

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Job and the Three Stooges

Based on Job 42

It's hard to believe that in just about a month's time, the Christian calendar will come to a close, and once again, we will begin afresh, the start of Advent, and our preparations for the Christmas season. It should come as no surprise, then, that as our year begins to wind down, the messages presented by our lectionary become more direct, urging you to consider carefully, the 'big' ideas of Christian discipleship, before we meander towards stars over Bethlehem, the birth of a **baby**, and the arrival of three wise men. (Hold on to that last one, because we're going to come back to it).

Enter, Job, and the 'big' topic of the day: suffering. If ever there was a character in the Bible to epitomize the drama and the depths of despair one really can discover, it would have to be Job. Job was a man who had all the world could offer, or so it would seem: family, friends, money, land, popularity. He was the guy you would meet at the coffee shop for a chat, the guy you would always see at the Synagogue on Saturday, the guy who would dress up as Santa and deliver candy to children at the orphanage

each Christmas (if Santa had been invented then!) You get the picture.

And then, it all disappeared. Disaster. Business deals gone south. Bad news in the doctor's office. Car repossessed. Tragedy. Death. First one thing, and then before he'd had a chance to catch his breath, another bombshell. Friends began to slip away, afraid the bad luck might be contagious. No more dinner party invitations. No more business deals. A little after that: no house, no food. Job's emotions went from bad to worse, and then fell to the depths of despair where there are few words to adequately describe the experience. He moved from sorrow, to deep grief, to anger, to a darkness and void where one could hardly breathe. He blamed everyone. He blamed himself. He blamed God. And still, there was no relief.

Somewhere along the way, he was joined by three 'friends.'

It seems a bit odd that while everyone else in Job's life was running in the opposite direction, these three companions would join the party. But then again, sometimes, miserly loves company. One of the study references from our Bible Study this week suggested that these men were in fact, sages, wise men. I would suggest to you that the author of Job was using some literary 'comic relief' of sorts. I would refer to them, rather, as The Three Stooges more than three Wise Men.

These companions had been very 'helpful' at helping Job sort out his problems. When drowning his sorrows in guilt, they confronted him with words like "Well Job, what did you do wrong to make God so angry?" When searching for a prayer of comfort, they commented, "You must not be a very faithful believer, Job, to have God treat you this badly!" With 'friends' like that, who needed enemies?

So how did Job find his way out of his 'dark night of the soul?' Somewhere along the way, between the 'oh woe is me pity party' and the endless loops of suffering, and the noise of his companions reminding him just how it was all his fault anyway, something changed.

The whispers of God began to make their way through the darkness. Job realized that even though he had been angry with God, God had continued to be his true companion through the difficulties. Job began to see the world through a different lens. He looked around, and realized: he had survived. Things were very different than before, but he was alive. There was still time, and still hope, and still possibilities of what yet, could become.

*"My ears had heard of you,"
Job had said, "but now my
eyes have seen you."*

~Job 42:5

Unfortunately for the three 'companions' they were too busy feeling sorry for themselves, trying to figure out who or what to blame next, and licking their wounds from God's sound scolding. They missed the point completely. God breathed new life into Job, and Job began to live again. But this time, job saw each turn of fortune as a blessing, not a given. He did not take things for granted. Worldly success or failure did not matter. For Job knew that his feet were firmly planted in his faith, that God would be faithful to him for all time. Never again, would Job lose sight of his God.

Suffering comes upon us all. Some suffering is obvious: sickness, death, tragedy. But look more closely, for there is hidden suffering that cuts just as deep, and stings just as much. The 'perfect' life on the surface often carefully hides deep suffering and anguish. Even for those of faith. The question becomes, do we see our suffering as some sort of punishment, and move into those agonizing, late night tossing and turnings of guilt? Do we look for someone to blame, or something to be angry about, as we discover unhealthy ways to vent our frustration, and fear? Do we want to make someone else 'pay for our pain?' Job tried all that. It didn't work. It didn't make him feel any better. It didn't make the suffering disappear.

Clinging to God did not make the suffering disappear either, but it did make it manageable. Holding on to hope made for a better outlook. A better outlook led to a head held a little higher. A chin up led to greater confidence. Confidence led to opportunities. Opportunities led to success. Success led, years later, to:

*"An old man and full of
years"... who*

*"saw his children and their
children to the fourth
generation." (v17)*

It is said that:

*"The Lord blessed the latter
part of Job's life more than the
former part." (v12)*

But we must realize that even in that second season of success, there would have been difficulties, troubles, suffering, just like before. But this time, the outcome different. And the companion beside Job? No, not one of the Three Stooges. They had long since disappeared from the scene, unable to cope with the smell of hope. Job said to God,

*"I know that you can do all
things; no purpose of yours
can be thwarted (v2)*

As our life story continues, through success, and through suffering, may we be able to say, "I trust you God, because

*"I know that you can do all
things."*

*"I know that you can do all
things."*

*"I know that you can do all
things."*

Amen.