

Job 3

How many of us like to watch movies or go to the theatre?

I invite you to think of Job as a stage play. In the opening scene we see Job. He is all that God wants a person to be. He loves the Lord with his whole heart. He loves his neighbour too. And he is blessed like crazy. All is well. All is as it should be. A good man is blessed by the Lord.

The scene shifts to the conversation **we** now know well. But Job knows nothing about it. He is still happily going about his life. The sons of God appear before the Lord as civil servants in the empire. The accuser is there too. The Lord loves Job, and loves to bless Job. The accuser says, 'strike all Job has, and he will curse you to your face'.

Permission is given to strike Job and take all he has. Job does not know what is going on. The question that hangs over everything is this: "Will he curse God or keep trusting that God is good and loves him"?

He trusts and praises the Lord.

The accuser is not convinced that Job's faith is real. The accuser ups the ante. 'Stretch out your hand, strike his bones and his flesh, he will curse you to your face'.

Permission is given again. Job cannot breathe without suffering.

His wife encourages Job to curse God and die.

Will Job curse God?

No. He accepts good and evil from the Lord. He trusts the Lord.

His three friends arrive. They weep and lament and fall silent as they see Job's suffering. They say nothing because they have no words for his pain.

Will Job curse God? It is the question that brings us to act three as the other characters look on and listen in silence and the spotlight falls on Job.

Let's listen in:

Read Job 3

Afterward Job cursed...

The phrase itself is shocking. There is hardly time to wonder... does he curse his wife?, his friends? Does he curse God after all?

Job curses...

The balance of his life has tipped over completely. There are no blessings to count. Every good gift is gone.

In our times of trouble we often use sentences that begin with, 'at least....'

"At least we have our health".

"At least I have a job".

"At least we have each other."

"At least...."

But Job cannot finish the sentence. There is nothing left but pain.

Job has come to that dark and terrible place where some of us have been. It is the place of concluding that it would be better if I had never been born at all.

And so with grim eloquence and dark beauty, Job curses the day of his birth.

If only that day could have been erased from the calendar. If only that date could never have happened he would not have been born and he would not know this pain of searing loss.

In Job's day there were professional cursers. If only they had called upon the great and terrible sea monster, Leviathan to swallow up my birthday and night. I would not be.

Or, if the day of my birth could not be erased, why could I not have been still-born or miscarried?

The grave is quiet and restful, everyone ends up there. It would have been better to by-pass life and go straight from the cradle to the grave.

Some of us know this kind of pain. Some of those we know or love have taken their own lives because they could not see their way out of pain and loss.

As we watch this stage play, as we listen to Job's lament, he turns toward us and directs questions to us, the audience:

Why is light given to those in misery?

Why is life given to the bitter of soul?

Why is life given to those who long for death that does not come?

Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?

Why does abuse in a family leave a dark trail down to unsuspecting generations?

Why do some struggle with mental illness that resists all attempts at treatment?

At classis on Wednesday, Joanne told us about Abby Colthorpe, a man from Sylvan Lake. Over a seventeen year period his wife died from a medication accident, his daughter died of cancer, his stepson in a car accident, and finally, his only remaining reason to live, his son Cory died when his buddy from work, driving drunk, rolled his truck and left Cory behind in the ditch as he walked away.

The organist at the 100th anniversary service last Sunday is someone I've come to know a bit over the years. His name is D. His wife died suddenly less than two years ago. He himself now has cancer and is receiving chemo for it.

Why?

Job has no idea. All he knows is that he hurts.

They say that 99% of what we fear does not happen. Especially as a child, but even as an adult I have taken comfort in that saying. I would think that since I was worried about something, especially if I prayed about it, it would not happen. For Job, **100%** of what he feared has happened.

Sometimes life really is this hard.

Addictions are often attempts to self-medicate the pain we have not faced or do not understand.

Cutting is an attempt to distract oneself from emotional pain by physical pain.

What I am about to say may strike you as strange. But it may be that Job 3 is in part a gift for those who are suffering and a gift for us when we suffer.

How?

Job 3 offers the gift of being understood. For some of us, as we heard this passage, we had this response. 'Job gets it'. 'Job knows how I felt that day'. 'Job knows how I wanted to escape so badly that death looked attractive'.

Some of us have tried to tell our parents how much life hurts, we have tried to open up in a small group or confide in a colleague or tell our spouse or even a 'helping professional', and we have been met by a blank look, or a wrinkled forehead, or advice or anger or a swift subject change.

Sometimes, when we are in our pain and do not understand it ourselves, everyone around us looks so neat and tidy and they seem to live such strong and neat and tidy lives. God seems to bless everything they do, they could never 'get' what we are suffering. Job gets it. Job is just as hopeless, just as disoriented, just as confused as we have ever been, or as we are on that terrible day when we think it would have been better not to have been born at all.

I have said it before, but as a church we do our selves a disservice when all we sing are happy, peppy songs about God's blessings and love and joy. No matter what our favourite Bible verse might be, no matter how our theology has agreed that life is, we still need a poem and a song for our pain. Job's lament is a gift to us that says that we are understood.

It's a gift of words that can help us to carry our own pain to the Lord. It is a gift that can help us to tell others what life is like for us, or has been.

By now, in this stage play, some of us have left our seats and come up to sit closer to Job.

Others of us are still in our seats, watching.

It may be that our role in life right now is to be a friend to one in pain. I hope that this lament can help us to listen more closely to children, spouse, friend or neighbour and not to be afraid of their pain or questions.

I hope that we will trust the Lord enough to say, 'I don't know' when someone throws a 'why' question at us. I hope that we will have the courage to say nothing when we have no answers for why suffering has come.

One of the basic points of Job is that here, where we live and where we hurt, we do not get some of the answers we seek. Job never knows what we in the audience know.

What we do have, we who live not in Job's day, but now, closer to the end of the great drama that God is writing and of which we are a part, is God's answer to suffering.

God in Christ came to suffer with us. To have his trust in the Father mocked along with ours. To finally cry out, "why have you forsaken me?" And to die with his questions unanswered.

We live on the other side of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is God's guarantee that he hears our cries, that he has responded and that one day he will raise us up too. The resurrection answer is so strong, that St. Paul who knew much about suffering, dares to say, of his own and all of our suffering, that it is 'light and momentary' compared to the future that is to come. It's a description that can give us the hope we need to hang on and the courage we need to follow Jesus from where we are.

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.