

The Rev. Mary Haggerty
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
4rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 2021
Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-41

Life is not fair.

Did you ever hear that growing up? Maybe you have said it to your own kids. I may have said it to mine from time to time. We say it to remind ourselves that there are no guarantees in life. There is no formula that will keep the chaos at bay if we just do it right. Our Scriptures today remind us that life is always going to include storms.

In our reading from the book of Job this morning, we heard God's reply to Job's experience of chaos, of a powerful storm in his life. Job's friends have assured him that his misfortune must be due to some sin on his part. But Job knows that he is innocent. If he's innocent, he wants God to acquit him. If he is guilty, he wants God to tell him what sin he is charged with. Job's question to God came out of a particular understanding of the world. It is an ancient world view that still sounds familiar to us today.

According to Job's framework, those who live a good life and are obedient to God's commands will be rewarded with good fortune. Those who disobey God's commandments will meet misfortune. This is the framework of justice, the understanding of the way the world works, that Job grew up with.

Then tragedy strikes. Tragedy upon tragedy. Job loses his family, his flocks, his servants, his health. This is clearly not fair! Job has done everything right and yet he is suffering terribly. He has not sinned against God or disobeyed God and still he suffers. Job's legalistic framework,

based on right and wrong, with clear cut rules, is wholly inadequate as he sits in the ash heap of his life.

I have been right where Job is and I would guess each of us has had Job-like moments. Moments where we shake our fist at God and say, “It’s not fair.” Maybe you ate all the right things and exercised every day and yet you are the one who got the cancer diagnosis? Or you went to counseling and tried everything to make the relationship work, but she left you anyway. Or your child’s life was taken far too soon. Parents should not have to bury children. Maybe you were on time every day and went above and beyond the call of duty at work, and yet they let you go when things got tough. It’s not fair! Each of us could tell our own Job-like story.

Job challenges God to a trial because it is the only framework he knows. Job believes that if he can only have the chance to plead his case in court surely he will change God’s mind and be vindicated.

God says, Rubbish! Your categories are too small. Your vision is too narrow. Pastor Leann Reed imagines God saying, “You think in terms of the courtroom. I think in terms of the cosmos. Your human theories cannot possibly capture the complexity of the universe, nor can they contain the chaos. For chaos is part of the creation as surely as crocodiles roam the Nile.”¹

God says to Job, and God says to us in our Job-like moments. You are right. It’s not fair. Life is not fair. But its not about fairness. It is about my power even in the midst of the chaos. It’s about my love through the worst storm. It’s about my presence through it all.

Job does not get an answer from God as to the why of his suffering. His answer is a “who.” His answer is a Divine encounter, an assurance that in the midst of the chaos all around

¹ Leanne Pearce Reed, “Homiletical Perspective.” In *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p. 151.

us, the God who created the world, who gave us the gift of the sea and the land and all the creatures, who set the stars in the sky, is the secure foundation of all creation. Despite the inevitable chaos, the God of creation is present. God doesn't promise to take away the storms. God doesn't promise to settle the score. God doesn't promise that we will understand the complexity of creation. God promises presence. Steadfast love through it all.

This is the steadfast love that our psalmist speaks of this morning. When their "courage melted away in calamity" and they were "at wits end." "They cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he brought them out from their distress." He didn't query them to see if they had done things right or to see if they deserved it. This isn't about fairness. It isn't about how God's people have performed. It is about God. The steadfast love of God, the creator of all who is present to us and has mercy on us in the wildest of waters.

This is the steadfast love that Jesus shows when his disciples cry, "It isn't fair!" This whole trip probably doesn't seem fair to the disciples. They have worked a long, hot day alongside Jesus. They have dropped their own work to follow him. They have given it their all. And now he draws them right into the heart of a raging storm. What kind of thank you is that? It isn't fair! To top it all off he is snoozing away as the boat is filling with water. Does he not even care that they could go under? Jesus wakes up to their fear. He sees it. He feels it. He tells them, "Do not be afraid." He doesn't say, "There is nothing to be afraid of." The storm is real. Their fear is real. Jesus calms both them and the storm with the power of his presence.

Jesus says, "Don't be afraid, because you are not alone." Jesus is not telling us that we have to have more faith or better faith. He is asking us to trust him. He is asking us to let God be God. To let God hold us close as we weep and tremble with fear. To trust in the loving God of all creation even as we shake our fist at the chaos of life. The faith that Jesus wishes for his disciples

and that God was teaching Job about is trusting that even though there are real, frightening storms in our lives, they need not paralyze us. They don't have to have dominion over us. They need not own us because we are not alone in the boat.

Your mother was right. Life is not fair. But God is not interested in our balance sheets. God is interested only in loving us through the storm.