

03-15-20 Scripture Readings – excerpts from Job

Last week we were introduced to the story of Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God and turned away from evil. Job was very wealthy with huge flocks of animals, untold numbers of servants and a large family – seven sons and three daughters.

All of that had been tragically and quickly taken from Job in a wager between God and one of God’s agents referred to as The Satan – a title that means The Adversary or, The Prosecutor. Not only had he lost everything (except his wife who had told him to “Curse God and die”) but he was also suffering painful sores all over his whole body.

When we left Job last week he wasn’t cursing God, but he was cursing the day he’d been born. His suffering was so great that he was asking why he hadn’t been allowed to die at birth.

His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had heard of his troubles and they came to see him, to console and comfort him. He was in such bad shape that they didn’t even recognize him. They wept and tore their robes and threw dust in the air on their heads in solidarity with Job. They sat with him – in silence – for seven days and nights.

And then... they began to speak. We’re going to present snippets of their speeches as well as Job’s responses, from the Common English version, because this part of the story goes on for some 27 chapters. So, we’ll give you a taste of this dramatic conversation. Eliphaz spoke first.

Eliphaz, (4:2-9)

²If one tries to answer you, will you be annoyed?

But who can hold words back?

³Look, you’ve instructed many
and given strength to drooping hands.

⁴Your words have raised up the falling;
you’ve steadied failing knees.

⁵But now it comes to you, and you are dismayed;
it has struck you, and you are frightened.

⁶Isn’t your religion the source of^[a] your confidence;
the integrity of your conduct, the source of your hope?

⁷Think! What innocent person has ever perished?
When have those who do the right thing been destroyed?

⁸As I’ve observed, those who plow sin
and sow trouble will harvest it.

⁹When God breathes deeply, they perish;

Job (6:24-27)

- ²⁴ Instruct me and I'll be quiet;
inform me how I've erred.
- ²⁵ How painful are truthful words,
but what do your condemnations accomplish?
- ²⁶ Do you intend to correct my words,
to treat the words of a hopeless man as wind?
- ²⁷ Would you even gamble over an orphan,
barter away your friend?

Bildad (8:2-7)

- ² How long will you mouth such things
such that your utterances become a strong wind?
- ³ Does God pervert justice,
or does the Almighty distort what is right?
- ⁴ If your children sinned against him,
then he delivered them into the power of their rebellion.
- ⁵ If you will search eagerly for God,
plead with the Almighty.
- ⁶ If you are pure and do the right thing,
then surely he will become active on your behalf
and reward your innocent dwelling.
- ⁷ Although your former state was ordinary,
your future will be extraordinary.

Job (9:2-4)

- ² I know for certain that this is so;
and how can anyone be innocent before God?
- ³ If one wants to contend with him,
he won't answer one in a thousand.
- ⁴ He is wise^[a] and powerful;
who can resist him and prosper?

Zophar (11:2-6)

- ²Should all these words go unanswered
or a wordy man be justified?
- ³Will your idle talk silence everyone;
will you mock and not be put to shame?
- ⁴You've said, "My teaching is pure,
and I'm clean in God's^[a] eyes."
- ⁵But oh, that God would speak,
open his lips against you
- ⁶and tell you secrets of wisdom;
for sound insight has two sides.
Know that God lets some of your sin be forgotten.

Job (12:2-4)

- ²Surely you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.
- ³I am also intelligent;
I'm not inferior to you.
Who isn't like these people?^[a]
- ⁴I'm a joke to friends
who called to God and he answered;
the innocent and blameless one is a joke,

By this point in the story Job is despondent and asks God to simply leave him alone. Then Eliphaz speaks again.

Eliphaz (15:2-6)

- ²Will the wise respond with windy knowledge
and fill their belly with the east wind?
- ³Will they argue with a word that has no benefit
and with unprofitable words?
- ⁴You are truly making religion ineffective
and restraining meditation before God.
- ⁵Your mouth multiplies your sins a thousand times;
you opt for a clever tongue.
- ⁶Your mouth condemns you, not I;
your lips argue against you.

Job (16:2-4)

²I've heard many things like these.
All of you are sorry comforters.

³Will windy talk ever cease;
what bothers you that you must argue?

⁴In your situation I could speak like you;
I could put words together to oppose you,
shake my head over you.

Bildad (18:2-4)

²How long? Would you all stop talking.
Try to understand and then we can speak.

³Why are we considered beasts,
ignorant in your sight?

⁴To you who tear yourself in rage—
will earth be forsaken for your sake,
a rock be dislodged from its place?

Job (19:2-6)

²How long will you harass me
and crush me with words?

³These ten times you've humiliated me;
shamelessly you insult me.

⁴Have I really gone astray?
If so, my error remains hidden inside me.

⁵If you look down on me
and use my disgrace to criticize me,
⁶ know then that God has wronged me
and enclosed his net over me.

Zophar (20:27-29)

²⁷Heaven exposes their guilt;
earth opposes them.

²⁸Their household wealth will be carried off
by rushing streams on the day of his anger.

²⁹This is a wicked person's lot from God,
their heritage decreed by God.

Job goes on to reply again and then all three of the friends take another turn at pointing out Job's wickedness and how he deserves what he's experiencing. Finally, in chapter 26 Job speaks of God's unsearchable majesty, in chapter 27 he again maintains and defends his integrity.

Job (27:2-6)

²As God lives, who rejected my legal claim,

the Almighty, who made me bitter,

³ as long as breath is in me

and God's breath is in my nostrils—

⁴ my lips will utter no wickedness;

my tongue will mumble no deceit.

⁵I will not agree that you are right.

Until my dying day, I won't give up my integrity.

⁶I will insist on my innocence, never surrendering it;

my conscience will never blame me for what I have done.