

## “Courage to Risk Living and Loving Again”

### Job 42: 7-17

This week, we finish with our sermon series on the Book of Job. I'm sure at the beginning of this series, many of us were thinking, “Why Job?” and now that we are at the end of it, we may still be asking, “Why Job?” Because even though we find ourselves at the end of the series, we still don't have the answer to why humans suffer. We still don't know why God “let” matters happen in the first place. We still don't know a lot of the answers to our questions of faith. We've come to the end of the series, and it seems like we have more questions than answers.

So knowing all that, I will be the first to admit that the Book of Job does seem to take us around and around in circles without ever really answering our questions but I will also be the first to admit that over the last few weeks, I have come to appreciate that fact. I like the fact that the Book of Job takes us around and around without ever answering our questions. Because the reality of it is, that is the life we experience here on earth. We experience a life with ups and downs, joys and pains, good and bad, all rolled up in one journey, continuing on sometimes with no rhyme or reason. As people of faith, we experience a life full of more gray

than black and white. A life full of more questions than answers. A life full of more wonderings than certainty. That's one of the main reasons I picked this book for our summer sermon series. Because it doesn't try to make things neat and tidy.

Well, that is until this last part of Job. As we heard today, Job, after all that happened to him and his family, we are told that his fortunes are restored twofold. Now, I know, looking at first glance, this seems like a very good thing. I mean, Come on, after all that Job suffered, why shouldn't he find a little relief? Why shouldn't he experience some good in life for a change? At first glance, we say this man has gone through enough already. Universe, let up, will you? As we read the ending of Job's story, our first reaction is that it is a good thing that Job is healed. It is a good thing is cattle numbers are doubled and tripled. It is a good think that he and his wife have more children. All of these things are good things. But then those pesky questions start popping up again. We start asking "Does God restore Job's fortunes because Job was faithful? We start asking "Does God feel bad for all that happened to Job and that's why God blesses Job even more later in his lie? Those pesky questions keep popping up and we find ourselves asking, "Aren't we in the same place that we were when we started this whole journey with Job? What was the point of Job going through all that stuff if God was just going to restore everything back to Job in the end anyway?

You see, like I said before, we are at the end of our story and we still have more questions than answers. But I'll be honest, as we draw to a close on this Book in the Bible, it is not the unanswered questions that bother me. What bothers me more is that each and every time I read this part of Job, it ends just a little too "happily ever after" for my taste. It is all just a little too neat and tidy. Every time I come to the end of Job's story, it is not the pesky questions that keep popping up that bother me the most. It is the fact that, in the end, it seems like the narrator is telling us that all that stuff that happened to Job and his family doesn't matter, that we can forget all about it because now Job's fortunes are restored. It is almost like the narrator is telling us that all that should matter to us as people of faith is that now Job can put the past behind him and move on with his life. And all that stuff, the loss of his children, the loss of his property, the loss of his health, the loss of everything, shouldn't matter to us. All that should matter is that everything has been made right. We should be able to enjoy the fact that now Job has his own "happily ever after."

I hope you can detect the sarcasm in my voice as I am saying all of this because, let's face it, we all know that there is no way Job can just move on and forget his losses. There is no way Job can just move on and pretend all that stuff didn't happen to him and his family. He knows that they happened. We know that they happened. And as people of faith, we also know that it is these very losses that

have shaped Job into the person that he is at the end of the story. These losses are the very things that bring God and Job to have a heart to heart. These losses are the very reasons that Job begins to question God in the first place. So as people of faith, we can't just ignore a huge chunk of Job's story nor can we gloss over them or act like they didn't happen. Because if we do, then we make this whole Book of the Bible pointless.

Think about it. If we are just going to ignore Job's losses and pretend that everything is honkey dory, there wouldn't be a reason for this Book in our Bible in the first place. It could have easily been left out and no one would have been any wiser. But there is a reason this book was included in our sacred text and as people of faith, we need to figure out what exactly that reason is.

So as I have struggled with this ending this past week, here is what I have come up with as a possible reason for us to take a second look at how Job's story turns out. If I'm being completely honest, I don't think Job is able to just move on and enjoy his "happily ever after". Too much has happened. Job is not the same person he was at the beginning of the story. That's the power behind his story. Job comes to a new understanding in his relationship with God. He realizes that before all this happened, he was passive in his faith. Sure, he was doing all the right things but for the wrong reasons.

Before Job's transformation, He was treating his relationship with God as a system for action and reward. Job would pray, God would reward. Job would sacrifice, God would bless. Job was a righteous man, and God responded with goodness. But after his encounter with God, Job realizes that faith in God, that our relationship with God doesn't work that way. God doesn't punish or reward God's people. God is not up there, checking God's list twice, seeing if we are naughty or nice. God doesn't smite those who disobey and reward those who are considered good. Instead, God makes sure the rain falls on the just and the unjust equally.

The thing that Job realizes after his transformation is that God has given God's creation to free will to make its own choices, good or bad. God has given us the gift of choosing whether or not we want to be in a relationship with God. God doesn't try to force us into a relationship if we choose not to. It is up to us to decide if we want God in our lives or not. I bet you never thought a preacher would say that!

However through his transformation, what Job appreciates the most about his relationship with God is that what God does promise us as God's Beloved Children, named and claimed, is that God will be there for us, loving us, walking beside us, along the way. Even if we decide we don't want God in our lives, God is there waiting for us and more importantly loving us.

God will be there with us through all of life's ups and downs, through all of life's twists and turns. God will be there with us and for us no matter where our life journey may take us. God will be there for us through it all, the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takingly beautiful moments that fill our lives. God has promised to be there for us no matter what.

