

Disciples Live By Faith

Part 10 of Sermon Series:

What Disciples Do

a sermon based on

Job 19:23-27*a*

and delivered on

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(off lectionary)

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Last week, I preached that disciples affirm resurrection hope. Therefore, this week as we continue this sermon series “What Disciples Do,” it’s interesting that the Gospel lesson has Jesus questioned about whose wife the widow of seven childless brothers will be in the resurrection. (Lk. 20:27-38) This isn’t a serious question. The Sadducees who asked it were trying to trip up Jesus so that they could support their claim that there isn’t a resurrection. That would be just fine with them.

The Sadducees were the powerful people – the leading priests in the religious establishment, the nobility and so on. For them, a resurrection was repugnant. Resurrection implied redemption and vindication. They didn’t need that. These are the people who are convinced that one’s status in the world is confirmation of one’s righteous worthiness – or not. If you were successful in (we’ll just say business) – if you were successful in procreating a large brood – if you were successful (I know that “successful” is a weird word to use here, but if you were successful) for being healthy/disease free/infirmity free/disability free, then this was proof that God loved you because you were righteous. If you were unsuccessful (that is, if you were poor) or infertile or afflicted by any sort of ailment or disability, this was proof that God didn’t love you quite as much because you’d failed somehow in your righteousness.

It’s not a new question. Referring to a blind man, even “his disciples asked (Jesus), ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” (John 9.2) Bad things only happen to those who deserve it. That’s the implication. It’s what people believed; and what people still believe. Even some of us here believe that whether we think we do or not, but our actions and how we sometimes treat others shows that it’s true. We forget that Jesus’ answer was that “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” (John 9.3) At first blush that makes God look bad, as if he caused it. But let’s consider the story of Job.

Although the passage from Job that we hear today includes his words, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth,” (Job 19:25) Job is not a happy man. He’s not a patient man. People who refer to “the patience of Job” have not read the story.

Job was happy in the beginning. Just in case you don’t know the story let me give you some background. The first two chapters of Job is narrative. Most of the rest of the book is a conversation between Job and his friends. The story begins in heaven when the satan (that’s a Hebrew word that means “adversary” or “accuser.” – In this context it doesn’t necessarily refer to Lucifer or the devil.) comes before the Lord who asks what he’s been up to. “Going to and fro on the earth.” The satan’s job is basically heaven’s tattle-tale. So God asks (remember this is all my paraphrase), “Didn’t hear you mention Job. Do you even know about him?” “Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know him. He’s only good because he’s been so fortunate in life; but the first bit of trouble, you’ll see.”

At this point God is so confident in Job, that to prove Job’s (and by extension humanity’s) potential for righteousness he gives the satan permission to do anything he wants to do Job except for hurting his person. The satan burns his crops and livestock and even his servants; and then he kills all of Job’s children. I think even he had a notion of Job’s true righteousness. But in all of this, Job refuses to sin or to deny God.

God says to the satan, “See, I told you so.” But the satan acts like what he’d done to Job was mere inconvenience. “Sure he did. But you made me hold back.” (Maybe this satan is *that* Satan.) Reluctantly – because he does love Job – God says, “Fine, you can strike Job, just don’t kill him.” Hee hee hee. The satan is tickled as he goes off to inflict Job from head to toe (as the Bible says) with sores that ooze and ache continually. His wife won’t touch him and no one else wants to be near him.

His wife even says, to him (and now I’m quoting Scripture) “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” In other words, what’s the point of being good if bad things happen?

That's how we get, here; to the passage we have today. Job's friends come to sit with him. At first they spend a few days just sitting quietly. Then the conversation begins. "So, Job, what did you do to bring on this calamity?" (I'm paraphrasing again.) "Nothing! I've lived my entire life with integrity." "Come on... there must have been something." It goes back and forth like that. Essentially, God's got it out for you; and he must have a reason. So Job gets serious here when he says in that passage that we heard earlier,

"O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!" (Job 19:23-24) Literally, "you can write what I'm about to say in stone, because I mean it." Then he goes on...

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:26-27) Bam! Did you hear that? Not only has Job been defending himself, now he's defending God; even if he's not particularly happy with him at the moment.

Let's look at this bit says for a moment. Shall we? "I know that my Redeemer lives..." This word *Redeemer* could have just as easily and correctly been translated as *Vindicator*. This word redemption that we use came down from the practice by which someone could redeem property. It's a central part of the story of Ruth and Boaz (Jesus' great-great-[43 greats all-together] great-grand parents of Jesus. Redemption was the means by which someone was entitled to buy back any property that had been lost or sold due to misfortune – even a descendent so that the family could be restored. When we speak of redemption and a redeemer, we're talking about claiming what God intended for us all along and the one who would make it right. So you can't really have a redeemer if everything is going well.

It would be tempting to just give up. You can hear that temptation and frustration grow in Job as the story continues. But what good would it do? If bad stuff's going to happen, I might as well be bad? Think about that. That just proves the satan right? People want to be bad. Except... Except that while it is true that after making us in the image of the Lord God, God refused to say that it was good – instead saying, "Very good!" That's what's been lost by sin, but it's the very thing that has been redeemed by Jesus Christ who vindicated us on that cross. Get this. Everything didn't go peachy for him up until that point. At one point in his ministry, his hometown friends tried to throw him off of a cliff. (Lk 4:29) Not only did one of his inner circle set him up, the others abandoned him when he was arrested, and merely watched from afar as he was beaten and humiliated. Before all of this, after being baptized and going out alone into the wilderness for some serious prayer and fasting, the devil came and tempted him.

If Jesus himself could be subjected to temptation and misery, why do any of us think we should be exempt? It's not fair! I know it's not fair. It's not fair that jerks have been given the exact same free will that each of us has been given. It's not fair that the unrighteous seem to prosper while the righteous are too often afflicted.

When I think of those I know: it's not fair that Bill suffered and died of lung cancer, when he'd never smoked a cigarette. If there was anything in his life that might have been to blame, it was accepting the Uncle Sam's invitation to Vietnam when his number was drawn. It's not fair that Patti's brain is being eaten away with Creutzfeldt–Jakob Disease. It's not fair that Terry's daughter died when she was three-years-old and that that tragedy led to the end his marriage.

Each of these, are people I know. Each of these is a person who did nothing to bring about the tragedies that entered their lives. Each of them has been for me a beacon of faith.

We want explanations. We want easy explanations – explanations that too often lead us to blame the one suffering. We do it without thinking that that's what we're doing. While I was

grieving the death of a cousin killed in a car accident, a church member asked, “Was she wearing her seatbelt?” I just looked at her and said, “She’s dead.” What more really needed to be said at that moment? My uncle and aunt could have turned against God in that moment – they’d just begun to attend church again. But their faith grew stronger. Why?

Disciples live by faith. We don’t live by disregarding facts. Smoking often leads to lung cancer and seatbelts can protect people in car accidents. But we also realize that things happen with no explanation.

Disciples live by faith recognizing that the God who would allow his own Son to suffer our suffering and to die our death because he so loved each and every one of us – “For God so loved the *world*,” (Jn 3:16a) – would never bring tragedy into our lives.

God’s promise is to sustain us. The promise he made in Jesus is our redemption – our vindication. But he doesn’t force himself upon us, instead he waits.

When we live by faith – not intellectual belief, but a deep trust – when we live by faith we discover that God doesn’t blame us for our suffering. When we live by faith, we discover that God is offering us healing, if we’ll claim it.

I know that my redeemer lives! You can write that in stone. Because of that, I’m free.

Say that with me, “I know that my redeemer lives, and because of that I’m free. I’m free to be loved and to be healed.”

Don’t let any accuser convince you that you God doesn’t love you. Don’t let any adversary shame you for your suffering as if you deserved it, because faith teaches us that what we deserve – what we were made for is to receive the gift of God’s love. Instead surround yourself in faith amongst the faithful so that the light of Christ that shines in his disciples might lead you to your redemption each time that you need it even when it isn’t on the timeline that you expect. Live by faith, and know life. AMEN.