

When Someone You Love is in Pain  
March 13, 2016  
Job 2:7-13; II Corinthians 1:3-7  
First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights  
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Have you noticed that Christian leaders are saying some hard things about public figures these days? Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, has been all over President Obama for visiting a mosque. The leadership of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has criticized Donald Trump for his comments concerning race and immigration. Pope Francis, of all people, has been hard on just about all of the candidates for President with the exception of the Jewish socialist who wants the job. Go figure.

But as tough as some of these comments are, I was flabbergasted when I read what some of the leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ had to say about a woman. One of these pillars of the church called her “the Devil’s accomplice.” Another referred to her as “a diabolical fury” and “an instrument of Satan.”

Who is this woman of great evil and questionable character that has the men of God so up in arms? Some Hollywood trollop? A porn star or morally-challenged athlete?

Nope. These comments came from St. Augustine, the pre-eminent scholar of the fifth century, and John Calvin, widely thought of as the father of Presbyterianism. The target of their scorn was an unnamed woman whom we know only as Job’s wife.



<sup>1</sup>This woman, whom Augustine also called “the helpmeet of the Devil” speaks a total of ten words in all of scripture. The book of Job contains 1070 verses,

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<sup>1</sup> *Job and His Wife*, Ilya Yefimovich Repin (1844–1930)

and she speaks in one of them... and somehow, in her speaking, she has really gotten under the skin of these great Christian leaders. Why?

Let's review where we've been with Job thus far. We've seen two different Heavenly Councils that point, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to the overwhelming power and authority of God. In addition, these discussions reveal the Satan's desire to turn the creation against the Creator, and to sow discord and disharmony. Job's integrity is repeatedly emphasized, as is his wealth. Last week we read where Job suffered an incredible loss: not only did he lose all of his property, holdings, and accumulated wealth, but every single one of his children was killed, presumably along with their families.

And perhaps I don't need to say this out loud, but I will anyway: there is no loss that Job has suffered thus far that has not also struck to the heart of his wife. Although Job is clearly the leading actor in the earthy part of this drama, we dare not minimize the pain of his bride. So before we even get to the point of considering what she has to say in this book that bears her husband's name, I will make a motion that we give her a break. We are about to consider a conversation between two people who have just buried all ten of their children and their families. And when you live through the funerals of ten of your own children on top of losing your entire savings account and income, well, you get a pass in my book. If that happens to you, I promise not to quote you for at least a year. So I will say to St. Augustine and to John Calvin, "Simmer down, boys. Give her a break!"

Let's consider the text for this morning, shall we? Picking up with our reading from Job, chapter 2.

Scripture  
Text

*So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the*

*soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.*



<sup>2</sup>The Satan leaves the second Heavenly Council and does his worst, afflicting Job from head to toe with unspeakable pain. There are a couple of things that are noteworthy here. First, it's as good a time as any to point out that while we often use "Satan" as a proper name, the Hebrew text reads *ha-satan*, which means, literally, "the accuser". Sometimes we read of this creature accusing God, and other times he attacks a human or some other part of the creation, but we have come to call him by that which he does. I could be wrong, but I would be willing to bet that most of you in this room have felt the sting of his accusations. The one who asks Eve in the Garden, "Can you really trust God?"; the one who strolls in front of the Almighty here in Job, taunting God by saying that Job only loves God because of all the shiny stuff that God has given to Job; the one who came to Jesus in the wilderness and said, "If you're just willing to soften a little on your stance concerning idolatry, I could make things so much better for you..." – *that one* has paraded through your life as well, troubling your heart and mind and spirit with doubt and fear and uncertainty and pain. You know the Satan. You have dealt with the accuser.

And here, the Satan goes out and finishes his work in Job's life, and then disappears from the story. There are still 40 more chapters to go in the book, but the accuser bows out after verse 7 in chapter two, leaving Job and his community to deal with the disruption he has brought.

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<sup>2</sup> *Job*, Leon Bonnat (1879)

And if the pain that Job and his wife had undergone in chapter one wasn't bad enough, here he suffers anguish in his body and mind. We see him sitting in the ashes – he has already torn off his clothing and shaved his head; now he regards himself as of such little worth that he takes himself out with the garbage. He lays in the dust of the earth and seeks to soothe the itching with a broken piece of pottery. Job is in a horrible place.

And then his wife speaks her only line in this entire drama:

Scripture  
Text

*His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"*



<sup>3</sup>We've often said that when we get to the Bible, it is a beautiful thing to have the words in front of us – but we don't know the inflection or the intent, do we? When she says that, is it a sarcastic jab? Is she kicking him when he is down, and belittling him for having faith? Is she tempting him into faithlessness?