So again, no I don't think Job can just forget what happened to him and move on. Simply because Job is not the same person he was at the beginning of this story. He has grown in his faith. He has grown in his relationship with God and shown us how we can do the same.

We know that we are not the same person we were when we started this journey we call life. We are not the same person we were five years ago, ten years ago, twenty years ago. Hopefully we have grown and are becoming the person God created us to be.

On our journey through life, We've been changed. We've been transformed. Events that have happened and will happen in our own personal story have shaped us into the person we are today. And because of that, As people of faith, we know that Job cannot forget all that happened to him and his family. Simply because we've never been able to forget all the things that have happened in our lives either.

Each and every one of us has been shaped by the events in our lives. Events either good or bad. Events like divorce, a loss of a parent, a loss of a job, a loss of security, a loss of a child. Events like marriage, birth of a child, new jobs, or moving away to a new and exciting place. Our lives are filled with such events and whatever that event maybe, we know that it has shaped us into the person we are today. Good or bad, that event is now a part of our story and it will never go away. We can't ignore it. We can't deny it. We can't forget it either. And just because some of these events may have taken our lives in a different direction than what we expected does not mean that they should control our lives forever. We know that there is more to life than just the events that fill it. There is also the very experience of life as well.

As people of faith, we know we have a choice when it comes to how we experience the gift of life. We know that, after an event happens in our lives, especially when that event throws us for a loop, we have a choice. We can either summon up the courage to risk living and loving again or we can roll over and let the darkness win. Either way we choose will reflect the faith we claim and name as our own.

Let me explain: There is a saying that goes, "Time heals all wounds." That's not true. All time does is give us perspective and distance. Time doesn't erase our hurts and our losses. It just give us distance so they don't hurt as much. We know

they are still there but now, thanks to the gift of time, we can see that we have a choice. We can either choose to find healing and wholeness or we can choose to let the losses take over our lives. I'll be the first to admit it is not an easy choice nor is it an immediate choice. It takes time until we are ready to make that choice. And It takes courage, it takes strength, and more importantly, it takes faith to risk loving and living again. Something we can do because we've experienced the love and grace of our God.

That's what the whole resurrection is about for us as people of faith. It is about us as people of faith finding the courage to know that death and darkness will not have the last word. It is about us as God's own children finding the courage to trust that God will be the God we expect and know God to be: a God of love, a God of grace, a God of mercy and more importantly, a God of life. The resurrection is about us as a community of faith finding the courage to hope always even when the world tells us that we are foolish to do so.

You see, our story of faith is a story of hope. It is a story of new life. None of the Gospels end with the empty tomb. Somehow, some way, the disciples experience the gift of new life through the presence of the Risen Lord. Each Gospel tells of how life can continue on. Each Gospel tells of how life and light will overcome darkness. Each Gospel tells of how hope reigns forever.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is when Jesus comes to Thomas after the resurrection and he tells Thomas to touch the wounds in his side. What I love is that the resurrection, this gift of new life that Jesus brings, doesn't eliminate Jesus' wounds. It just transforms them into an opportunity for Thomas and for all the disciples to experience the love of God in a new way. Jesus' wounds become a way for healing and wholeness to happen for all of God's children once more.

And the same should hold true for Job's situation as well. Job's losses shouldn't be forgotten. They shouldn't be ignored. Instead, they should become ways to show us, all of God's children, should become ways to show us that in spite of the darkness there can be healing and wholeness for us as well. That in spite of the pain and hurt that comes along in life, there is hope for new life, all because we know our God is a God of love and life.

I'll be honest I have never liked the fact that someone tried to explain things away in Job's story. This part was added later, separate from the original. I really wish that someone would have just left it alone and ended it at verse 6 of this chapter. You know, that moment when God and Job come to some sort of understanding of each other, that moment when Job realizes that God is God and he is not, that moment when Job realizes that no matter what, God is going to be there for him and all of God's creation.

But no, someone felt like he or she needed to tidy up the loose ends of this story. And instead of helping the story, the story loses its power because of the addition. I wish that person would have realized that sometimes the sad reality of life is that in the face of loss and hurt, we don't get tidied up loose ends. Instead, more often than not, we are left with some frayed ropes, frayed ropes that we have to fashion into a life line. I wish that person would have realized that sometimes, in spite of all our good tries, our stories don't end with a "happily ever after." I really wish that someone would realized that sometimes in the end, we don't get all of our questions answer.

Simply because by adding this addition, this person tries to ignore Job's losses instead of allowing them to become ways of healing and wholeness for us as people of faith. I just wish that person would have left this story alone. But I guess it is human nature for us to want a conclusion. We prefer happy feel good stories. We prefer knowing how things come together in the end. We prefer experiencing the power of good triumphing over evil. We prefer to have all the answers to our questions especially when we come to the end.

But I think if that is what we are expecting from our journeys of faith, than we will be greatly disappointed. We aren't people of faith because we want answers to all of our questions. We are people of faith because we have been

transformed by the grace and love of God and realize that there is something more than this world can offer.

I think Job's greatest lesson for us is that it reminds us that no matter what, God is here for us. And as people of faith, it is this knowledge that gives us the strength, gives us the courage, gives us the faith to risk living and loving again when life takes unexpected turns. Because with this knowledge, the knowledge that God is always there for us, ultimately we know, no matter what God is in control and that life and love will always overcome the darkness.

It may not be how we expected it to happen and it may not be the way we hoped our lives would go, but in the end, all that really matters is that we know it is going to be okay because we have the faith that God will see us through.

Thanks be to God. Amen.