

Sermon - 10/03/2021
Job 1:1; 2:1-10; Ps 25; He 1:1-4; 2:5-12; Mk 10:2-16

The Old Testament Scripture for today is difficult to read – what suffering Job undergoes because Satan wants to destroy his faith! No need to comb through the evidence of Job's goodness and love for God. Job is a godly man. He is sincere in his faith in the Creator. He is singled out for torture because of his faith.

The scene brings up some questions about our faith in God: Do we think believing in God in Christ will protect us from danger or suffering or temptation? What is the true relationship between blessing and faith? Do you believe or profess to believe in God only to obtain blessing and comfort and assurance?

Job is afflicted with horrible pain – the loss of his children – the loss of his livelihood (cattle and crops) – the loss of his physical health and wellbeing. All this was done by Satan – the accuser. God permitted it. What do you say to that? It may be that you have suffered on account of your faith in God. Did you think that confessing sins, repenting before Jesus, and receiving the Holy Spirit would wrap you in the cloak of invisibility so that Satan could no longer see you or ruin your life? This Scripture teaches that faith does not work that way.

There is a young woman in Upper Egypt where Muslims and Coptic Christians live side by side. Her name is Sanjana. (*The Voice of the Martyrs*, Oct 2021, vol 55, no 10, pp 4-5) Sanjana was born into a strict and militant Muslim family. She went to school with both Christians and Muslims. She always admired the way the Jesus-followers accepted punishment from teachers without flinching or complaining. At age 13 Sanjana questioned a Christian teacher about her faith in Jesus. The girl began to learn from a Christian leader who taught her over the next two years. At that time, knowing the possible consequences, Sanjana accepted and decided to follow the Lord Jesus. Her teacher gave her a copy of the Gospel of Matthew. She read it over and over. She had to keep it in a plastic bag buried in the ground.

When Sanjana's father noticed she was not praying five times a day toward Mecca, he questioned her. She boldly told him she had decided to follow Jesus. He beat her. Sanjana was refused entry to church because she did not have a cross tattoo. Christian congregations are suspicious of Muslim infiltrators who wish to break up their worship services. When she got a tattoo, her brothers burned it off with acid. She still bears the scar of that ordeal.

She was tied up and locked in her room in the family compound. Her father beat her every day. When he was exhausted, other family members would take up the beating. She almost died of her injuries – broken bones and severe wounds. She nearly starved during her imprisonment. At last, her father brought an imam to try to turn her back to Islam. He had permission to rape and beat Sanjana if she would not renounce Jesus Christ.

Her younger sister saw her wounds and heard her screams. She helped Sanjana escape that very night. Sanjana never renounced her faith and trust in Jesus. She wound up in Cairo under the protection of a Christian pastor there. She was baptized in 2016. She recalls that when the pastor lowered her into the water, she heard Jesus say, "You are my beloved daughter."

Here is a 21st century example of the faith of Job. You and I may be tempted to ask, "Lord, why did You allow Your beloved son or daughter to suffer so much for their faith?" Much like Job, Sanjana says, "God gave me a promise. And I trust His promise. God is always good." These saints did not take the way of avoiding suffering to obtain comfort by compromise. No, they held fast to God's promise, believing God will guard our souls.

Nobody sets out to suffer – rather, when we suffer for our faith, God supplies supernatural strength to endure. The Lord's encouraging voice brings His glory into our heart and mind and body. Job's friends did well to sit with him and simply offer the support of being there. As they began expounding on the reasons for Job's suffering, they became part of his agony.

They talk and talk for dozens of chapters about Job's sins and faults being the reason for his suffering. They claim

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God is punishing him for doing wrong. They are wrong, and so are we when we decide to apply a simple formula to the problem of suffering: If you sin you will be punished – if you do right you will be rewarded. It's hard to listen to them drone on about Job's guilt being the source of his pain. May the Lord prevent you and me from such hateful and hardhearted judgment.

Suffering is much more complex and mysterious than Job's friends are saying. They continue to try to make Job admit he is being punished for doing wrong. But Job isn't buying it. He maintains his stand that he is innocent. Satan cannot shake him loose from God. He says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

Jesus willingly suffered mistreatment, humiliation and finally death knowing He was bringing the hope of glory to each of us who believes and accepts His gift of Himself. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that "Jesus, because of His suffering death (*is now*) crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." (Heb 2:9)

Is Satan working on you these days? He wants to pull us down, bring us suffering in relationships, in infirmity, in despair. Suffering is always part of life in the world – particularly for Jesus followers. We may think we cannot bear our suffering. Yet, when we come out on the other side of the ordeal, we can thank and praise God for it. What seemed impossible in the midst of suffering -- that is proven character, strengthened faith, endurance -- actually come to us through Christ's presence in us.

It was only right that God, who creates and preserves all things, should make Jesus perfect through suffering, in order to bring many children to share his glory. For Jesus is the one who leads them to salvation. He purifies people from their sins, and both Jesus and those who are made pure all have the same Father.

I pray that God in Christ is always near you in your suffering. May you also hear Him say, "You are my beloved child." Amen.