

What would your first response be?

Job 1: 1; 2: 1-10 and Hebrews 1: 1-4; 2: 5-12

So, on this day of gratitude and Thanksgiving we are reminded of the importance of having faith and leaving an authentic Christian life. Over the next four weeks we will be working our way through the story of Job. The stage is set in the reading today when Job is chosen by God to be tested by Satan. Job is described as a righteous, blameless and an upright man who fears God and will turn away from all evil. He has integrity and strength. In the story it must be noted that Satan doesn't just work alone, Satan is working for God, Satan cannot act at all without God's permission. Now it has been said that "the book of Job is a complex work exploring the intricate intersection of divine sovereignty, human faith and innocence suffering."¹ Job's faith will be tested. The question is how will Job respond when he loses everything, when he is faced with suffering, and how much suffering can one person take? What motivated Job to respond with faith even when his wife questioned it?

Our stewardship theme is 'Become a First Responder to the Call'; how will we the faithful followers of Jesus and the people of God respond to the suffering in the world? How we respond to the needs of others in our midst and in this community and in the world? We will be exploring first responses to the call from God; we will seek wisdom on what it is we are called to do when it's hard to respond; we will take time to discern how and who should respond by assessing the situation and asking the important question, 'How can I help?'; and finally we will make our pledge to respond to God's call. So, let's begin by exploring one's motivation. What motivated Job to respond in faith? I'm not sure that we are going to be able to answer that question yet. How does one explain why they believe in God? How does one explain their faith?

The book of Job leaves us with a chicken or egg kind of question. Did the chicken come first or did the egg come first? In this book the question is, "Do persons believe to be blessed or is faith instead an expression of gratitude because we have been blessed?"² So, do we believe to be blessed or do we believe because we're blessed? That is the question. Why does Job believe? Why do we believe in God? Is faith a commodity for you? Job's wife seems quite angry and questions Job's decision to stay faithful to God when she said, "Do you persist in your integrity?"

¹ J.S. Randolph Harris, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, p. 123.

² _____, p. 123.

Curse God and die.” I have no doubt that many people of faith, strong faithful people have cursed God in times of great suffering. My answer is always God can take it so it's okay. Job's answer though is challenging. He says, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?”

In one of the commentaries I was reading Paul E. Capetz shared the following,

*“God vindicates the righteousness of Job. We thus learn that in the world as designed by God suffering is not always the consequence of one's sin or virtue and our virtue does not entail happiness. I once heard someone who is in the middle of a deep personal crisis remark, ‘God doesn't owe me anything.’ Like Job this person understood that true service of God is not motivated by the hope of reward for oneself.”*³

So, what then is stewardship? For Christians stewardship is a way of life, it is a way to follow, it's a way to give. Being a steward is our faithful response to God. So, as we focus on how we will respond as God's stewards we need to reflect on the big questions. Why do we believe? Why are we called be here? And what have we been called to do? And what have we been called to share and to give? Job is called to give almost everything he had. He was chosen by God as a role model for others that no matter what he faced he would not turn away from God. What motivated Jesus to God's call, even in the face of extreme suffering and ultimately death? What would have been your first response if you were Job? What would motivate you to respond in faith? Why do you respond in gratitude, generosity and thanksgiving?

As we've been thinking about this stewardship theme I've taken the opportunity to talk to many first responders, paramedics, firefighters, police officers and I keep asking them, trying to figure out what is it that motivates people that deal with some horrific crisis. What motivates them to respond in those times? I have a friend from high school who is a paramedic, he tried to get me over my fear of doctors, it didn't work; however, I asked him, why did you become a paramedic? And he said do you want first answer or the second and I said both. His first answer was, well I didn't have the grades to become a doctor and I didn't have the grades or the drive; however, the real reason is because I want to help people. He shared a story of a time when he went to a house and was in the face of gunfire and discerning when to go in and how best to help, he also shared a story about responding to a lady whose radio wasn't working and how that was just as important a moment as the one when he was being shot at.

Being able to help somebody in a crisis is very powerful. He shared that many respond out of the desire to help. But he did mention that some people respond out of civic duty. They want to respond because they feel called to care for the community in which they live. He said that others respond out of legacy a family legacy where their grandfather, their mother and their uncle, their cousin were first responders and so it's in their DNA and that is what they've been called to do as

³ Paul E. Capetz, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B Volume 2, p. 126.

well. As clergy, we are called and feel called by God. We feel called to respond by feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and standing up for the oppressed and in the face of injustice. Each one of us has a slightly different call and some of us, like me, responded reluctantly fighting with God the whole time trying to avoid this call. But, sometimes God is very insistent.

And let me tell you that God is insistent with every single one of you too. You have all been called! You don't need to be a clergy to respond, as we heard in the story that Nancy shared today. Sometimes we need to respond because we are there. We are the first on scene. We respond because God longs for a world where we will live in peace and harmony, where wealth and all resources are freely shared, ensuring that all peoples needs are met. Jesus responded in faith and calls us to respond in faith by loving one another as we would be loved. Loving our enemy. Loving strangers with our whole heart, our soul, and our minds.

Jesus offers us a life where we will never be thirsty or hungry again. And through this bread and wine, through communion, we will be filled. We will be given the strength and courage to answer God's call.

People of God we are called to be the church! We're called to the edges of society where people have been cast out. We're called to walk with people that others would not touch nor look at. We are called to turn toward the suffering and not walk by hoping the next person will deal with it. Sometimes it's hard to express why we believe, why we feel called. Sometimes it takes outsiders, people who maybe don't have faith or a different faith to show us how it is we are already responding. T

his summer we received a letter anonymously delivered to our mail slot and it said, and I want to share with you now,

I want to take this opportunity say thank you to everyone at Robertson-Wesley United Church for the time and work you put into preparing and handing out bag lunches to the homeless and struggling, low income in our community. Your program has fed people who otherwise would have gone hungry without the bag lunches you prepared. The lunches you have provided for them maybe the only meal some people get. With food in their stomachs the homeless and low income are able to think more clearly and concentrate on other situations in their lives besides wondering where the next meal will come from. Your bag lunch program has been a blessing to our community. The people handing out the lunches do so with caring, kindness and a smile on their face. That caring kindness and smiling face will be remembered by people receiving lunch and may be the only caring, kind smile that they receive. Keep up the wonderful work. Good job. I'm sure God is smiling down, and that God watches you caring for the less fortunate in your community. Please use this money would I have enclosed to help with bag lunches. Thank you and God bless you all.

Why do you respond? Why do you respond with faith?