Maybe. It's possible, though, that this was not her intent at all. It might be that she was herself so upset by seeing her beloved suffer through this new round of afflictions that she was crying out to him to just let go of life. You've seen this before – a person is clearly in so much pain and distress that those who love him gather around and say, "It's ok! You can go! I can't see healing from where I sit. I can't imagine wholeness...just make this pain stop however you can..."

In our previous conversations about Job, I invited you to be attentive to the creational language that comes out of this book. I said that a lot of the imagery and vocabulary sounds like Genesis. With that in mind, it's easy to see how Calvin and Augustine and other scholars have drawn a parallel between Eve's behavior in

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<sup>3</sup> *Job on the Ash Heap · Job Berated by His Wife* Jusepe de Ribera (c. 1632)

the Garden of Eden and Job's wife's comments here. They read about Eve, the seductive temptress who led her husband into faithless behavior, and they saw an echo of it in Job's wife's comments.

We noted on Wednesday night, however, that one difference is that Eve was tempted by the thought that she would have the knowledge of good and evil – concepts with which Eve apparently had very little experience. Even a cursory glance at Job's wife, however, will indicate that she knew more about the nature and power of evil than any person should ever have to know.

My sense is that Job does not share the scholars' low opinion of his wife. Listen to his response to her lament:

Scripture  
Text

*He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"*

*In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

Job does not call his wife "sinful" or "wicked" or "evil". He looks at her, I believe, in love, and says, "You are acting like a foolish person." In Hebrew, the word for fool is *nabal*. A fool, according to Psalm 14, is one who does not accept the rule or reign of God – someone who cannot see where God is or what God is up to in the world. So in essence, Job turns to his wife and said, "You're not acting like yourself today...you are talking like someone who doesn't have faith..." Job affirms the sovereignty of God and does not lose his integrity.

Our reading for this morning ends with one of the most beautiful images in all of scripture. When they hear of his troubles, Job's friends come to see him.

Scripture  
Text

*When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.*



<sup>4</sup>Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come on the scene to offer what help and encouragement they can. Look at the beauty that surrounds this group of friends: they arrive and immediately enter into the fullness of Job's reality. They embrace his pain and his anguish. They sit with him in his

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<sup>4</sup> Job, his Wife and his Friends: The Complaint of Job, William Blake, 1785.

shame and isolation – right there, amidst the ashes and the garbage – they are present with and for him.

They do not try to cheer him up or distract him. They don't pretend that he has not just suffered unspeakably. They don't – praise the Lord, they don't start talking to Job about what their brother-in-law did when *his* child died last year and maybe you two should hang out or something... No, they didn't do any of that. They wept with Job. They sprinkled ashes on themselves. And get this: they don't try to *explain* things to Job (at least, not yet). Nobody's trying to *fix* anything for Job. Just four men, sitting quietly, feeling the weight of the world on Job's shoulders.

The Apostle Paul wrote quite a bit to the church in Corinth. His letters there contain all sorts of references to mysterious things: he waxes eloquently about the resurrection from the dead, for instance; he talks about forgiveness and freedom and what it means to be made strong in weakness. There's a lot in Paul that we have to sit and think about.

But in the reading you had earlier from II Corinthians, he offers some incredibly practical and truth-saturated advice. We are best able to serve those in need, he says, when we are in touch with our own vulnerabilities. We are in a position to

offer the greatest comfort and consolation to those who have suffered greatly as we are willing to re-enter, and to share, our own losses.

Someone you love is going to be in great pain. It may be sooner or it may be later, but something is going to happen that will find you walking into a room that is full of hurt.

What will you do?

Be there. Show up and shut up. Sit with them for a while in the ashes of their pain and grief. You can't fix it, you can't take it away, and you better not try to explain it. Sooner or later, like Job, you may find the opportunity to remind your friend that we don't know how everything plays out, and then you can offer some concrete encouragement. When you do that, you become like Christ.

Last week we talked a little bit about the ways that the story of Job is an invitation to consider the suffering of God. This morning, take a look at these three men who come to enter into the reality of the one they called their friend. And then think about the way that in Jesus, according to John, God "became flesh and blood and lived among us". Thanks be to God, who knows where we are, and how to find us, and who is

willing to sit with us in the pain that most assuredly come our way. May we have the grace to offer that gift to each other as well. Amen.