

October 17, 2021
Twenty-first after Pentecost / Proper 24

Meditation: “Just who do you think you are?”

There were two things that my mom said that used to strike fear in the hearts of her four children. You knew you were pushing your luck when she started counting. It was wise not to wait for her to get to three, but it didn't really strike fear in our hearts. No, what did strike fear in our hearts was when she would call us by our full name..... “hmm MARK PERRY”. The other thing she said that struck fear in our hearts was when she asked, “Just who do you think you are?” That meant that we had overstepped our bounds and she felt we were questioning or challenging her authority as our parent. Usually she was right.

In today's scripture lesson, God speaks to Job....but first let's review the back story. Satan, the deceiver, appears before God, and God asks him if he noticed his faithful servant Job. Satan says, he's only faithful because you protect him and have blessed him with a large family, flocks and herds, land and servants. If he loses that, he will curse you. So God says, do what you will. The Sabeans attack the servants ploughing the fields and steal the oxen and donkeys, a fire from the heavens rains down and incinerates the sheep and servants watching over them, the Chaldeans attack the servants caring for the camels, and take all of the camels, and a wind comes and blows down the house of Job's eldest son, killing all of his children who were gathered within. Job tears his cloak, a sign that his heart is torn, and mourns his losses, but he does not curse God as Satan said he would. So Satan appears before God again. God asks if he's noticed his faithful servant Job. Satan says that he's only faithful because he has his health. And God tells Satan he may do what he will, only asking that he spare Job's life. And Job is covered from head to toe with sores, and he sits on an ash heap, scraping his sores with a shard of pottery, but he still does not curse God.

Job's three friends appear and tell him that he has surely sinned against God and is being punished and that he should repent for his great sins. Job maintains his innocence and says he is being treated unjustly by God.

And God says, can't you just hear my mother's words coming out of God's mouth right now, “Who do you think you are?” Well, not exactly in those words.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Gird up your loins like a man,

I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.....”

Let me ask a question. Have any of you ever felt hard-done-by, or that life was unfair? I suspect we have all felt that way at least once over the past year and a half. And it's not really the government rules and restrictions that have us feeling upset. Really we are upset at the pandemic that necessitated the rules and restrictions. We just want life to get back to "normal." I wonder, is the reason we feel put-out by circumstances, feel that life is unfair, is it really that we feel entitled to what went before? Did Job feel entitled to fields and flocks and herds and a large family and many servants and good health and when it all disappeared, did he feel hard-done-by because he felt entitled to all those things in his life?

To us, the words God utters sound like a reprimand, and I suppose, in a way they are. But they are not just a reprimand. They are also words of hope. God reminds Job that it was God, not Job, who laid the foundation of the earth and determined it's measurements; it is God who calls for the rains to fall and the lightning to flash; it is God who provides sustenance for all the creatures of the earth. God puts Job in his place by telling him that he is not the Creator, but merely one of the Creator's creations. Job has but one job, to care for God's creation. To second guess God's motives; to judge God's actions is not Job's responsibility. Job is not the God Oversight Committee. Neither is Job the Fairness in Life Oversight Committee. As much as God is reprimanding Job, God is also freeing Job from the responsibilities of being God.

The things that Job had, the things that we have, were and are blessings from God. They were and are gifts that are unmerited. And the greatest of those gifts is life itself. Job did not give himself the gift of life, and, like the rest of us, cannot do anything to make life longer, or more fair, simply by wishing it to be so. Life is not always fair, ultimately, we are entitled to nothing, AND we always have God no matter the circumstance.

In the end, Job is humbled, his friends are humiliated, and Job's fortune is restored, twice over. Satan, the deceiver, has failed to make Job curse God, and I can just picture him like a child who walks away frustrated, kicking at the dirt. And, the One who was there at the beginning, the One who created life itself remains at Job's side, at our side, and offers blessings, the second greatest of which is that we do not need to be God. Thanks be to God.