

“Making Peace with God”

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Scripture: Job 1:1, 2:1-10; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

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This story of Job is not an easy one to read. Now, I don't say that because we live removed from the story by some 3000 years. This story really is timeless; it's not bound by its history. I think it's hard to read because it comes so close to home.

Who among us has never wondered why God allows good people to suffer? Have you ever known anyone, someone close to you, who has suffered loss or illness far beyond what anyone deserves? Or maybe you, yourself, have gone through such suffering, are going through it even now? We know who Job is; we know what it's like to be Job.

Turns out, the question of suffering is not unique to we modern people. It's always been a source of bewilderment, especially for those who want to live close to God. This story takes that question of why God allows the innocent to suffer and puts it on the table completely naked. There is no window-dressing or attempt to qualify God's complicity in this in any way. Job is a good, righteous man and God allows him to be struck by calamity and disease for no reason whatsoever.

That's what it says, isn't it? "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." This is an extreme case of innocent suffering.

Now, all we heard was the beginning of that story. It goes on and on...and on. Three friends of Job's show up to console him. They actually end up blaming him. "You must have done something wrong; innocent people don't go through this..." That's the conventional wisdom, after all. We like to believe there is some sort of cosmic ledger that balances everything out: You do something wrong here, you get punished there; you do a good deed, you get a reward. But Job reveals all that to be a lie. It's not the way the world really works and we know it. If it were, would Jon and Kate Gosselin still be on TV?

There is so much meaningless pain in our world. And this story acknowledges that reality and God's complicity in it while also seeking a way of coming to terms with it and making peace with God.

In the end things are resolved for Job. He doesn't suffer forever. He's justified. But he has to fight for it. He insists on meeting God face to face, and in the end God meets him. And even though God's response may not be entirely satisfying, it's enough for Job. And while he doesn't learn anything from his suffering, he does discover that God is not ignorant of it, and so he is not alone.

“Long ago,” begins the writer of Hebrews, “God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son...” Jesus is God’s peace in the world. And just as Job discovers God’s enduring presence through suffering, so does God become present to us in Jesus’ suffering. More than that, in Jesus God enters our suffering and takes it upon God’s self and makes it God’s own.

For the writer of Hebrews this is a source of unimaginable wonder. God makes peace with us through Jesus, who suffered and died and lives. So we are not alone in the suffering we endure. And the people of Samoa or Indonesia are not alone in their suffering and loss. And neither are children in Gaza or Afghanistan or Somalia. God knows it all, enters it all, in Jesus who calls each of them, each of us, sisters and brothers.

We remember God’s unity with us through Jesus’ suffering and our connection to the suffering of the world when we gather around this table. The table of communion is where we are met, through a body broken and blood poured out, met by the unavoidable reality of innocent suffering. It is also where that suffering is relieved and redeemed. For at this table, where the world gathers, all are fed, all are offered hope, and despair is turned to joy.

For Job making peace with God began when he refused to shut himself off from God in his suffering. God met him and Job was restored. We begin making peace with God when we refuse, in the midst of our suffering, in the knowledge of the world’s suffering, when we refuse to shut ourselves off from God and approach this table to receive God’s peace revealed to us in Christ.

Friends, I invite you to make peace with God. Let God enter your suffering and start to make you whole again.

Amen