

Called to Faithfulness
Job 42:1 – 6, 10 – 17; John 21:15 – 19
Sunday, October 28, 2018

For the past several weeks, we have been looking at the book of Job. It started off with a conversation between God and Satan, where God says, “Have you seen my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth! He is blameless and upright. He fears me and turns away from evil.” To which Satan says, “Only because his life is so good. If he lost it all, he would curse you.” God says, “Let’s see,” and Job loses everything – his livestock and his servants and his home and his children and his health. But still, he remains faithful. When his wife encourages him to curse God and give up, he says, “Shall we receive the good from the hand of the Lord and not also the bad? The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Then Job’s friends show up, and they spend the next 34 chapters telling him, “This has happened to you because you have sinned; because you *children* have sinned. Someone must have done *something* wrong, because God is *just*, and this would not have happened without a *reason*. So just ask for forgiveness.” To which Job says, “If I could *find* God, I would make my case and be found innocent! But God is nowhere to be found.” Job feels utterly alone. He feels abandoned by his friends (who don’t *get* it) and by God (who is not there).

Then last week, Ridgley talked about when God finally *showed up*. It says God came to Job in a whirlwind and said to him, essentially, “Who do you think you are? Were you there when I created the world? Do you know the mysteries of the deep? *I* am God. *You* are not. You are questioning me about things too great for you to understand. Have you *seen* my *crocodile*?” (Really, that’s how God’s speech to Job ends. God says, “Have you seen my crocodile,” then

talks about its skin and its teeth and says, “On earth it has no equal, a creature without fear. *I made that.*” And God stops talking.

So now, we get Job’s response to God. Can you imagine all the things he must have wanted to say? “I lost *everything*. My *children*. My *livelihood*. How could you let that *happen* to me? And then you come here in your whirlwind talking about mountain goats and crocodiles, and you tell me to stop complaining because I’m too stupid to understand. Thanks for *nothing*.” But he *doesn’t* say that. He says three things.

First, Job says, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” He affirms the power and glory of God. Second, he says, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” He admits his own limitations as a human being. *You are God, and I am not*. Third, he says, “I have *heard* a lot of talk about you lately (from his friends). But now I *see* you with my own eyes.” He affirms the *presence* of God with him. “Therefore,” he says, “I *despise* myself, and *repent* in dust and ashes.” Except he *doesn’t* exactly say that.

We know, as the readers, that Job is righteous. He *is* innocent. He has done nothing to deserve what has happened to him, and he has spent the entire book *saying* that. He has done nothing wrong. Why does he *despise* himself? What does he have to *repent* for?

When he says he *despises* himself, that’s the Hebrew word *ameyas*, which can *also* be translated as, “to *recede* or *retract* or *melt away*.” It’s like a way of saying, “I *yield*. I *retract* my questions and my complaints, and I *withdraw* myself.” When he says, “I *repent* in dust and ashes,” he doesn’t use the typical Hebrew word for *repent*, which is *shub*. He uses a *different* Hebrew

word, *nacham*. *Nacham* is used seven other times in the book of Job, and *every single time* it is used, it doesn't get translated as *repent*; it gets translated as *comfort*. When Job's friends come to comfort him, *nacham*. Right after Job's response to God, in verse 11, it says, "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 (nacham)* for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him."

So we can understand Job here as saying, "Now I see you with my own eyes, therefore I *yield* and am *comforted* in dust and ashes." Job has spent most of the book questioning the presence of God, and it's like now he says, "I see you. You are here. And that's enough for me." Even though Job has lost everything, he remains faithful to God and is comforted by the presence of God.

In the end, it says, God restores Job's fortunes; gives him *twice* as much as before – twice as much livestock, twice as much money, seven new sons and three new daughters. But the thing is, that doesn't erase the *pain* of what Job has *lost*. He gets *new* children (whom he *loves*), but they aren't his *original* children. Job doesn't go back to the way he was before all of this happened. He is forever changed by this experience. Being faithful to God has cost Job *everything*, but in return for his faithfulness, he receives a *new life*.

