

Meditation: “Life finds a way!”

Albert Camus, the renowned French author, once said, “Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.” What he means is that it is in a fictional story that we can explore deep truths. The Book of Job is just such a story. In the story of Job we explore questions like, why do good people die? Or, why do people get sick with things like sores all over their bodies, or cancer? Or, why do bad things happen to good people? Or, why does God allow suffering? Or, even, why me?

In the story we read about the sores that afflicted Job. Let me remind you of what happened before that. ¹³ One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother’s house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” ¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you.” ¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” ¹⁸ While he was still speaking, another came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, ¹⁹ and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you.” ²⁰ Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And after Job lost all he had, and his children, then was his health attacked. The only two things he had left were his faith in God, and his wife.

This past week we had our monthly Congregational Support Commission meeting. In the process of the meeting, we talked about what was happening in Horseshoe Falls region. There were four United Church congregations that were close together. All of them had old buildings that were costly to maintain. All of them had aging and shrinking membership. The first one had enough people to fill the roles required to run the church – trustees, ministry and personnel committee, chair of the board, and so on – but it lacked the money to maintain the building or pay for a minister. Reluctantly, they decided to close. The second had a building that was on the verge of being condemned and they could not afford the repair costs. Reluctantly, they decided the time had come to close. The third had enough in reserves to continue on for some time but lacked enough people to fill the mandatory roles – trustees, chair of the board, and so on. They too reluctantly admitted to themselves that it was time to close. The fourth church also decided to close because there were too few people to share the work, and only a handful who did everything, and they were burned out. On top of that, they were out of reserves and their income would not support hiring a minister or paying the upkeep on their building.

All four churches were neighbouring congregations. All four closed and sold their properties.

Are you familiar with the story of Jesus of Nazareth? Did you hear that he was a teacher, a healer, a miracle worker? Did you hear that he called for grace and compassion over rigid adherence to human rules? Did you hear that his message threatened the status quo? Did you hear that those in authority put him to death on a cross? Did you hear that three days later, he rose from the grave?

His rising was God's 'yes' to Jesus and all that he came to teach humankind. His rising was 'yes' to justice and compassion and righteousness. His rising was 'yes' to life and 'no' to death. His rising was life finding a way, even in the face of death. And yet, in order for there to be resurrection, there first had to be death.

Job lost everything except his life. Do you remember how Job's story ended? ¹⁰ And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends, and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money^[a] and a gold ring. ¹² The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning, and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ He named the first Jemimah (Dove – symbol of peace, freedom and hope), the second Keziah (cinnamon bark – symbol of strength and resilience), and the third Keren-happuch (horn of beauty). ¹⁵ In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶ After this Job lived one hundred and forty years and saw his children and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷ And Job died, old and full of days.

So Job died a wealthy and wise man, who shunned traditions and left an inheritance to his daughters as well as to his sons, and he was full of years – but only after he had lost all that he owned and his own health had been attacked. Life found a way, even in the face of death and calamity.

And the four churches in Horseshoe Falls region? They pooled the money they sold their properties for, and pooled their combined incomes, and pooled their numbers, their volunteers, their trustees, their council members, and all that they had and built a new building – one that was accessible, and green (by which I mean energy efficient, not the colour), and of the right size for the new congregation. In the face of loss and death and grief, they found a way for something new, a way for life.

For the congregations and for Job, the losses were painful, even unbearable. And, in the end, something new and wonderful came out of it. I could tell you the same story from my own life, instead, lets celebrate the life we have together today.