

Sunday 7th August 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Job 7:1 – 7
Theme: "Why, Lord!?"

"Learn, like Job, to trust in God in times of trouble. Your loving Father is working for good in your life"

Introduction:

When trouble or illness or suffering comes our way, or the way of someone whom we love, one of the first questions that comes into our mind is "Why?". "Why, Lord, must I suffer, we ask. "Why me!?" "I've done nothing to deserve this suffering".

Or we say to God, "Why, Lord, must my husband or my wife or my sister or my child suffer so?" "Why, Lord, why!?"

Part 1: This was the cry of Job

The book of Job in the OT tells of a man named Job who was in exactly this situation. He was a man who was suffering and crying out to God, "Why, Lord, why!?".

Job was a man who had been afflicted by all sorts of misfortune. He had gone from being a wealthy man in good health to a man in rages afflicted with all sorts of painful sores. And to top it off, his children whom he loved had been killed in tragic circumstances (1:13-19; 2:7-8). Job is pictured as a wretched, miserable man crying out to God for relief. Our Bible reading for today shows us the depth of the misery that Job felt.

Listen again while I read to you what Job says here. He says:

- 7 Human life is like forced army service,
like a life of hard manual labor,**
- ² like a slave longing for cool shade;
like a worker waiting to be paid.**
- ³ Month after month I have nothing to live for;
night after night brings me grief.**
- ⁴ When I lie down to sleep, the hours drag;
I toss all night and long for dawn.**
- ⁵ My body is full of worms;
it is covered with scabs;
pus runs out of my sores.**

**⁶ My days pass by without hope,
pass faster than a weaver's shuttle.**
**⁷ Remember, O God, my life is only a breath;
my eyes will never see happiness again.**
(read 7:1-7 with feeling; use NIV for 7:7b).

And Job's misery is compounded by the fact that he can't understand why all this is happening to him and why God won't bring his suffering to an end. He asks:

**⁸ Why won't God give me what I ask?
Why won't he answer my prayer? (6:8)**

The only possible reason that he can come up with is that God is punishing him for something that he has done. And this is what his friends tell him when they come to visit him. They say to him, "Look, Job, search your heart for that which you've done wrong. Find out what you've done wrong, *you know what it is*, and go to God and ask for forgiveness. Then your troubles will disappear".

His friend Zophar, for instance, says to him:

¹³ Put your heart right, Job. Reach out to God.
¹⁴ Put away evil and wrong from your home.
¹⁵ Then face the world again, firm and courageous.
**¹⁶ Then all your troubles will fade from your memory,
like floods that are past and remembered no more.**
(11:13-16; cf. 22:21-28).

But when Job looks at himself, he can't see any great evil that he has done. He says in effect to his friends, "I've been a good man. I've done nothing to deserve punishment of this magnitude".

In chapter 27 of the book, for instance, he is quoted as saying:

**⁵ I will never say that you men are right;
I will insist on my innocence to my dying day.**
**⁶ I will never give up my claim to be right;
my conscience is clear.**
(27:5-6; cf. 29:11f; 31:5-8).

And because Job can't find any reason for his suffering in what he has done, he rages against God for his unjustness. He says in effect to God, "Look God, you haven't kept your end of the bargain. I've lived a good

life and I obeyed your will, and so I deserve to be blessed with good health and prosperity and children. And what are you doing!? You are not giving me any of these things!"

I'll read to you some of the things that he says to God:

12 Why do you keep me under guard?

Do you think I am a sea monster?^[b]

13 I lie down and try to rest;

I look for relief from my pain.

**14 But you—you terrify me with dreams;
you send me visions and nightmares**

**15 until I would rather be strangled
than live in this miserable body....**

20 Are you harmed by my sin, you jailer?

Why use me for your target practice?

Am I so great a burden to you? (7:12-15,20).

And elsewhere:

**7 You have worn me out, God;
you have let my family be killed.**

8 You have seized me; you are my enemy.

I am skin and bones,

and people take that as proof of my guilt.

