

Yr. C, Proper 27
November 10, 2019
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1669 Words

Lessons: Job 19:23-27a
Psalm 17:1-9
2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17
Luke 20:27-38

“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book!”

In the first paragraph of the Book of Job we learn that he was one of the good guys—a completely upright man. By all appearances he was also blessed accordingly. Prosperity evangelists would say he was living his best life—a big, beautiful family; delicious food and wine; and lots and lots of wealth. Job had worked hard and followed the rules. He deserved the rewards of a good life.

That’s what *we also* believe, isn’t it? Those are the words we would write down about a good person. This is the message we would inscribe in a book about right and wrong, good and evil, rewards and punishments.

In the *second* paragraph of the Book of Job there is a very disturbing wager. “If *bad* things start to happen to this ‘good man’,” Satan says to the Lord Almighty, “he will curse you to your face.”

Well, in the third paragraph, catastrophe strikes Job’s enormous herds and flocks, his servants, and even his children. He is understandably upset, and yet he is still able to say this: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

What would *you* say? What are the words *you* would write down in your journal under those circumstances? Would you be *able* to bless the name of the Lord under those circumstances?

In the second *chapter* of the Book of Job Satan dials it up another notch. Job becomes afflicted with gruesome, painful sores from head to toe. He curses the day he was born, but he still will *not* curse the name of the Lord.

How do *you* curse what is painful? What are the words you would like to write down which help express your God-given anger at what is wrong...or broken...or unjust...or untrue? How do you project your anger? Where (or upon whom) is it aimed? And why?

In the *third* chapter of the Book of Job there is poetry—chapter after chapter of poetic discourse between Job and his friends. We hear the depths of Job’s despair and *also* the miraculous strength of his hope. Job pours forth bitter lamentations and yet holds on to his remarkable faith. All the while, God is so frustratingly *silent*—not a word. No explanations. No answers.

The only answers *Job* gets are from his friends—maybe I should say his ‘so-called friends.’ They try to explain everything by using *the most* acceptable religious opinions of their day. They also give Job advice. And they assign Job with blame.

Which ‘answers’ do *you* want to toss out in the uncomfortable silence when someone is suffering or confronted with a profound loss? What advice are you tempted to give other people who don’t have it quite as good as you? What blame are you tempted to assign to those who are less fortunate? What words would you like to write down for *them*?

If we read the Book of Job we will know that our friends do not want our answers, no matter *how* acceptably religious they are. People do not want advice when they are hurting. And there sure as heck don’t want to be blamed.

So, now you know how Job felt—tormented as he was, *presumably* by God and most certainly by his friends. Now you know the crucible of fierce testing Job suffered so you can make sense of the deep, soul-shaken truth of the words we heard this morning.

“O that my words were written down! that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!”

What are those words for you? What would you write down after being tested beyond belief? What would you inscribe in a book or a memoir of your life—that takes into account not only your best, happiest days; but also your worst, most challenging days? What are the words *you want* to leave behind for posterity?

When it is all said and done, nobody really cares what we think about sports or politics or even religion. In the age of Twitter, talk is cheaper than ever, which is why so many people are *buying it!* I want to challenge you to cut through the clutter of pabulum of every day banter. For goodness sake—and for your *own sake*—read or listen to something meaningful, personally challenging, and spiritually grounded.

Learn a new verse of scripture or a psalm or a poem that will help shape your thoughts and vocabulary for deep honesty in your prayers. Equip yourself to be able to write down some words that mean something. Prepare yourself to speak, pray, and write a blessing...for God, like Job did when the chips were down. Practice speaking and writing blessings for those you love, so you will not be speechless when the chips are down.

In this age of social media, we are allowing spiritually unequipped people to mislead us about matters that are deeply consequential. There is an unfortunate equivalency assumed about the vast expanse of opinion showing up in the daily feed.

Anybody can post a paragraph or a meme, but it doesn't make them a worthy commentator. (I know how to hold a hose, but it doesn't make me a fireman.)

And this is precisely what happens in today's Gospel lesson with the Sadducees. This privileged group of men adhered rigidly (and selfishly) to a narrow religious dogma which perpetuated *their* power and control.

They asked Jesus their question—not to learn something new, but in order to play 'gotcha.' All they wanted to do was try to prove *their own point*. Notice how they use a woman as the foil in their riddle. They couldn't care less about her life...or afterlife. They only care about themselves and their narrow viewpoint.

Jesus is brilliant. He doesn't get sucked in. Instead, he rises above it. Jesus knew the teachings of *their* favorite authority—Moses—better than they did. Jesus knew the sacred story because he spent time learning the sacred story. He knew the scriptures. He sang the psalms. He knew all about God and what life with God is *really* like.

Jesus reminds the Sadducees that Moses met our living God in the present tense. At the burning bush, the Lord called out to say, “I AM the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” ...not I USED TO BE the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob. As Jesus so wisely points out—this God is “*not* of the dead, but of the living; for to God all of them (and us) are alive.”

Dear people, this is good news...that we come to Church—*not only* to hear what God did in the past, but also to give thanks and praise for what our living God is doing now. On our best days and on our worst days, we are learning how to bless the name of the Lord of life, like Job did.

We celebrate the Holy Eucharist—not only to remember the gifts Jesus shared with his disciples in the past, but also to receive what Christ is sharing with us now. On our best days and on our worst days, we are learning to bless the Christ who lives with us—and suffers with us.

The most profound thing I heard at our diocesan convention yesterday was spoken by a teenager. He walked up to the microphone in a gymnasium filled with hundreds of adults, and he said, “You know, those of us who are here as youth were just talking about the most important thing we can do to be faithful.”

You could have heard a pin drop. I mean consider the source. He probably knows more about social media than every adult in the building. He’s a young person some adults might think needs to receive a little advice. He’s a young person some adults might find easy to disparage or blame because he is from Generation Z.

This is what he said: “*We think* the most important thing is prayer—when we don’t need it. You see, all of us are eager to pray when we need something from God, but the way you build a true relationship is by spending time together when you *don’t* need something.”

Thank goodness the adults erupted with applause as he walked back to his seat. What we were cheering in that moment was not only the young man, but also the Good News revealed to us today by Job and by Jesus.

And the good news is this: “*I know* that my redeemer lives, and at the last day he will stand upon the earth...and I shall see God. I, myself, shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and NOT a stranger.”

If you are here today because life is hard right now, God bless you. We stand beside you to *help you* bless the name of the Lord, like Job did.

If you are here today, and you don’t particularly need anything from God right now, God bless *you*—because you are equipping yourselves for the inevitable hard days to come. You are practicing learning our sacred stories, and building a relationship with God so that you will be able to bless the Name of the Lord, like Job did.

Together, we are practicing a basic part of our faith—keeping the prayers, remembering our stories, building our vocabulary to express ourselves with deep honesty under duress. We are equipping ourselves to rise above all that drags us down. We are learning how to proclaim the Good News for ourselves and for others.

And the Good News is this: “I know that my redeemer lives. My redeemer *is* the God of the living...who is my friend and NOT a stranger.”

Amen.