

Proper 25 B 2021  
October 24, 2021 :: Job 42: 1-6, 10-17  
Fr. Jim Cook

*“We’re Blessed by God  
to Be a Blessing to Others.”*

In our first reading, we heard the end of the story of Job. And though there were plenty of reasons to think otherwise, it turned out to be a really happy ending. Now, in case you weren’t here last Sunday, I’m going to take a minute to bring you up to speed about the path that Job’s fortunes have followed.

At the beginning of Job’s story, he was wealthy and well-established. He had houses and farms. He had servants and livestock. His family was large and happy. And, what’s more, Job was a good man, respected in his community, and a pillar of his faith. Even God described Job as a singular person — as a man of honesty, and integrity, and piety.

But, one day, Job’s world came completely apart, and he loses everything: his livestock, his servants, his property, and even his family. Even his health takes a turn for the worse when, one day, Job finds himself covered from head to toe with — and I quote — “loathsome sores.”

What follows for Job is a long season of struggle. Naturally, he struggles over his tremendous loss of family and property. He struggles with some of his friends, who thought everything that had happened was Job's fault; that Job had somehow offended God, and that God was punishing him. He even struggles with God, who seems nowhere in sight; who seems, perhaps, even to be ignoring Job.

That was then. But now, many chapters later, we've reached the end of Job's story. And, like so many of our children's fairy tales, Job's story ends almost miraculously, with him living happily ever after; which means that God restored everything Job has lost. And more. Job receives double the number of livestock that he had lost. His friends and family, who had abandoned him, now return and shower Job with money and gold rings. God even gives Job a new family: seven new sons, and three new daughters, to replace those he had lost. It looks like the ultimate fairy tale ending.

However, unlike fairy tales, where a happy ending means that the slate has been wiped clean, and it's as if nothing bad had ever happened, we all know that, in real life, it doesn't really work

that way. Yes, in real life, we *may* see a dramatic reversal of our fortune, but the slate is never totally wiped clean. Because suffering changes us inwardly, as well as outwardly. And the mark that suffering leaves upon us, can very well be permanent.

While I think God *is* trying to tell us something important in the story of Job, I also think it's *more* than simply a message about the possibility of the restoration of things lost. And to find out what that might be, we'll first have to take a closer look at our *reading* from Job; and then, we'll need to step back and take a broader look at the *story* of Job.

So, let's look at today's reading, and see what Job said to God. I'll be reading from the *Common English Bible*, which I think provides us a bit more clarity. Job is speaking to God, and says:

<sup>2</sup>I know you can do anything; no plan of yours can be opposed successfully. <sup>3</sup>You said, "Who is this darkening counsel without knowledge?" I have indeed spoken about things I didn't understand, wonders beyond my comprehension. <sup>4</sup>You said, "Listen and I

will speak; I will question you and you will inform me.”<sup>5</sup>My ears had *heard* about you, but now my eyes have *seen* you.<sup>6</sup>Therefore, I relent and find comfort on dust and ashes.

In other words, what Job is admitting to is the fact that, up until that point in time, all that he had ever known about God, were things that he had learned second-hand, probably from stories and legends he had heard or read. That is, his knowledge of God, his understanding of God, was based upon *someone else's* experience of God, someone else's opinion of God. And so, **the first lesson** that Job has learned is that, when you base your image of God *solely* on what others are telling you, it's easy to get bad information.

For example, Job grew up in a cultural milieu where the gods were represented by idols of clay and bronze. And if that's what you're accustomed to, and if that's all you know, it's hard to get away from that sort of thinking. And that's where Job *was*. But now that Job has had a face-to-face encounter with God, he realizes that clay and bronze don't tell the whole story. He realizes that he has underestimated God.

But then, Job also comes to realize that, throughout his time of loss and suffering, God, the almighty creator of the universe, had been with him all the time. And that gives him pause, for Job had *thought* that God had abandoned him, but now he realizes — and this is **his second lesson** — that the circumstances of his loss and suffering had distracted him; he *thought* he was looking and waiting for God, but now he realizes that he was mostly focused on his own misfortune. That is, he wasn't *really* looking for God, and so, of course, he couldn't *see* God.

