

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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October 4, 2009

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job 1:1, 2:1-10

1There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

2:1One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 3The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." 4Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. 5But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." 6The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."

7So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

9Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." 10But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Mark 10:2-16

2Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." 5But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

10Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

13People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." 16And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

"Enfolding"

It was a "pop-quiz." It was intended to be a surprise. It was also intended to catch him off guards. Those questions on divorce had no answer that would please everyone. There were various schools of thought on the subject and each came out on at a different point.

When they asked Jesus the question they were fully aware of that reality. It is the very reason they chose that topic. It was a sensitive topic then and it still is today. But do understand that things then were somewhat different then than they are now.

The situation was that in that time a man could write a certificate of divorce that in essence cast the woman aside. It was devastating. As women could not and did not own property or have any rights, the result of the certificate of divorce was that it usually made the woman homeless, destitute, and without any family. Her existence really came to a crashing end.

So when they question him he really turns the questions in a different way. They are asking about legalisms. They want to know what are the boundaries and limitations of the law. Even when the discussion turns to an insider discussion it becomes clear that the disciples too are hung up on the legalisms of the issues with divorce.

Jesus turns it. He turns them from a picking over the meaning of the Deuteronic law to a discussion of the intention of Genesis. He pulls the conversation from the particulars of divorce and draws their attention to the larger issue of intention. The question Jesus deals with is the intention

of marriage. What was it for? And his approach is one that turns them back towards the commandments—the commandments had to do with honoring relationships.

It is also interesting that in this turning he makes it mutual. He speaks from the perspective of women too. It is beautifully there in the text. Jesus is the one who gives women an equal place.

One has to step back some and see the intention of both Jesus and the Gospel of Mark. This is not intended to be a universal teaching on the particulars of all relationships and marriage. The truth of the matter is we all know too well the pain of divorce and the struggle of relationships that are broken. We also have come to see those times when it is more holy for two to separate than it is for them to remain together.

This Gospel, this Jesus—it is about the movement towards the kingdom of God. Jesus proclaims a kingdom that is near. It is a reign of God that is present and at hand. In that reign of God relationships get re-framed into their original intention. We are to face our failures as humanity and our struggles as people with our relationships. And we are to see in all that the intention of the Creator God and the intention of the reign of God that we live those relationships in wholeness.

It does not erase the questions over why some marriages just cannot be. Some cannot. It also does not explain how it is that some endure for 50 years. Today we celebrate Ed and Doris Matthai. 50 years ago today they were married. It is wonderful.

The beauty of it is we do get to see these occasions. I'm not talking about Ed and Doris anymore, but relationships and marriages and being in community with each other is difficult stuff. We live in a disposable society where we toss away our relationships. It is in the struggle, it is in

those places where we do the difficult work of trying to make it go that God invites us to hear the coming reign of peace, and love, and joy.

We like to do what those did that came to Jesus—we like to know the limits. We like the legalities of it. We like it all to be black and white with no shades of gray. But as soon as we insist on having it that way—as soon as we insist on making it all fit into one way or another we have tended to then focus on being right and not wrong. We tend in those time to focus on who is in and point out who is out. In all that we lose sight of the reign of peace, and love, and joy.

Job, we are told, was a blameless man who feared the Lord. It is hyperbole, of course. There is no one who is totally blameless. Job stands in the place of the one who is blameless. He is a good man who lives in an upright way.

The scene of the book of Job is very different from the world and universe as we conceive of it. The main characters are Job, God and ha-satan. This ha-satan is not the devil that we encounter otherwise. This is one who is a character in the drama of Job.

The premise is an inquiry into the limits of Job's commitment and devotion to God. As the drama unfolds we will encounter much, but even here in the first two chapters of the book it is as if everything that Job knows is stripped away. Here he is the one who is loyal, faithful, and true to God and yet he loses everything.

He not only loses everything, but he ends up covered in sores all over his body. He ends up so covered in sores that he sits there in the ash heap with a broken piece of pottery. And with that piece of pottery he literally scrapes on the scabs of his sores.