**9 In anger God tears me limb from limb;
he glares at me with hate.**

**12 I was living in peace,
but God took me by the throat
and battered me and crushed me.**

God uses me for target practice

**13 and shoots arrows at me from every side—
arrows that pierce and wound me;
and even then he shows no pity.**

**14 He wounds me again and again;
he attacks like a soldier gone mad with hate
(16:7-9, 12-14).**

Part 2: God's answer to Job

And the amazing thing is that God answers Job in his anguish, even after all Job's insults to him, *though, I guess that it's not amazing given the fact that God's heart overflows with love for us, the people whom he created.*

And how does God answer Job? Does God give Job a nice, neat, rational explanation of why he is suffering? Does God say to Job, "You are suffering because I want to refine your faith or so that you can learn what it is like to go through hard times or..."?

No!! In common with most people who suffer, Job does not receive any adequate explanation of the disaster that has entered his life (see *Simundson, The Message of Job, 139-140*).

The only answer of sorts that is given in the book of Job is a firm "no" to the notion that there is a direct link between sin and suffering.

We are told by the writer of Job:

⁷ After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you did not speak the truth about me, the way my servant Job did.

⁸ Now take seven bulls and seven rams to Job and offer them as a sacrifice for yourselves. Job will pray for you, and I will answer his prayer and not disgrace you the way you deserve. You did not speak the truth about me as he did." (42:7-8)

And this is what Jesus, too, said. Remember the story in John's gospel about Jesus and the man who had been born blind. The disciples asked Jesus about this man. Listen to what John tells us happened:

⁹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. ² His disciples asked him, "Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents' sin?"

³ Jesus answered, "His blindness has nothing to do with his sins or his parents' sins. He is blind so that God's power might be seen at work in him (*John 9:1-3; cf. Luke 13:1f*).

Jesus had to make it plain to his disciples that God allows sickness, sorrow, and suffering as he wills for his good purposes and that he does not act according to some fixed scale related to the amount of sin in a person's life.

Well, how then does God answer Job in the book of Job if he doesn't answer with a nice neat, rational explanation of Job's suffering? God answers Job by drawing Job's attention to his smallness and his finiteness before God.

Listen to some of the things that God says to Job:

**² Who are you to question my wisdom
with your ignorant, empty words?**

**³ Now stand up straight
and answer the questions I ask you.**

**⁴ Were you there when I made the world?
If you know so much, tell me about it.**

**⁵ Who decided how large it would be?
Who stretched the measuring line over it?
Do you know all the answers?**

**⁶ What holds up the pillars that support the earth?
Who laid the cornerstone of the world?**

**¹² Job, have you ever in all your life
commanded a day to dawn?**

**¹⁶ Have you been to the springs in the depths
of the sea?
Have you walked on the floor of the ocean?**

**¹⁷ Has anyone ever shown you the gates
that guard the dark world of the dead?**

**¹⁸ Have you any idea how big the world is?
Answer me if you know (38:2-6, 12, 16-18)**

God makes Job realise that there is a huge difference between himself and his creatures. We are tiny and finite, and we can't possibly understand everything as God understands it.

Paul realised this too. After wrestling with the problem of understanding God's way of dealing with the Jewish people, Paul cries out in his letter to the church at Rome:

**"How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge!
Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways?
As the Scripture says, 'who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to
give him advice...?'**

**For all things were created by him, and all things exist through him and
for him. To God be the glory for ever! Amen." (Rom. 11:33-36).**

We can't understand things from God's perspective. We are human beings, not God! All we can do is trust God, *the God who has revealed*

himself in the person of His Son, Jesus, as being compassionate and loving.

All we can do is trust that God, our loving Father, knows what he is doing and that he is working for good in our lives (cf. Rom. 8:28).

After God had finished speaking to Job, Job too realised this. He realised his foolishness in seeking an answer for his suffering and simply threw himself at God's feet trusting in God's mercy and goodness. Listen to how Job answers God after God has spoken to him:

**² I know, LORD, that you are all-powerful;
that you can do everything you want.**

**³ You ask how I dare question your wisdom
when I am so very ignorant.**

**I talked about things I did not understand,
about marvels too great for me to know.**

**⁴ You told me to listen while you spoke
and to try to answer your questions.**

**⁵ In the past I knew only what others had told me,
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.**

**⁶ So I am ashamed of all I have said
and repent in dust and ashes.**

Part 3: The message to us

What message does all this have for us as we seek to deal with the problem of suffering in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones?

