

We have a story in our family about my mother. Those of you who knew her remember that she was extremely hard of hearing, even with her hearing aids. My Dad had been made executor of a couple of elderly friends will and with this came the Power of Attorney. With my mom's hearing disability, she always said that Dad had the Power of Eternity! We always laughed and didn't try to correct her. When Dad died we all agreed ...yes, now he really does have power of eternity! When reading today's lessons in Job that story came back to mind and put a smile on my face as I remembered. Maybe my Mom knew and believed before the rest of us about what Dad really had waiting for him.

Over the last two weeks we have watched Job show the strength of his faith as his entire family and all his possessions were taken from in one day. We watched him struggle with physical pain and bodily sores and the advice of well meaning friends. But, through all of his losses and all of his pain, Job hung onto his faith and trust in God, setting an example for each of us. We saw that no matter what was thrown his way, he never doubted that God was with him and that God would lead him to better things.

Do we follow Job's example, turning to God when life stretches our faith, or do we give up and try to fix things on our own? Do we rely on our faith and knowledge that when life hands us some hard blows that God will continue to walk with us and never leave us on our own? Do the struggles of our life discourage us and leave us questioning God and his love for us?

Today we return to Job to find him pondering about death and what will happen to his earthly body. In the first part of our reading Job thinks about the life of a tree and the tree's life after it is cut down and left to die. Borrowing a part of the litany found in the Narrative Lectionary , I summarize his words:

Even when all its branches have been cut to the bottom, Even when only roots lie untouched, underground...Even then there is hope that new growth will appear in the presence of water and the sunlight to feed it. Where a future seemed doubtful and the prospects seemed dim, Even then there is hope....

So Job sees hope for the tree, for God's creation, knowing God will provide water and sunlight to nourish the tree and give it new life, yet he wonders about himself and continues with these words: **“But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they?”**

We all wonder. We all have a fear of the unknown, of what lies ahead for us, for our loved ones. We wonder when we die, about earthly things first, like who will care for our loved ones; who will do the things we have been doing; and what happens next? We are no different than Job. It is just part of our humanness. We want to be in control, to know what lies ahead, but that isn't always the way it goes.

Job continues, asking to be sent to Sheol to wait for all his suffering to pass. As often in our reading we need a bit of background about the culture of the time and about the Jewish traditions that were a part of Job's life. It was the Jewish tradition that the dead were placed in Sheol, a place of darkness, cut off from life and from God. Job's suffering seems endless, so much so, that he was ready for Sheol, desperate to be free of all the suffering and loss, ready to be cut off from life itself and to live in the darkness of Sheol. To be sent to Sheol where he won't face anymore pain, but to wait for the day when God would redeem all of humanity. Even tho Job is in dark despair, he doesn't stop there with his thoughts... instead his faith in God continues and he finds hope in the God that has been with him in all of his pain and loss. He finds hope that God won't leave him, yet that God will come and remember him and that God will lead him from the darkness and into the light.

Remember, Job was one who lost all his children and possessions in one day. He is one who endured painful sores covering his entire body. He endured seven days of silence while his friends came to comfort him. And even after all of this, he was able to say: **O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.**”

Again, in Jewish tradition and the tradition of the culture in which Job lived, “a redeemer” served a specific purpose. A redeemer was generally a relative or very close friend whose specific role or job in ancient Israel was to restore the rights of others. In Leviticus 25 the role of the “redeemer” or family member was to “redeem” a person who had to sell himself or his land to pay off a debt. Another redeemer was Boaz who redeemed Naomi to community and family by marrying Ruth. Job knew these things, he knew that eventually he would be redeemed when all humanity would be redeemed.

He had his faith and his hope in the God that he had always trusted even in his darkest days. Job asks this at the end of verse 13 with his words: “that you would appoint me a set time and remember me!” Job turned to God in his good times and in his suffering and God had never abandoned him. Job put his faith and trust in God through everything. Are we like Job? Do we trust that through all of this Corona Virus and quarantines that God will be with us? Do we, like Job, believe that when death takes our earthly bodies, we will go to a much better place? Do we put our lives and our complete trust in the God that cares for his creation to care for us when our lives are in the darkest places?

Can we say **“I know that my redeemer lives!”** with the faith and the confidence of Job? This is our Easter story. Jesus was not in the tomb when Mary went to look for him! We know that Jesus lives!. We know that He is our salvation! We know he will be back for us and that he never leaves us alone, not even in death. We know the ending!

We know the words of assurance found in **Romans 6: “ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”** We have the words **“He is Risen! He is not here!”** spoken at Easter. There is our hope...our knowing that eternity and life beyond is waiting for us. Each week in the Creed we confess: **“we believe in the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.”** We have the assurance and the promise that there is more waiting for us after our bodies are laid to rest.

Job's words have been written down and have lasted for over 2000 years! They are written for all of us to hear and to learn from. Job never allowed his tragedies to cause him to doubt God's love and care for him. He refused to let go of the greatest hope available to us all—that there is a loving God who wants a relationship with his people and who promises them an eternal home full of love, peace, and wholeness. We do have the power of eternity!

We can sing with boldness and confidence....

“I know that my redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives!”

Thanks be to God!

Amen