

Job

Some Bible scholars believe that the Book of Job is the oldest written book contained in the Bible. Job's experience is one which most of us can relate to. Bad things happen to good people. Sometimes we question, "Why me?" when those bad things happen to us. We heard in our first passage this morning that Job "was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil," (Job 1:1), and God even said of him, "Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he still maintains his integrity, though you incited Me against him to ruin him without any reason," (2:3).

To summarize Job's story, the devil convinced God to let him torment Job. The devil thought that by taking his family, wealth, and even health, Job would turn on God. The devil's schemes didn't work then – they still don't work. If we are grounded in God's word, and are regularly coming together to worship, praise, and thank God for all He keeps on doing for us through Jesus Christ, then the enemy's schemes won't work on us. That's Good News – Jesus Christ whipped him at the cross and empty tomb and won the victory for us!

I want us to look at a Scripture from Mark's Gospel, and this morning keep in mind the title with which the Lord described Job to Satan – "My servant." Let's look at Mark 10:2-16. **Read Mark 10:2-16.**

Divorce is Painful

You know, hearing Jesus' words on divorce can be painful. When a marriage ends, it's heartbreaking. Anyone who has gone through a divorce can tell you that there is a lot of trauma, grief, and stress involved with terminating a marriage. Been there, done that. I know a few of you have as well.

Our Gospel lesson begins, saying, "Some Pharisees came and tested Jesus by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'" (Mark 10:2). I want to point something out here. The Pharisees are experts in the religious practices of the day. When they ask if it's "lawful," they're asking if it lines up with the Hebrew Bible – the Law. The key word in that verse, though, is "tested." These guys are testing Jesus, in much the same way the devil tested Job – trying to entrap in a difficult theological situation.

Notice how Jesus responds. "What did Moses command you?" (verse 3). He's referring them back to the Bible. Put another way, "What does the Bible say about it?" The Pharisees respond. "They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away,'" (verse 4).

Jesus on Marriage

I've read commentaries about what these guys were doing in those days. If their wife burned their food, they could divorce her. If she couldn't produce male children, they could divorce her. If she got sick and couldn't keep up with picking the grain in the fields, they could divorce her. They're all lousy reasons to divorce a wife. So Jesus

addressed this. “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” (verse 5).

And then, He corrects.

But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate, (verses 6-9).

In providing His correction, Jesus quotes the Hebrew Bible back to the Pharisees. Verse 6 of our text is a quote of Genesis 1:27, and verses 7-8 are a quote from Genesis 2:24. Who do most people think wrote the Book of Genesis? Most attribute it to Moses, someone any good Jew – any good Pharisee, or Sadducee for that matter – would look up to as an exemplar of faithfully living as a follower of God.

Love, Commitment, Covenant

This response by Jesus shut the Pharisees down, and left the disciples puzzled, and so when they were alone with Him, they asked Jesus about it, we’re told in verse 10. Then Jesus expands their understanding of divorce. “He answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery,’” (verses 10-11). See, what Jesus is doing in His response to the Pharisees, and His elaboration on it to His disciples is to redirect them back to the heart of God’s design for marriage and relationships.

In doing so, He focuses not on legalistic rules – on “Thou shall nots...,” but on the deeper intent of love, commitment, and covenant. We also heard this idea play out in the passage from Job today. In the face of horrific suffering – which most of us wouldn’t survive, if we’re being honest – Job maintained his integrity and his commitment to God. God asks Satan, “Have you considered My servant, Job?” (Job 2:3).

Satan’s allowed to test Job’s loyalty, and even though Job experiences deep suffering, he remains faithful to God. Job serves as a model for enduring hardship with integrity. Jesus, too, stands as the Servant of God who faces numerous tests from religious leaders, crowds, and even His own disciples. Just as Job is tested, Jesus also faces challenges but remains true to God’s purposes.

Bad Things Happen to Good People

Bad things happen to good people – I said that earlier. Jesus was, is, and forever will be living, breathing Perfection wrapped in human skin. But bad things still happened to Him. Horrible things occurred to Him on Maundy Thursday night and into Good Friday evening. Betrayed by all His friends, brutally beaten, and sentenced to die as a common criminal on the cross, and He didn’t deserve any of it.

Things sometimes happen in our lives, which we don’t deserve, either. Things like a cancer diagnosis, or a diagnosis of congestive heart failure. A loss of balance resulting in a fall and broken bone. The unexpected loss of a family member. The point is, everyone, including Jesus, goes through difficult times. It’s what we do when we’re in the difficult moments that make all the difference. God often allows challenges to

come our way, not as punishment, but as a way of refining our faith, showing our dependence on Him, and building our character.

