

## *When responding: assess the situation and know your limits!*

*Job 38: 1-7, 34-41 and Mark 10: 35-45*

The stewardship theme, for this year is “Become a first responder...to the call.” We have shared stories of when somebody responded to us when we were in need. Last week we talked with a firefighter and heard why he was called to his career. And we heard that he knows that he is never alone; you never go into a situation on your own, but always with others. And, we talked about we too as faithful followers need to lean in to God.

I want to talk today though, about the process a first responder goes through when arriving to a call. A friend of mine who is a paramedic provided me with some steps that first responders follow when arriving on scene. The first step is that we need to recognize that I need to be safe in order to help you. I need to ask how I can help. I also then need to do a scene assessment. I need to remember to ask myself; is it safe for me to respond? Do I need to more resources than I currently have? And then the third assessment I need to do is a personal one. Do I have all the protective resources I need in order to safely respond and be of help to others? And finally, I need to introduce myself and ask how can I help? And then, and only then do I respond.

After suffering great losses and living in pain, Job called on God and said we need to have a sit-down meeting right now. I am done with this. I think it was a reasonable request after what he had been through. He was tortured for a very long time and all he asked was to have a one-on-one conversation with God. But Job was left wondering, where God was during his trials and tribulations. Job’s perspective, when you think about it, God has been and always will be someone of action. Job had heard the stories of how when the people disappointed God, God acted by flooding the earth, but then promised not to do it again. When the Egyptian Pharaoh held the Hebrew people captive as slaves, God responded by sending in Moses to free them as God’s chosen ones. And when the people got frustrated as they spent 40 years walking to the promised land in the wilderness, God provided for them as well. So, where was God for Job? Why wasn’t God responding to his cry for help? I think it was well within Job’s right to plead his case to God. After all he was a good and faithful man. God had shown us that God takes care of faithful followers, and Job’s experience left him wondering has God changed? Is it me? Job

wanted to know if everything that God did was just. Because from his perspective, what Job experienced and had to endure was not just in his mind. I think the message in the scriptures today is this, 'Be careful what you ask for', and 'trust that God only asks you to do what you are capable of doing.'

For Job got what he asked for. God answered Job from a whirlwind, but as always, the answer is not one that one would expect. In fact, God responds with more questions than answers. So, what did you think of God's response to Job today. What did you think when you heard the words, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins. I will ask you and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding." How did you react when you heard God's words today? How did it make you feel? A psychologist might say God was reacting defensively to what Job had challenged. But alas we know that God is not of human realm and so did not react in a human way. Job was searching for God, and Job found God. Where was God during the suffering and great loss? God was right there with Job. When Job demands that God sit down with him, God appears. When Job cries out in search of a reason as to why he was being punished, God answers him. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have God suddenly appear before you and speak so clearly and directly to you? God helped Job to clearly assess his situation, through asking questions, through discernment and by helping Job to become more self aware.

Now similarly, in our gospel lesson today, Jesus helps James and John discern what they are called to do. My favourite part of the reading today is when Jesus responds to James and John by saying, 'you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' And of course, in their arrogance, they reply, 'We are able.' Sometimes, in our desire to help or to be recognized or valued or to find our place, we put ourselves into a situation where we may not be as helpful as we would like. There are times in our lives where we need to accept help, before we can give help. There are also times in our lives when we think we know how to help somebody, but what we may be doing is not providing them with the help that they need. So, let's ask the question, how can I help, before we respond. Again, we need to be careful what we ask for; God has played a few of those great tricks on me over the years, in ways I never would have expected and probably, well, it wasn't a good situation, let's just say that. Again, we need to be careful what it is we ask for.

John and James made some big assumptions in this dialogue with Jesus today. For their desire to be like Jesus means that they too have come to serve and not be served. I invited the group that gathered for Scripture Reflections on Tuesday to think about a time when they thought they were ready to take on something, but in hindsight they realized they really weren't, and it wasn't a good situation. And, we all came up with various examples. There were more when we were younger and foolish and thought we were super heroes and could do just about anything. But there were also ones when we were adults, when we took on something that we weren't ready for. And, I didn't ask this question to stop you all from responding.

So, where does this leave us as faithful responders to God's call? Here's what I know. We are all called to respond. We all have gifts, skills, and resources that we can offer. And as we move through life there will be times when we can offer help and there will be times when we are not, even when we have the gifts and skills. Some of us need the proverbial kick in the pants, to get off our butts and to go and to do something that makes us a little bit uncomfortable. Some of us, though, need to pause, because we always say yes to everything and we get spread so thin that we are not able to respond in the way that we want. And we sometimes respond either way because we do not feel worthy, or we feel that somebody else will respond, they'll do it better, maybe they really don't mean me to respond in this situation. There are so many reasons, but what you need to discern is what it is you are called to do at this moment in your life.

I am also aware that we as a congregation need to stop making assumptions about the people who are gathered here; the people sitting next to you. Some of us need to be asked the question, how can I help, rather than, will you help. By my rough calculation there are over 260 named volunteer roles that are filled and need to be filled here at Robertson-Wesley to carry out our mission and ministry. That's a rough estimate. And those are only the ways that we see and talk about and advertise. We are looking for people to help in so many ways; sometimes in those one-time moments and sometimes in the long-time leadership, over a period of a year or two. Things like our Spiritual Formation Pod Coordinator or our Family Ministry Committee, the Stewardship Committee, the Finance Committee, the Property Committee, the Ministry and Personnel Committee. We are also looking for youth leaders and people to help with the nomination role so that we can find key leaders for our Board. And these are just a few of the many. And I know that there are just as many roles being filled outside of this church, in the community and in our world by people here in our midst.

As people of faith we respond to people in need; in need of the basics of life. As people of faith we respond to people who are being oppressed and we are called to be advocates and to seek justice where there is none. As people of faith we are called to respond to God. For even when we, like Job, think God has abandoned us, God is there. Providing us with the strength and courage and direction; to do what we know we are called to do. Like John and James, we are not called to simply sit back and serve Jesus directly; we are called to serve the world in love, as Jesus did. This is not an easy call and it is essential that we take time to discern if we are able to help at this point in our life, or not; or whether our help may be more harmful than good. Knowing our limits is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of health and wellness. Asking the question, how can I help, is not a sign of incompetence, but rather a sign of humbleness, respect, and love. I have faith and I trust that we will all respond to God's call in both the little and big ways. So, ask yourself, how will you respond. What are you ready to do right now? What has God called you to do?