His wife, always and ever the voice of practicality, says to him, “Curse God and die!” Enough of this already, he ought to just give up and give over and let it all go. This is no fun at all. This surely cannot be what happens to the righteous. This is not how it is supposed to end up.

So then, “Curse God and die,” seems an appropriate response to all that befalls poor Job. Job continues to get pushed. And so the story goes.

At what point with Job just give in and do exactly what his wife invites him to do? At what point will Job just give it all up and be done with his enduring trust in God? After all, and this is the difficult question, if God creates everything then did not God also create the evil with which Job is being confronted?

Is God the author of this bad stuff too? And as such, and if God is then how, oh how, do we deal with the question of is God dealing and dolling out bad stuff to the likes of Job? And is God doing that to us too? That is the deep question!

And so we stop and we step back, but we do not step away from the difficult questions. God does not urge us to give up on those difficult questions or to avoid blaming God, putting God in a position of having a hand in evil, or even of making God responsible for suffering.

God does not make any of those questions off limits. God does not take any of that off the table. But as we struggle there and as we ask those questions we also at the same time need to see the movement of God.

In the passage from Mark’s gospel there is a demonstration of that movement. It is right with this difficult discussion of relationships. There

are ones that bring children to him. And the disciples want to chase them away. “Ah he does not have time for all this.”

Jesus, however, stops them. He stops them and he is insistent about the children. He tells them to bring them to him. As they come he takes them in his arms, he does that holy thing of laying hands on them, and he blesses them.

It is that movement of Jesus that we need to see. He enfolds the children into the reign of God.

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That word enfold is a word of movement. He welcomes. He cradles. He holds. He gathers together. He brings them in. All that is to enfold. It is what Jesus does for children.

To enfold is the movement of God.

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Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. It is a relatively new observation on our world-wide Christian calendar of observations. Today Christians of every variety, race, and creed are invited to celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It is a way of expressing our visible unity even though we are varied and different across the globe.

It is a way of signaling to the world and to ourselves the kind of life to which we are called where there will be a time when all come together and all are one. Our differences will be seen as gifts and our oneness will be real.

The Lord’s Table is the place where that happens. It is the place where we are to hear the enfolding love of God that invites us to come and

dine, to “take my yoke upon you,” and to taste and see that the Lord is good.

This cup and this bread are the elements in which we are to hear again, see again, feel again, and know again that we have been enfolded into this incredible move towards a time and place where peace, and love, and joy are fully present and all else is absent.

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Enfolding. It is Job. No matter how much. No matter how many sores he had. No matter how much he had to scrape off with that pottery shard—no matter, God was still there. After all the questions, God was still there. After all the struggles, God was still there. After all the comforts of living were gone, God was still there.

Job was enfolded in. Job was held. Job was cradled. Job was like a child being welcomed into the arms of a loving parent. Job was enfolded in.

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Enfolded. So were, and so are, and so will be those of us who are married for 50 years or divorced 5 times. Those of us who have been successful at relationships and those of us who have yet to get it right—oh, we are all of those people all the time. And the movement of God in all of it. **Enfolding.**

In all of it God is enfolding us in. God is welcoming us back. God is the one who in the cross holds the shard of pottery and scraps those sores for us. In Christ our God is moving our lives to the place where there is peace, and love, and joy.

In the end—it is in that very place where we still have those sores, and it is in that very place where we still struggle for wholeness in our

relationships, and community, and lives—it is in those places where God is enfolding us.

And in that enfold...in that enfold is that which hurts, that which is unanswered, that which is beyond explanation.... In it is the one who says, “This is my body,” and “This is my blood,” ...and he says it, “for you.”

For us—for we have been invited here. It is here at this table where we are to see scraping beyond the sores to the place where there is the fullness of joy, and peace, and love. For that is the very place to which we are being enfolded.

We are the enfolded. And the witness of that enfolding is our eating and drinking here with the world, and then it is our going out into that world and enfolding the others of us in our broken relationships, and suffering, and loss, and Jobness.

The enfolding is to continue. It is the way to move on.... Amen.