

Job 1: 1, 2: 1-10

Psalm 26

Pentecost 20 2024.

Hebrews 1: 1-4, 2: 5-12

St. Mark 10: 2-16

“Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.’
Job 2: 10b

Let me tell you an ancient story, about a good man, and disaster!... The good man’s name was Job. Job was a wealthy, devout, God-fearing man, who would offer sacrifices to God, not only for himself, but also for his children...

Then, one day, Job lost it all!... His extensive property holdings were destroyed. His farm animals were killed, or stolen by his enemies... Tragically, all of his children – young people in the prime of their lives! – died... Job himself became very ill. Job’s condition was painful and miserable. Even Job’s wife wants him to die; she apparently can’t stand being in his presence...

Job has 3 friends, who try to give glib explanations about why Job is suffering so much. The friends try to give advice, or counsel – that’s important to notice. The friends are trying to give cheap advice about why God is allowing Job to suffer... and the friends are just making it even worse!...

Job lived in a land called Uz. “Uz” means “counsel” or “advice;” that’s something to notice, because a lot of the biblical Book of Job is about these 3 friends trying to give counsel, and they are just making Job even *more* miserable!...

Job. Lost. It. All... His wealth. All his kids. His large farm. His marriage was collapsing. Job was sick and in chronic pain. Even Job’s friends, trying to help, were making a bad situation worse... Job. Lost. It. All... Job was a good man; a faithful man. But God allowed disaster after disaster to strike Job...

The Book of Job, then, is an amazing exploration of why bad things happen to good people... If we are here this morning and we are miserable, we might receive comfort that we are not alone – and we have it far better than Job!... If we are here this morning and if things are pretty good, we might need to be reminded that the things of this world do not last – what is most important of all is how we navigate life, with the Lord’s help...

By the end of the story, Job’s life has improved in ways Job could never have foreseen. But there is no denying Job’s immense suffering. We can note that providing cheap, glib theological phrases to someone who is deep pain never helps...

Through it all, Job never lets go of God... Job doesn't understand it. Job doesn't like it. But Job knows that all things come from God; and we might lose whatever we have. Job 1: 21 is one of the most well-known verses in the Old Testament: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord..."

Nothing is really ours. It all comes from God. God has put you and me and all people in the position of being stewards, managers, of everything God has entrusted to our care... The question we face is, What *kind* of manager am I, of what God has entrusted to me?... My time. My money. My relationships. My work. My Church ministry. My sexuality. My brain. My Sabbath rest... Everything. Everything belongs to God... Am I looking after well, what God has entrusted to me?...

In a few minutes, we will be saying the offertory sentence printed in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, from Second Chronicles. "All things come for you. And from you we have given in return..."

There are a lot of things which Job lost, but I'm just going to take one example this morning. It's Job's wealth... Job lost it *all* – and God allowed it to happen. (Being close to God doesn't shield us from hard times, sometimes...) Let's keep in mind, too, that Job didn't have a pension or an OHIP free medical card, or even kids who would help take care of him. It was a terrifying position to be in. Job lost it all... What's really important to notice, though, is that Job surrendered it all to God...

Now, the story of Job is a very ancient story, and these theological questions about good and evil are questions which have haunted humanity since the Garden of Eden... But I suggest to you, and to me, that the story of Job isn't just a story from long ago... We face these same questions today – about good and evil, and surrendering it all to the Lord... Let's work through about God and financial resources... What can you and I learn from the Bible, which can help us be joyful, faithful servants of the living God in every corner of our lives?...

Here are some biblical principles about money:

Money is a resource to do work. It's not an end in itself. Money, used well, accomplishes goals... Money can be used for family stuff, the way Abraham bought a cave when Sarah died. Money can also be used as a tool to help do ministry, like when St. Paul the Apostle organized a fund-raising drive to help when there was a food shortage. Money is a resource to do work...

We can have an unhealthy relationship with money. "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," reads First Timothy 6: 10. Let's note that this Bible verse is

often misquoted – “*Money*” isn’t evil. “The *love* of money” is the root of all kinds of evil. We shouldn’t develop an unhealthy obsession with what we have – or what we don’t have...

Jesus Christ calls us to a modest lifestyle (Luke 10: 4). There is nothing in the Bible which forbids enjoying moderate pleasures (assuming they aren’t sin)... But we are called to live modest lifestyles...

Another biblical principle is that we are not supposed to be anxious – about money, or about anything else which might happen in the future. Anxiety robs us of God’s peace... God doesn’t want anxious, uptight disciples! He wants us to carry his peace. Matthew 6: 25:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

We are called to be considerate of others, not just ourselves... The prophet Amos, for instance, reveals God’s judgement against people who are self-absorbed with spending only on themselves, and who neglect people’s needs around them. Part of the parcel of loving God is caring for others, including (but not limited to) our financial resources...

God wants us to share our financial resources cheerfully, not reluctantly... If we’re reluctant, then we’re probably under the misunderstanding that it belongs to us in the first place!... But we are managers, not owners... If we are doing God’s will, then it’s appropriate that we are cheerful; that we feel good about what we are doing. II Corinthians 9: 6-7 reads,

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The late Canon David Reed helped me understand this. I remember him saying something like this, once: “What is this expression, ‘Give until it hurts?’ That’s not what God wants. No! Give until it feels *good*... Give until it feels *good*...” If we’re being generous, if we’re blessing others and honouring God, then it’s appropriate that we feel good about what we’re doing. “Give until it feels good...”

Another biblical principle is that God blesses us, when we choose to bless others -- whether it's with money, or with other ways of caring... God blesses us, when we choose to bless others. II Corinthians 9: 8-11:

And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written,

‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.’

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.

God blesses us, when we do the right thing... Don't take my word for it. Try it! Then have an open heart, to see what blessings you are receiving. I am absolutely confident that God will be faithful to his promises. Try it!...

The biblical standard for giving is 10% – what is called a “tithe...” The standard of Abraham, our spiritual ancestor, was the tithe

And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said,

‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
maker of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. (Genesis 14: 18-20)

The prophet Malachi prophesies God's message:

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. (3: 8-10)

If you'll forgive me speaking personally for a moment, when Nancy and I were married, it was just a “given” that we would tithe whatever income we received to the local parish, as well as contributing to charities which are important to us. God has always been faithful to us... I submit, God is always faithful in meeting our needs, when our priorities are in line with his...

If we are in financial trouble – if we have overused a credit card, or neglected a bill or 2 or even 3, or if we have failed to make reasonable plans for a “rainy day” which has arrived, then we do need to get our financial house in order... I, and a few wise lay leaders at St. Brice’s, can give some private guidance if we’re stuck – *and* (an important “and”) –and, if we really want to change what we have been doing... But part of that process of getting our financial house in order is to follow God’s priorities...

My hope, after you hear this sermon, is that you’ll go home after the shared lunch, maybe make a decent cup of tea, and pray about it... Just be open to God – and then have confidence in God’s leading. If God is challenging us to go deeper for him, then let’s do it!... If God is *really* telling you, “Stop all financial giving to St. Brice’s, and give to a local church in Australia” – I’m absolutely fine with that!... We only desire God’s good, pleasing and perfect will in all things. We all want nothing less, or different...

Job’s desire was to do his best in all things for God, not matter what his circumstances were. These included his financial circumstances at the time. May we honour God in every corner of our lives, leaving nothing out...

Thanks be to God.