

"JOB AND GOD"

INTRODUCTION

If you were to call the church some hour of the day and say that you were sick, and if I should detect in your voice a downcast, discouraged tone, I might be tempted to ask, "Are you just sick...or are you sick and disgusted?" If you're just sick that's a fairly simple matter, at least in most cases. Under normal circumstances, the natural thing for a wound to do is to heal, the natural thing for the body to do is to right itself, and if in this particular situation that does not happen, and you do not get well, then you will have to learn how to handle your disability...how to live with it, or above it.

But, if on the other hand, you are sick and disgusted, that's a different matter. That means that in addition to being sick in body, you are also sick at heart, sick in spirit. It may mean that you're fed up, that you're disillusioned with life. You've been drained of courage. Life looks empty to you. It makes very little sense, and you have little desire to go on with things.

DEVELOPMENT

This was the sickness of Job. His body was sick; there wasn't any doubt about that. And he was suffering from the physical pain that often goes with a physical illness. However, Job was more than equal to that. But his heart was also sick - shattered by grief and shocked by loss. He was sick of life itself...sick and disgusted with everything. And he made no attempt to conceal his disgust from his friends or from God. He stood on his feet and poured out his feelings.

I think you could say that this feeling - both in your case and in Job's - may be the dark side of the moon. I think you know what I mean. It's something like this. You wouldn't be disgruntled if you didn't care at all. You wouldn't be fed up with life if you hadn't had a taste of life...the delicious quality of which you can never completely forget. And you probably wouldn't say that life didn't make sense unless you really thought that it ought to, and in your heart of hearts really knew that it did.

I suppose, too, that when a person rages against God, his rage at the very least is a sign that he still believes that there is a God to rage against. This sickness of disgust may be the dark side of the moon, and the moon may turn. It usually does, and it did eventually for Job. For finally God spoke to Job - not face to face, but as the poet says, "Out of the whirlwind" - not just out of an ordinary storm, but out of a hurricane, the kind which men use to imagine would bring the end of the world.

GOD AND JOB

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and I think the first thing to notice is what God did not say, and this is rather surprising. God never mentioned Job's suffering, either to explain it or to soothe it. After all that Job had been through, after all that he had suffered, you might have expected God to have said something like this to Job: "Now, Job, you've been through a lot; you've had a tough time of it, and frankly you've done well. Keep your chin up; things will soon get better." But God never said anything like this. There was no reference on His part to Job's suffering, and He never answered any of those questions with which Job had lashed the skies. "What have I done to deserve this?" "What has God got against me?" "Why didn't I die the day I was born?" God said nothing about Job's behavior - good or bad....not a word.

FIRST THING HE SAID

The first thing He did say was this - and I'm paraphrasing this in the hope that it will make a fresh impact upon you the way it did upon Job. God said to Job: "Stand up like a man, and answer my

questions". In other words, God didn't pity Job. Instead He challenged him. There are times when the right thing to do is to go down into the ashes with another person and sympathize with him. And we who believe in and understand the mystery of the Cross know that there are times when God does that very thing. But there are other times when human beings in their suffering are so filled with self-pity that the thing to do is what God did with Job, and that is to speak rather sternly, "Gird up thy loins now like a man for I will demand of thee and thou art to answer me."

Then God began to ask Job some questions and they were all embarrassing questions because the answer to all of them in one way or another was "no". If you have read Job, you may remember some of them. I hesitate to paraphrase them because the English of the King James' Version is so beautiful, and yet once again in order to get the full impact of them, it would be better to paraphrase them. "Were you there" asked God of Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?" "No". "Can you bind up the Pleiades in a cluster or loose the chains of Orion?" "No". "Can you count the clouds?" "No". "Can you feed the ravens?" "No". "Did you give the peacocks their wings?" "No". "Did you set the lightning?" "No". "Does the eagle fly at your command?" "No". "Have you ever roused the morning and given directions to the dawn?" "No".