Three points, I think, stand out:

1) The book of Job, and the Scriptures as a whole make it plain that it is wrong to look for a cause for suffering in things that have been done in the past. There is no direct link between sin and suffering for the child of God.

In fact, the Scriptures shout out again and again that the child of God, *the person who has been baptised into God's family and who trusts in Jesus*, is a pardoned, forgiven person (e.g., Rom. 8:1). Jesus took all the punishment for the things that we have done in the past and will do in the future when he died on the cross, and in God's sight now we who trust in Jesus are pardoned forgiven people.

Even now we who trust in Jesus wear white robes, robes which are white because they have been washed with the blood of Jesus (*cf. Rev. 7:9,14*). So we don't have to worry that our suffering or the suffering of a loved one who is a child of God is God's punishment for a past sin. Jesus, God's Son, has taken upon himself the punishment that we deserve for our sins.

- 2) The book of Job makes it plain too that it is foolish to agonise over why God is allowing suffering in our lives or in the lives of our loved ones. Sure, Scripture gives us pointers to some of the reasons why God allows suffering in our life. For example, to refine our faith, or to help us rely on God more in our lives to enable us or to help us to understand the suffering of others (*1 Peter 1:3-7; 2 Cor. 1:4, 8-9*). But the reality is that we can't know for certain why God is allowing suffering in a particular case. God alone knows that!
- 3) So in the midst of suffering, wondering "why" is useless.... It is a useless waste of time and energy. All we need do is trust God: trust that God is our loving Father! Of that we need have no doubt. God has shown us that and told us that through his Son Jesus. And so, like Paul, we can rest assured that "in everything *that happens to us*, God is working for good..." (*Rom. 8:28*).

Conclusion:

I'd like to finish up this morning by mentioning the example of a man that I knew when I was vicaring at Dernancourt, *many, many years ago*.

He was an old man who had had a hard life and who with his wife had gone through many difficult times connected with family and work (*e.g., losing a child in infancy, being cheated out of the fruits of some of his inventions, disappointment and tragedies with regard to his children*).

He told me that there were many, many times that he had gone to bed and agonised in prayer with the Lord for half the night, crying out, "Why, Lord, why!?" And at such times, he told me, sleep came to him only when he recalled passages that reminded him that God, our loving Father is in control (*e.g. Psalm 46:10; Heb. 13:6*).

As he realised and Paul realised and as Job realised *and God's people down through the ages have realised*, agonising over the reasons for our

sufferings and the suffering of our loved ones is useless. It is a useless waste of good sleeping time.

God our loving Father is in control and he wants us simply to continue serving him, knowing that "in everything that happens to us he is working for good" (Rom. 8:28). In fact, how could our loving Father be doing otherwise!! Amen.

Addendum:

Can I share with you one of my favourite stories... It's a story that a well known German pastor by the name of Helmut Thielicke tells. It's a story about two dogs and the different ways that these two dogs responded to the long journey by ship from Europe to America.

It goes like this:

On the voyage over, a big shepherd dog was with us. His master had sent him over by ship since he himself was going by plane. He was an exceedingly miserable dog. He was living in an unfamiliar world, a world of strange smells and strange people who meant nothing to him. The ground under his feet was unsteady, there were no trees, and the world ended at the railing. For him it was doubtless a plunge into Nothingness; his whole dog-world-view collapsed and he was pitched into the void. Looking at this dog, one no longer felt that the groaning of creation was merely a myth.

On the return voyage, we again had a dog on board; this time *it* was a lap dog, and really nothing more than a "half portion". But even though outwardly everything was just as bad for him, he did not generate the waves of sadness that the other dog did; for his master was with him. The little creature often fixed his eyes upon him and it was as if he were saying, "This is a crazy world, and I have stopped trying to understand it. But as long as you are here, it can't be too bad. The time will come when this will be over and then I'll smell some half way normal smells and see some trees too" (H. Thielicke, *Christ and the Meaning of Life*, p. 169-170).

What made the difference between the two dogs and how they handled the changed world around them? Simply this: one dog was on his own, and the other dog wasn't. The little lap dog knew that his master was with him, and that enabled him to face the changed world around him without fear.