of all the accusations of Satan against us. But if we suffer with Christ on account of Christ in this life, our restoration will be much greater than Job’s. For it will be resurrection into the eternal blessed life, free from Original Sin once and for all and restored to the Image of God by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

So let’s finish by talking a bit about suffering. Yahweh created us in His Love. He is absolutely committed to us for the good. For God is perfectly righteous. He is Love. In return, Yahweh created us to be equally committed to Him. However for Love to be real, there must be freedom — the freedom to walk away from a relationship. For this reason, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was placed in the Garden of Eden. Every time Adam and Eve, the holy couple, walked past that tree, ignoring its fruit, they demonstrated their righteous love for Yahweh. However, once they were deceived by the Serpent and ate of the fruit, they broke Love with Yahweh. They became their own gods, loyal only to themselves. And so, they opened the gate to evil and all its consequences.

Sin has consequences. One of those consequences is suffering. Through their disobedience, our first parents brought many consequences down upon themselves and us.

Their sin made this universe a dangerous place of hard labor and potential suffering for everyone born here. This is the universal suffering we all live under.

However, there are also consequences to personal sin. Personal sin can bring all manner of suffering.

But sometimes we suffer because of foolishness. I don't know about you, but I've injured myself in all kinds of ways through making poor decisions with tools and extending myself beyond my abilities or failing in some other way.

However, all suffering has only one purpose — to remind us that we are fallen, sinful creatures, and without repentance before Yahweh, we will suffer far more in eternal life than we can ever suffer in this life. For this life is not the main event of life. Eternity is. Therefore, the big question of this life is with whom we will spend eternal life. Will we spend it with righteous Yahweh or the lying thief and murderer of our souls, Satan? That's the most important question of this life.

Recently, one of those blame God videos came into my YouTube feed. It's based on the case of a Peruvian girl named Lina Medina who became the youngest confirmed mother in history when she gave birth to a son on May 14th, 1939 when she was only 5 years, 7 months and 21 days old. The father of her child was never determined. But the condition that enabled her to conceive is called precocious puberty.

The female maker of this video wants us to believe that God is evil for permitting such suffering to happen to a little child. Therefore, we shouldn't believe in God.

I would retort to this modern American woman, "Is God evil, then, for permitting you to abort your unborn child if you so will?" Or is it you who are evil for even considering it?

Let's be clear about one thing. Until the Day of His final Justice, Yahweh will tolerate all kinds of evil on this earth. He will permit evildoers to cause great suffering. But Yahweh has told us quite clearly that on the Day of His Justice all of us will be held accountable for what we have done. And nothing will remain hidden. The man who raped the little girl will be revealed and held accountable. Yahweh is righteous and His righteousness will prevail against all evil, big and small. No one will escape standing before righteous Yahweh in judgment. Therefore, lady, you are quite deceived. God is good. Period. His Justice will prevail. But, what will happen to you on Yahweh's Day of Justice?

There is only one way to escape the suffering of eternal separation from Yahweh. There is only one way to be restored to Yahweh. There is only one way to regain the Image of God. There is only one way to be able to Love Yahweh as He has loved us. There is only one way to become as righteous as Yahweh for all eternity and to stand without fear in His presence. That one way is Jesus. The suffering and excruciating death of Yahweh, the Son, on a Roman cross in our place has totally satisfied Yahweh's Justice. We saw that when we studied Romans 8 in past weeks.

Therefore, to all who repent of the unfortunate god-playing they're locked into by Original Sin; to all who repent of their offenses against Yahweh in thought, word and deed; to all who confess their sins to Yahweh without trying to hide anything, Yahweh has promised through the completed work of Jesus that their sins are forgiven — totally, completely. And wherever the debt of sin is forgiven through the suffering of Messiah Jesus, nothing but Yahweh's righteousness remains. As it says in John 1:12, "... to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Like Job, we may have to suffer in this life. Let's be clear that those who alleviate suffering in this life do a good deed. However, this life is not the main event of life. As we heard the Apostle Paul say a few weeks ago in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And this came from a man who was intimately acquainted with suffering. Those in Christ who suffer here have a great hope. It will be more than made up to them in the glorious main event of life. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV.