

Call, humility, and obedience – the priesthood of all believers

Job 38:1-7; 34-41, Hebrews 5:1-10

Call, humility and obedience - the priesthood of all believers

What COVID has reminded me is that, as a faith community, as we re-engage one another, that we also need to reacquaint ourselves to God's call. As we stand together in humility and seek to find ways to participate in God's mission and ministry in this world. How will we take part in making God known in this world? How will we embody the presence of God in all that we do and all that we are? We sang this morning the song that reminds us that we are the church. So what does this mean? These are the questions that we seek to explore today with our scriptures.

The story of Job is a story I have always loved and hated at the same time. The story of Job is this man who was chosen by God as a person who was exemplary in his faith. God believed that Job would never, ever lose faith. And so allowed and invited Satan to challenge Job by creating all sorts of suffering on this poor man. Job lost everything. He got sick. His wife started to wonder, "What is wrong with you? Why aren't you cursing God?" His friends, same thing.

The passage from Job that we heard today is the climax of the story for Job, in Job's moment of suffering. We know that God believes, as I've said, that Job is a person of faith. Yet in this story we hear of the long suffering that Job was put through. Now, his friends believed that this suffering is caused because he is sinful. And he is very clear right from the beginning that, "I haven't sinned. There is no reason for this suffering." And his friends were like, "Come on, Job. Just admit it. Would you just admit that you aren't perfect? You did something wrong. All you need to do is repent, say you're sorry, and all will be well." But Job maintained that he had not sinned. So why is he being forced to suffer? Job is understandably upset with his friends because they didn't believe him. And Job at one point was ready and said, "You know, I just want to have this important conversation with God. We're going to get to the bottom of this." And so, as for most of us when we're preparing for one of those big debates, we're thinking about all the questions we're going to ask, we're thinking about all the things that justify our argument as to "I did not deserve to suffer, God. So why is this happening?" Eventually, he goes on to even curse his life, but not God. He says, "You know what? I wish my life was over. I'm

done with this. I'm tired of this suffering." But he still doesn't get to the point where he loses his faith. He cries out, "Why do I have to go on?"

And then we get to the passage today. Job, as we know, is longing to see God, has asked all these questions, looks to God for help and then finally, after a very long drawn-out of over 30 chapters, God finally speaks. God appears and speaks out of a whirlwind and a storm. So not in a time where everything is good, but in a time where everything's chaotic. And God ends up answering Job's questions with more questions, which isn't always so helpful. Perhaps God's words are there to help Job see the bigger picture. To see what it means to be human. Either way, God's response does remind us and assures us that we have not been abandoned, even in our suffering. God is there for us. And in the presence of God, after the passage that we heard today, what happens is that Job's questions disappear. They melt away because of the experience he had in being present before God. Suddenly his questions didn't seem to matter. His arguments that were intended to confront God no longer mattered. God listened, God was there, and in the end God blessed Job and Job's life was restored.

The story of Job teaches us and reminds us that this is God's world. Not Job's, not yours and not mine. We need to let go of our need to control everything in this world and instead let God. We need to recognize that God is present, even when, in our suffering, we can't see it. And let's be honest: there's been a lot of suffering over the last few years.

How many of us, in our times of suffering, have wondered where God is? How many of us have longed to feel God's presence in those times of need? And how many of us have felt abandoned by God and, at times, by our own faith community, by the church?

Have you ever been around somebody who has real presence? Can you think of somebody who just, when you're with them, you're so present to them and them to you? Who, in your life, has really seen and heard you for who you are? For Job, it was God in the end. God saw Job. God knew Job. But what about the rest of us? God isn't here on earth, so we think. The passage from Hebrews helps us to understand that Jesus is actually present here on earth.

Hebrews points out that not only is Jesus the high priest, but more importantly, according to another theologian who said:

"Jesus is also the humble slave who endures and experiences *every* weakness, every testing that human experience can offer. And Jesus suffers with us, not for us. Not rescuing us, but strengthening us for the cruciform living that rests at the heart of our own baptism: priesthood. Powerful weakness, holy humiliation, subversive authority, and priestly servanthood. Jesus models for us a kind of ministry that is complete. Perfect, but not in the sense of purity, but

perfect in the sense of wholeness.”¹ Perfection, in this case, is defined as completeness, fully carrying out the purpose for which we have been created.

So we hear of Job, tested by God, called by God to show us that our suffering is not caused by sin. Our suffering is human. And while Job was wondering where God was, God was truly present. Then, in order for us to feel God’s presence, God sent Jesus on earth. The disciples, the people who followed Jesus, as they listened and were around him, experienced the presence of God. And even in Jesus’s death and suffering, God’s presence is there. But now it lives in each and every one of us, the priesthood of all. We truly believe that we are all called by God to be the church in the world. To express and help people to feel the presence of God.

What Job and Hebrews reminds us is that we do not *choose* to serve God, but God chooses us, for this is God’s world. The faith community, or the church, are the people gathered into community in response to God’s call in Jesus Christ. The church does not exist without the people. So there’s that beautiful little thing with your hands that we used to do as children: “Here is the steeple, here are the doors. Open the doors and there are the people.” That’s what the church is. The church is the people. The church exists, our purpose is to form and sustain individuals and people who are followers of Christ. The church – which is all of you – being the presence of God and Jesus in this world, are here to transform each others’ lives. We are here to help one another and to be committed to one another to share all that we’ve been given so that this world will truly create a space and a presence where all are important. Where harmony and peace can exist.

People don’t need to wonder if God is present in this suffering. During COVID, we have seen the presence of God. Through what you’ve done, through what you’ve felt, through what you’ve experienced. through *who you are*. Jesus is truly present in our suffering, because we are all part of the priesthood of all. God truly dwells in each and every one of us and in all of creation. But what we need to do is recognize it. We need to see and believe it, and have the faith that Job did that even in our suffering, God is truly present. For we are the body of Christ. We each have a part to play. And we need to do it with humility and obedience. And we know that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. Having faith that God is there to give us the strength to face what it is that we face. And know that there is no rhyme or reason. We are human, and with humanity comes suffering. But it also brings hope. Hope when we live out the call to love one another – our strangers, enemies, and friends alike – how will you be the presence of God to others? How will your kindness, your love, your need for justice in the world, bring hope to another person? Bring healing to another person? We’re in this together, for we are the church.

¹ Susan R. Andrews, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 184