In the movie *Evan Almighty*, Steve Carrell plays a man named Evan who has just been elected to Congress. His life is perfect. He is young and handsome and successful, and he has a great family and a beautiful new home. Everything is going his way. Until one day, God shows up and tells him that there is going to be a flood, so he needs to build an ark. At first he *resists*, because he doesn't have *time* to build an ark, and everyone would think he's gone crazy. But

God keeps after him; keeps telling him to build the ark. One day he wakes up and he suddenly has a beard. Then another day he wakes up and has long hair. Then all these animals just start showing up in pairs. So, eventually, he gives in and starts building the ark. But he's still trying to do his job as a Congressman.

This one day, he is in a congressional hearing, when he lets it slip that there is going to be a flood. All these congressmen start questioning him, "Who told you that?" All these television cameras are on him, everyone is watching, and he says, "God." There is this collective groan, and it's like, instantly, his career and his reputation are all gone. He becomes a laughing stock; a national joke. They suspend him from Congress because they think he's gone crazy. His family leaves him. He loses everything. But he is faithful to God. He builds the ark, and eventually his faithfulness is rewarded. His family comes back to support him, and it turns out he is *right* about the flood and the ark saves all these people. He gets his job back, and he gets this whole new life with his family and with God. He doesn't go back to the way he was before all of this happened. He is forever changed by this experience. Being faithful to God costs him everything, but in return for his faithfulness, he gets a new life.

This is what Jesus is getting at, too. After Jesus has risen from the dead, he is sitting around a fire, eating breakfast with his disciples. He says to Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter says, "You *know* that I love you!" Jesus says, "Feed my lambs." Three times this happens. Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" Peter says, "You *know* that I do." And Jesus says, "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Don't just *say* that you love me. If you truly love me, *show it* by caring for others."

Then Jesus says to him, “When you were younger, you used to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” It says that Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God, and Peter’s faith in Christ ultimately *does* lead him to his death. Then Jesus says to him, “Follow me.” Christ is calling Peter to follow him, to live by his teachings, to order his life after him, to show his love by caring for others. Even though it will cost him everything; even though it will cost him his life. Following Jesus is *hard*. It is *uncomfortable*. And it doesn’t lead to the life that Peter would necessarily *choose*. But it leads to a *new life*.

For the past six months, we have been reflecting on this story with the Elders, Deacons, and Trustees. At the beginning of each of their meetings, each month for the past six months, we have read this text. And one of the things we have reflected on is, “What is God calling *us* to do?” As leaders of the church, as we make decisions for the life and ministry of the church, what is God calling us to do? How is Christ calling *us* to feed his sheep and show our love and care for his people?

Next week is Consecration Sunday, and that is the question that will be guiding *all of us* then. “What is God calling me to do? What is God calling *us* to do?” And the answer to that is very simple. What Job and Jesus and *Evan Almighty* all show us is that God is calling us to be *faithful*. That’s it. To be faithful. To hold on to God, no matter what may come, and live a life that trusts in God’s presence and God’s power and God’s ability to provide.

Faithfulness is not a means to an end. Like, “If I am faithful, then God will bless me and reward me.” Job was faithful, Peter was faithful, and it cost them everything. Being faithful is *hard*. It

can challenge us to go places we don't feel comfortable going; to *do* things we don't feel prepared or equipped to do. It takes us where we do not wish to go and stretches us way beyond what is logical and rational and what makes sense on paper. And sometimes it can cost us everything. Because faithfulness is not a *means* to an end, it is the end in and of itself. Faithfulness is the goal of this life that we are called to. To live in the kingdom of God, under the rule and reign of God. The whole journey of the Christian life and following Christ is a journey of learning to be faithful; of *growing* in faithfulness and our ability to trust God with our lives.

So, in one respect, our answer to that question of what God is calling us to do is the same for all of us. God is calling us to be faithful. To follow Christ. To feed his sheep and use our time and our gifts and our resources in ways that take care, not of *ourselves*, but of others, because we trust God to take care of *us*. While that answer is the same for *all* of us, what that *looks like* is going to be *different* for each one of us. How is God calling *you* to be faithful? What is God calling *you* to do? How is God calling you to use your time and your talents and your energy and your gifts and your abilities and your resources and your money and your love and your forgiveness in ways that bear witness to God's presence and power? How is God calling you to take a step in faith and go where you may not wish to go? How is Christ calling you to follow him and feed his sheep and make his love manifest in this world?

I encourage you to spend some time this week thinking about that. Spend some time *asking God*, "What are you calling me to do?" And whatever answer you begin to discern, remember the words that Job spoke to God, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Trusting in that, let us follow him.