And so it goes....on and on...and all of the questions seem to be calculated to make Job feel small. If you've ever had the experience of sitting in a class room and being called upon by a teacher for an answer to a question, and not being able to come up with the right answer, or have an answer ready, then perhaps you can understand to some extent how Job must have felt as God questioned him. If you don't have an inferiority complex before the question, you soon will have. It may seem to us on the surface to be a rather heartless thing on the part of God to do to Job, but the more you think about it, the more you begin to see that these questions with all of their negative answers didn't make Job feel so small after all. They made him feel alive again.

And as these questions were flung at Job, one after the other, it was as though his life began to come back. I thought of the way the doctor slaps a baby when he is born to get the breathing started, and the effect of this lengthy examination on the part of God seemed to cause something like this to happen inside of Job. It made Job feel humble, to be sure, but it didn't make him feel small and insignificant. It made him come alive.

Yes....the moon was turning. The other side of the darkness was beginning to appear, and we ask why....what caused it all to happen. What was there about this experience that would do this to a person? And here let me just say parenthetically that we are on difficult ground because about all we can do is proceed by way of our imaginations...limited as they are....and I have tried to do this in a way that will be fair to Job, and helpful to us in our experiences of life.

IT MADE JOB THINK OF SOMETHING OTHER THAN HIMSELF

Let's ask this question then: what was there in this particular experience that caused the moon to turn from darkness to light for Job.

One thing about this examination by God of Job was that it made Job think of something beside himself. As God kept asking these questions, questions that had nothing to do with Job, with his suffering, with his family, with his aches and pains - Job found his attention turned away from himself to something quite outside of himself. His interest was captivated by the wonder, the variety of creation, as God asked those amazing questions about everything from stars to peacocks.

I suppose it seems rather strange to us to talk to someone who is in the depths of trouble about the wonders of creation and the animal life of the world. This is what God did. He talked to Job about the goats and the way they brought forth their young, about the wild asses and how they couldn't bear living in the cities, but roamed the open plains, about the horse, the hawk, the hippotamus, the ostrich, the peacock. It seems rather strange and yet when you stop to think about it there is something in it for us.

People have been known to regain their sanity by getting an interest in birds or goldfish and watching them so closely they have forgotten themselves. And so if we could put down a general principle here this morning at this point, it would be something like this: you always do a great deal better with anything in life when you forget your own aches and pains and concentrate on something or someone outside yourself. This is the first thing about Job's examination by God: it made Job think about something or someone beside himself, and this is always a good thing.

IT MADE HIM REALIZE HE DIDN'T KNOW AS MUCH AS HE THOUGHT A second thing that came out of this confrontation between God and Job was that Job began to realize that he didn't know as much as he thought he did. He discovered in this examination that he was completely surrounded by vast margins of mystery. He came to see that there were some things he would never know.

I've often thought that a man who spends his life studying the stars, for example, isn't likely to be sick and disgusted because he can't understand the reason for his own suffering. He is too well acquainted with the mystery of the universe to think that he can reduce the mystery of human suffering to a mathematical formula that he can grasp with his own little mind. On the other hand, the man who thinks he knows all of the answers is likely to have no answer at all when he loses his health or his child or his possessions, or whatever is the most precious thing in his life. All neatly constructed theories go crashing to the ground.

I hope that as you reflect upon Job's experience, you will conduct a private examination of your own to discover whether you are one of those who has thought all along that you knew everything that there was to know about life, and that your religion has provided you with every answer, ready made, and therefore human suffering wherever and however it touches you would present no mystery at all. If you're that kind of person then immerse yourself in the mystery in which Job found himself completely wrapped.

HE BECAME AWARE THAT GOD WAS THINKING ABOUT HIM As we come to the end of these four sermons then dealing with Job, it should be noted that as so often happens, when Job stopped thinking about himself, and began to think about God, he knew for the first time as he had never known before that God was thinking about him.....not in the old way (as one of his favorites that he was helping along), but rather in a new way - as one whom He had taken into his confidence, one with whom he was sharing some of the problems and the joys of creation, assuming that he could handle his own human problems which he had proceeded to do. Once Job was convinced that God had not forgotten him, that He took the trouble to speak to him, and draw him into his own divine activity, he was no longer sick and disgusted.