And then, in our reading, when God next speaks, it's to Job's so-called friends — the fellows who were confident that God was punishing Job for some “unconfessed sin” — and God declares that *they* were wrong about God, that *they* had misrepresented God, and that *they* were the ones who needed to repent. And then, to add insult to injury, God says they are to ask Job to pray for them. In other words — and here is **Job's third lesson** — Job is vindicated by God, and is assured that his suffering had nothing — absolutely *nothing* — to do with anything he had done or failed to do; that is, he was right all along, his friends were wrong, and God *had been* listening to his prayers all along.

This may not surprise you, but we live in a world where many people of faith *still* believe like Job's friends. This world is filled with people who believe that, if something bad has happens to you, that God is punishing you, and you deserve what you get. But in the story of Job, God is saying *that is not true*. There is no connection between suffering and sin, nor between prosperity and righteousness. None at all. We simply live in a world where things can go horribly wrong for someone and, frequently, it has nothing to do with what that person did or didn't do.

However, none of this has anything to do with what I think are the three big lessons *that we can learn* from the book of Job.

**Our first lesson** is this: Very frequently, our vision of God needs to be enlarged. Until the very end of the story, Job and his friends had a very narrow view of how God operates in the world. For example, they believed that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Therefore, God was fairly predictable, and they didn't look for God to get significantly involved in their lives in any other ways. But at the end of the story, God has broken through all of their preconceptions, and is able to reveal himself for what he truly is, which turns out to be something far beyond

what Job and his friends ever imagined. And with their view of God enlarged, now the possibilities for where God could be involved in their lives also is enlarged.

In a very real sense — and I think this is key — God can only be as big as we are prepared to allow him to be. God can only do for us what we are prepared to let him. God can effect change only in those parts of our lives where we are willing to relinquish control over to him. Therefore, if we want to see God doing more in our lives, we need to enlarge our vision of God.

**Our second lesson** is this: We need to realize that restoration takes time, even for God. When God restores everything Job had lost, it involved giving Job ten children and twenty-three thousand head of livestock. Something like that doesn't happen overnight. In fact, I would guess that Job's restoration took somewhere between ten and twenty *years*. I can't imagine why it would be any different for us today. Therefore, when we've suffered some loss or harm, and we're looking for God to help make things right, we need to be patient, and be willing to wait for as long as it takes. Because restoration — even for God — takes time.

And **our third lesson** is this: When God blesses us, by restoring anything we've lost, I believe that God expects that we will likewise become a source of blessing for others. Near the very end of our reading, there is this statement:

“In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters; and their father (*i.e.*, Job) gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.”

That is a remarkable statement, because Job lived in a culture where *only sons* could inherit their father’s estate. But Job makes the unprecedented decision that his three daughters will inherit an equal portion of his estate along with their seven brothers. Why does he do that? I believe it’s because Job has learned something about blessing, and especially something about grace. He finally understands that grace is going beyond what is lawful; grace goes beyond what is fair; and grace goes beyond what is expected. And because grace is what Job experienced from God, he decides that the grace and blessing he has received will be shared with others. In this, Job becomes a model for how *all* of us should behave. For when God blesses us — and, make no mistake, God *has* blessed us,

*all* of us — we should be willing to share that God-given blessing with others.

[As a brief interjection: No doubt, you've all received a pledge card in the mail this past week. In two weeks, on November 7, we will gather in those pledge cards, place them on the altar, and ask for God's blessing upon them. I know that Peggy and I feel really blessed to be here, so I know that we'll have some conversations about how that'll be reflected in the pledge card that we turn in. I hope you will all do the same.]

In the end, the book of Job challenges us to be like Job: to always have faith in God no matter what happens; and to remember that God never ignores us, but rather is always listening to us and is never far from us.

But also, the book of Job promises that, when we least expect it, when we wonder why things have gone so terribly wrong, and when we've begun to believe that God has forgotten all about us, that maybe, just maybe, it's *not* our fault. And maybe, just maybe, God is waiting in the wings, working out a way to bless us. Maybe not *how* we expect to be blessed. Maybe not *when* we expect to be

blessed. And most likely not because of anything we've done. But because that's who God is, a God of blessing who wants to bless us.

And we are blessed when we meet God. And we meet God more often than we might think — in Scripture, in the Sacraments, and, indeed, in each other. We are blessed when God hears our prayers, wherever and whenever we pray. And we are blessed when we choose to bless others.

The book of Job reminds us that God has blessed us, and that he now calls upon us to be a source of blessing to others.

Amen.