

Job 23:1-9, 16-17
Job's Journey:
Through the Valley

“The Death of Ivan Ilych”: Friends in the next room, a million miles away.

There is something about suffering that isolates, cuts one off.

Can make a person feel dreadfully alone.

Job is alone.

Once he was the greatest in the east.

Respected, wealthy, blessed with 10 children.

Job is alone. His world is destroyed. He sits in the solitude of suffering.

The Sixth Sense: the solitude of that boy.

Job is alone ... though friends sit with him.

Seven days without speaking

But then they can take it no longer.

Must explain Job's suffering.

There must be a reason.

If there is no reason, suffering is random, and no one is safe. And everything they believe is at risk.

Last week's sermon

How can we be safe?

Job also: offered sacrifices for every child just in case.

But now Job is a million miles from such safe piety.

Job was “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.”

Integrity

Now all is in doubt.

The friends: Job, you have sinned. What have you done to bring this on yourself?

Eliphaz, chapter 22: “Is it for your piety that he reproveth you, and enters into judgment with you? Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities.”

But Eliphaz wishes well for him. Says something a good Christian could say:

Vv21ff: “Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored, if you remove unrighteousness from your tents.”

Get right with God!

God punishes the wicked. Job, you must be wicked.

This is an important part of their faith. Evil people suffer. Good people are blessed.

One thing people can't stand is to have their beliefs messed with.

Old joke:

The world sits on the back of a turtle.

But what does the turtle sit on?

You can't fool me. It's turtles all the way down.

Job is questioning his friends' turtles. But to them he is questioning God. They feel they must defend God.

So they explain Job's suffering.

Dangerous thing to explain someone's suffering.

Rick and his preacher: What sin did you commit?

David's story:

Chaplain at Scottish Rite.

With a mom who had just lost her young daughter.

A friend came in to visit and tried to say something helpful: “God never gives us more than we can handle.”

Mom: “Does that mean that if I were a weaker person my daughter would still be alive?”

You can believe in all the easy answers you want when your family is safe and sound and you have a stable job, a nice house, a good life. In times like that, cliches and flimsy faith will do just fine, but don't expect someone whose life is coming apart at the seams to go along for the ride.

You've sinned, Job, his friends say. You've done something to deserve this.

Job: Maybe I **have** sinned, but I haven't done anything to deserve **this**.

Tuesdays with Morrie quotation.

Job agrees. If this is punishment for some sin, if this is supposed to teach Job some sort of lesson, then God overdid it.

Some answers are needed, but it is God who should explain.

It's as though he's in a court of law:

vv. 3-6

But remember:

Job was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." He had always put his faith in God. He thought he knew God. He thought he walked with God everyday. This is the relationship upon which he had built his life.

The only thing Job has left is his integrity, his faith in the God he had always trusted. And he won't let go of that. But where is God?

Psalm 139: Whither shall I go from your presence?

Job: vv. 8-9

It's like the interrogation rooms we see on cop shows. From outside the room, people watch through a one-way glass, but from inside the room, all the suspect can see is a mirror.

Come out from behind the glass, Job says. Show yourself. At least hear me out.

Job is alone. Clinging to his faith despite all evidence to the contrary, he sits surrounded by friends who cannot understand him.

Now picture another group of friends. And sitting in their midst is one they cannot seem to understand.

He has been teaching them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

But to his friends such talk makes no sense. That isn't what happens to the Messiah. That can't be what will happen to Jesus, the one who heals, and forgives and shows in his words and actions the very power and truth of God.

He is alone among his friends.

They think he has come for glory, but he knows he has come to suffer with those who suffer, to be with those who in their hurt wonder, “Does God even care? Does God even notice when I hurt?”

I've quoted it before:

Jesus wants us to understand that we should no longer think “Where the Messiah is there is no suffering.” Instead, “Wherever there is suffering, there is the Messiah.”

Philippians 2: Speaks of Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with god a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of human beings. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

The one-way glass shatters. God comes to us, one of us.

And Paul, beaten, imprisoned, alone because of his faith in this Messiah, could also say of his and our suffering, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.”

Doesn't mean everything is good, but it does mean that there is no suffering in this world that cannot be given meaning by the God who suffers with us, the God of resurrection.

Job, a person of rare faith, will not—**will not**—settle for anything less.

And neither should we.