Notice that not once is the word "love" mentioned, but a man would have to be blind not to see the love of God turning the moon around and around until the dark side was no longer in view.

About the most important thing we can say about the story of Job is this. The answer ultimately is one of faith, and that measure of peace that comes to us from recognizing this, and holding to God in the confidence that He still knows how to manage the affairs of the universe.

And this, too: the meaningfulness of life doesn't come by understanding things. It comes with the willingness to venture forth - to be, to live, to lose, to suffer, to die. What happened to Job here in the end was that the willingness which he had almost lost, suddenly returned. He "saw" something. And what he saw was,

"I know that thou can'st do all things....and
that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. I
had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee"

What did Job see? We shall never know, but I would like to think that he saw, as if he saw the light of a distant star at night, the light of the glory of God as it had fully shone centuries in the face of Jesus Christ. He never saw the face itself, but I would like to think that in some way not understood by us...the light from that face shone backward as well as forward, and that by that light Job saw God.

PR Help us, O God, to be quiet here in thy house, and in the presence
of thy majesty and power and love - the fullness of which we shall
not comprehend nor understand, but the reality of which is never beyond our
reach. Amen

Lord, help us to hold fast to that which is good, and to forget that which
is evil. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Let us enter into a time of silent meditation...a time in which we prepare ourselves expectantly...that the Spirit of the Living God may be made real to us in this hour of worship.

In silence, let each now pray as the heart may prompt.

MEDITATION

"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far does He remove our transgressions from us."

2. "In the name of Jesus Christ, I share with you the Good News: we are forgiven!"

1. "Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart."

"Ask and it will be given you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it will be opened to you".

3. "And all things...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing...you shall receive. And as many as touched Him were made whole."

PRAYERS / LORD'S PRAYER

O Thou, who hearest prayer, hear our prayers for others...as well as for ourselves.

Touch with healing, O God and Father of us all, those whom we mention in our prayers this hour:

Father and Mother of us all...

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|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Raymond Barnes | 3. John Risley |
| 2. Ellen Nicholson | 4. |

Heal us at the point of our deepest need.

Comfort the bereaved and the broken-hearted in our midst. Abide among us all as a healing benediction.

For we ask all of this in the name and spirit of Jesus who taught us to say when we pray:

"Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth
as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our
trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen."

PASTORAL PRAYER: July 17, 1983

LORD, we are assembled here in the posture of prayer -

Heads bowed. Eyes closed. Hoping that
for a few moments we can bring ourselves
into the proper attitude of prayer.

BUT THEN we remember that YOU see not the outer appearance,
but are far more concerned about the inner need and
the inner openness.

WE ARE the ones who tend to look on the outside, but YOU see
the inside and are sensitive to the inner needs of
each of us.

MAKE US HONEST, LORD in our worship -

WE DO NOT want to pretend that we are something we are not.

WE DO NOT come to YOU to know how good we are, but rather
who we are!

WE WORRY about little things, and are apathetic about the
weightier matters of life.

WE DECLARE that love is the most excellent way - the only way -
and then let things dominate our lives and dictate
to us.

IN OUR WORSHIP, help us to see what matters most in life.
Help us to learn what it means to have faith,
to live by faith in a spirit of love.

Then we can be saved from living wasteful,
neglectful lives.

IS THERE ONE AMONG US this hour, Lord, who does not know what decision
he or she must make? Then may the right insight come in this
hour of worship that will enable that person to make the best
decision.

IS THERE ONE HERE in our midst, Lord, who feels that he or she has been
traveling down a "dead-end" road? Then may that person find
what seems to be an end - the place of a fresh start, a new
beginning.

HELP US, LORD, to reach out - in faith,
and thus find Your presence...giving us health,
healing, hope and happiness.

ALL THIS WE ASK in the strong name and the loving spirit of Jesus Christ,
our Lord.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: July 15, 1984

GREETING / VISITORS Even on a warm Summer Sunday in July, a New York City Church can be "blessed" with the presence of visiting friends in the congregation. Today is no exception! We have two or three...

