

The First Congregational Church of Plainfield

October 4, 2015

Sermon Title: "Not Always What You Think"

Job 1:1-3 and 2:1-10 - The Message translation

1¹⁻³ Job was a man who lived in Uz. He was honest inside and out, a man of his word, who was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion. He had seven sons and three daughters. He was also very wealthy—seven thousand head of sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and a huge staff of servants—the most influential man in all the East!

2¹⁻³ One day when the angels came to report to GOD, Satan also showed up. GOD singled out Satan, saying, "And what have you been up to?" Satan answered GOD, "Oh, going here and there, checking things out." Then GOD said to Satan, "Have you noticed my friend Job? There's no one quite like him, is there—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil? He still has a firm grip on his integrity! You tried to trick me into destroying him, but it didn't work."

4-5 Satan answered, "A human would do anything to save his life. But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away his health? He'd curse you to your face, that's what."

6 GOD said, "All right. Go ahead—you can do what you like with him. But mind you, don't kill him."

7-8 Satan left GOD and struck Job with terrible sores. Job was ulcers and scabs from head to foot. They itched and oozed so badly that he took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, then went and sat on a trash heap, among the ashes.

9 His wife said, "Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!"

10 He told her, "You're talking like an empty-headed fool. We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?"

Not once through all this did Job sin.

He said nothing against God.

This is a very human story, one that we have all pondered at one point or another. Why do good things happen to bad people and why do bad things happen to good people. These are questions that we just don't have an answer for.

The book of Job is the first poetic book of the Old Testament and the authorship of this book is still not agreed upon by the biblical scholars. Some say that it was Job and some say it was Moses. We just don't know for sure. It is believed that the story of Job took place somewhere between 2000 and 1800 BCE during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and was written somewhere between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE, most likely in the 6th century. We are told in this story that Job lived in the land of Uz, somewhere northeast of Israel maybe in Turkey, Syria, Jordan or Iraq. Is this story meant to be understood as a parable, that is a story designed to teach a lesson or is it meant to be understood as literal, having actually taken place; each one must make their own decision.

In any case, Job speaks to all who strive to stay faithful to their relationship with God and true to themselves. How do you and I perceive the events of life that don't seem to be fair? How do we perceive and accept the blessings in life that are beyond what we think we deserve? And how do we perceive and respond to the times that we face suffering and challenges that we don't think we deserve? What do we do with all of it and still stay true to living out our God given plan?

In the story of Job, we find out that he lost everything, his family, his wealth, his health and through it all, he continued to be faithful even through the darkest of valleys. Sometimes, you may wonder and sometimes I wonder, how do we keep going through this roller coaster ride of life looking forward to what Jesus told us we would hear when all is said and done -

*“Well done, good and faithful servant!
You have been faithful with a few things;
I will put you in charge of many things.
Come and share your master's happiness!”*

Life presents our logical minds with a dilemma; how do we understand when divine control, human faith, and innocent suffering seem to collide. An enduring faith does not come in a neat and tidy little package; it's messy and confusing and often overwhelming. Many, whose faith is superficial, fall to the wayside when their

feel-good faith is slammed with the realities of life in a broken world. The story of Job makes us examine what our faith is really about. If we are "good" do we then receive only blessing? Or is our faith a return to God for the blessings we've already received? And what constitutes a blessing? Sometimes blessings are not always what you think they should be. Isn't life itself a blessing?

I love this story of a wise man.

There once was a wise man who won an expensive car in a lottery. His family and friends were very happy for him and came to celebrate. "Isn't it great!" they said. "You are so lucky." The man smiled and said, "Is that so?" For a few weeks he had a wonderful time driving his new car. Then one day he got into an accident with a drunk driver. The car was totaled and he ended up in the hospital with several broken bones. His family and friends came to visit and said to him, "That was really terrible." Again the man smiled and said, "Is that so?" While he was in the hospital, there was a terrible rain storm that caused much flooding and mudslides and his home was destroyed. Again his friends came to visit and said, "Weren't you lucky to have been here in the hospital instead of at home." Again he said, "Is that so?"

The wise man chose not to judge each event for how it appeared to his human eyes. He accepted these turns of joy and sorrow knowing that it is impossible for the human mind to understand how each strand of life fits into the tapestry of all that is. I love the illustration of our lives being like a tapestry; sometimes we only see the tangled strands on the back of the tapestry while God sees the beautiful picture those strands create on the front of the tapestry. Sometimes God uses our tangled strands, our mistakes, our regrets, our tragedies, our hurts to fashion something of beauty if only we have patience and persevere - like the story of Job.

The writer of this story of Job was human too and trying to make sense out of the suffering of life. Jesus knew the human dilemma. God chose to empty himself and live a human life as Jesus - his life had pains, challenges, and joys. And Jesus gave us these words, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."ⁱⁱⁱ

So how do we do as Job said, "We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?" Those words reflect a faith that is deep and enduring. This life is only a blip on the radar of eternity. These joys and sorrows that we can't explain are only a fragment, only a strand of the tapestry that God has given us. Faith in God

and walking through our life journey can be so simple but it can also seem so complex as we get caught up in, what seems like, the insanity of it all. Keep your focus; keep your eyes on Jesus. Jesus told us that if we hold on to all that is true, if we have faith even in what is not revealed to our senses that someday we would hear,

*“Well done, good and faithful servant!
You have been faithful with a few things;
I will put you in charge of many things.
Come and share your master's happiness!”ⁱⁱⁱ*

Let's think about that.
Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 25:23 NIV

ⁱⁱ John 16:33 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 25:23 NIV