Following the testing discussion, our Gospel lesson shifts to a focus on children. “People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them,” (Mark 10:13), we read. In other words, they were saying things like, “Hey, don’t bother Jesus with your little kids. He’s got bigger fish to fry.” The disciples were trying to be “gatekeepers” of who got access to Jesus. They were trying to dictate who was allowed to be in His physical presence.

Drawing Others to Jesus Requires Relationship

This has been an on-going issue throughout Church history. I’ve told you before, and I’ll say it again, sometimes the Church gets it wrong. At times, it misses the mark. Prior to COVID, we took children under 2nd or 3rd grade out of the sanctuary after sermon on the steps. At the time, I didn’t see a problem with it, because sermons and worship services over here were geared for adults. And kids can be noisy. As I’ve grown spiritually, and in my understandings of Wesleyan theology, Methodist polity and worship in these Course of Study classes, I’ve come to see that we did a disservice for the kids we had during that time.

The kids were not taught, prior to COVID, why we do what we do here in worship. Or how to worship. Instead of keeping them within the family of faith for worship, we sent them out. The message we sent to them – and it was unintentional – was that they do not belong in worship. And we see where that’s gotten us. Our congregation – if they have hair – has a lot of gray.

People will sometimes ask me, as the pastor here, what does New Hope do for the church of the future? I’m not entirely sure I understand the question. I think they are referring to attracting children, and younger families. The future, though, is now. The children of today are the Church now. What are we doing to draw in kids and young families now? I don’t have the answers – but I know we need to do something. It’s something that we, as a local church, need to think about, if we plan to be here in ten years.

I know this – drawing anyone to Jesus requires relationship. If my relationship with Him is shut off, or non-existent, I’m not drawing anyone to Him. And you won’t, either. We can’t. If we aren’t on fire with the Holy Spirit to see God’s will done here below as it is above, at best, we’ll be ineffective. And if I’m not being authentic with the person I’m trying to draw closer to Christ, I won’t accomplish it – neither will you. Our relationships have to be honest and transparent. See, the Church, generally speaking, and especially us, New Hope – we mustn’t be the “gatekeepers.” We’re not called to keep people away from Jesus.

Such As These

“When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it,’” (verses 14-15). When the disciples sent the parents with their kids away, it bothered Jesus. If you look up “indignant” on Google, it tells you, “feeling or

showing anger or annoyance at what is perceived as unfair treatment.” It made Jesus mad. And He wasn’t going to stand for it.

Jesus provides correction to the disciples – basically telling them to eat a nice big slice of humble pie. Who did they think they were, anyways, to try to keep people from coming to see Jesus? “Let them come to Me,” He said. He still says it today – “let them come to Me.” It’s one of the reasons the United Methodist Church celebrates an Open Table.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, took the Open Table so seriously, that when he was doing his missionary work in Georgia in the 1700’s, he allowed pagan Native Americans to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Those Native Americans didn’t know what was happening. They just saw bread and wine – food – and they decided that since everyone else was eating it, they would, too. But Wesley believed that by receiving the Sacrament, the Native Americans would in some mysterious way through Christ’s own action, be drawn nearer to God. So, they would line up with everyone else, and Wesley would give them the bread and cup.

God Sees You

“And Jesus took the children in His arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them,” (verse 16), Mark records. While the Pharisees and even Job had to wrestle with deep theological and existential questions, the children simply come to Jesus in innocence and trust. Jesus, in His treatment of children, underscores the importance of approaching God with the same humility, trust, and simplicity that children do. In a world where people often seek to complicate faith with debates and tests, Jesus teaches that the heart of faith lies in trusting God like a child.

“Have you considered My servant?” God asks in the book of Job. Are we living like servants of God? We should be. Are we enduring great hardship like Job, or are we more like the children, who come to Jesus in innocence and trust?

All of us are called to rely completely – totally – on God. In times of testing, we must hold fast to our faith, knowing He sees and honors the integrity of His servants. Think about your own faith journey. When have you faced testing, like Job? When have you come to God with the simplicity of a child? And how do you embody both steadfastness and childlike faith as you walk with Christ?

God sees you, New Hope. He values each of you people – He loves you with an undying love. And He blesses His servants. Whether we are tested like Job, or welcomed like the children, we are called to be faithful in every season of life, trusting in the love and grace of God. Jesus invites us to come to Him, no matter the circumstances, and receive His blessing. Momentarily, we’ll meet Him at His Table, but first, let’s pray.

Prayer: Sovereign God, You make us for each other, to live in loving community as friends, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, partners and companions. Teach us to choose love that is committed and devoted; teach us like little children to wonder and to trust, that our loving may reflect the image of Christ. Amen.