We greet those of you who are visitors to our Church today...delighted to have you with us and we do hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you in a more personal way following the service - either at the door, or - time permitting - downstairs in the Russell Room where punch and cookies will be served.

You worship this day in a Church whose roots are deep in the soil of this city, a Church that has been a beacon of God's light and love to thousands of people across the years since 1837 - the year this Church was founded. We minister here in the name of Christ, our Lord. And it is in His name - His strong name and His loving spirit - that we would bid you welcome on this July Sunday in 1984!

TODAY'S MUSIC We welcome Michael D. Reed to the organ console this morning. Michael's a friend - and has been with us on other occasions in recent years...during the Summer weeks in the absence of Lyndon Woodside, who left on Friday for Europe where he will be directing this coming week in West Berlin.

Michael's talents and skills as a musician have blessed many of our services these past six or seven years and we are grateful to him. He will be with us for the coming five Sundays. And how nice to have Robert Smith - a church member and a faithful tenor in our Church choir - as soloist for this service. Bob has sung at a number of our summer services in recent years...and we thank him, too, for sharing his gift in the service today.

THIS WEEK We have a busy week coming along here in the Church. Note that Congressman Bill Green will be holding another of his Town Meetings on Tuesday evening...here in our Community Room downstairs. This meeting is captioned, "Senior Power VS Crime" - a Congressional Town Meeting, hosted by Representative Bill Green. All are welcome. Six pm on Tuesday evening.

And on Thursday evening, the Finance Committee will hold a supper meeting at the apartment of Kathy Buck, 345 East 86th Street. Members have been notified by mail. We have 20 people on the Committee, if all come... so please let Kathy know as soon as possible if you're coming...

JESUS SAID "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.

BAPTISM Today at 4 pm, we shall be baptizing Zachary Keith Koulermos, infant son of Rhonda and Michael Koulermos, born last December - the 27th.

TODAY'S MUSIC

We welcome Michael D. Reed to the organ console again this morning in the absence of Lyndon Woodside. We also welcome Christie Anderson - a member of our choir - as the soloist for today's service of worship.

ORGAN POSTLUDE

The organ postlude - a final offering of our praise to God - is played after the Benediction. Time permitting, we invite you to share in the beauty and majesty of it.

TUESDAY EVENING

"The Hounds of Heaven" study group will meet this coming Tuesday evening at 6:30 pm in the apartment of Leroy Coffman, 303 East 83rd Street. George Leopold serves as the leader for this mid-week study opportunity which is currently focusing on the meaning of prayer in life. New members are welcome.

DURING AUGUST

Mr. Clarke will be leaving for several weeks of a Maine vacation later this week. During his absence we shall welcome several visiting ministers. Rev. Richard Donovan - a friend of this congregation - will preach August 5th and 12th. Mr. Kenneth Halcott of our own parish will be at the lectern the four Sundays in August. Thanks to Ken for providing us with this "lectern continuity".

GLORIA PATRI

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

SOLO

"Benedictus"

Mozart

SCRIPTURE Job 38: 1-7; 40: 1-9; 42: 1-6, 19

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PASTORAL PRAYER

PARISH CONCERNS

SOLO

"How Lovely Are Thy Dwellings"

Liddle

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 27 "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

SERMON

"Job and God"

Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 217 "He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN

"A Trumpet Minuet"

Hollins

** Interval for Ushering

essions of church school for younger children are offered Sunday mornings during the Summer weeks and nursery care for infants and toddlers is also available. This service is provided on the fourth floor.

ADULT BIBLE CLASS

An adult Bible Class meets Sunday mornings at 9:30 in the third floor Fellowship Hall. Coffee is available and new members are always most welcome.

CHECK THE BULLETIN BOARD

Remember our church friends and members who are in the hospital or shut-in at home. A card, a call and a prayer are always appreciated. Names and addresses are on the bulletin board in the Russell Room.

