

Enfolding Love
Job 1:1, 2: 1-10
St. Mark 10: 2-16
October 7, 2018

'God above me, God below me, God on my right and God on my left; God all around me.' A simple prayer and affirmation, but a profound awareness that in all matters and at all times, in good times and in bad, God's love and care enfolds us. No matter what may befall, God cares deeply and is always ready to comfort a storm tossed spirit, as God is also prepared to temper with humbleness a spirit overjoyed or overconfident.

At the most horrific junctures of his life, Job recalls the grace and blessings which he had enjoyed. The memory of that grace was now enough to sustain his spirit. No evil befalling him would allow him to forget or ignore the goodness of God. This was no act of stoic heroism or prelude to human honor; Job was giving himself over to God and choosing to trust the Almighty, come what may.

The problem of evil and suffering has ever been confronting humanity. In this sense, there has never been a so called 'Golden er'. As long as people have roamed the earth, there have been tragedy, illness and suffering. Robert Frost expressed it this way, "Hell makes its moves on the checkered squares of human existence, but all its moves are on heaven's own chessboard. The adversary has an adversary. There are no feints, no sham battles lost or won. There is a profound sense in which by Job's testing, God is tested. It is God's own handiwork that is thrown into the fire of peril and sorrow."

In recalling God's blessings, Job maintains hope, perhaps the hope of things not seen, but hope nonetheless. Job clings to a vision of God, high and exalted. He may not understand, even what we cannot yet fathom, but Job persists. No matter how storm tossed, ultimately the peace that passes all understanding will prevail.

We do live in an as yet fully redeemed creation. The second chapter of the book of Hebrews states it thusly, "in putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet, at the present we do not see everything subject to him." Why that is, I do not know. And, nowhere in scripture is there an answer to that question. But, the question that is ever before us is this, 'Shall we then, in the daylight of our existence be Godly, but in the dark and stormy nights, Godless?'

It is in this context then that we begin to gain a more complete appreciation for the words of Jesus in today's gospel text. He speaks them, I believe, not to create a sense of guilt or shame in anyone, nor as importantly, that none should boast in regards the issue of marriage. Jesus recognizes how God intends life to be, but also, how in the grace and mercy of God, that peace and justice in relationship can be achieved. Jesus' entire intent is to underscore a principle that attitude and dedication toward any relational involvement is how the worth of spiritual values and human interactions are to be valued and assessed. No human law, whether of government, culture or even that of the church can ever adequately cover all circumstances.

The principle set forth is that we are to endeavor to look to God and not ourselves when difficulty arises. Jesus' words are a call away from self-centeredness and partisan viewpoints. When we look to our own limited knowledge of any and every subject, and away from God's teaching, we trip over even our best of intentions. Jesus speaks of life as God would have it, until the mind of man gets in the way.

But, even in that regard, as in the case of Job's anguish, God does not cut us off. God is still present and offers the means of grace to do justice by the other and to learn from and then to go and live again. Yes, there may be moments of regret and remorse, but our lives are not to be spent brooding over the past. Our call is to allow God to pick us up, dust us off and lead us forth. The promise is that though life may never be the same again, that does not mean it cannot be good. With God present, it can be very good indeed.

To underscore this teaching, the Gospel of Mark presents us with an example of dependence and receptivity. 'Let the little ones come unto me,' Jesus says to his disciples. They would have turned the children away as having been an annoyance and hindrance to the ministry of Jesus. But, our Lord highlights the importance of our need to be likewise dependent and receptive. For if we so turn others away, we in fact our turning our back on our own call to be open to God's embracing us.

God wills to enfold us, as a mother hen gathers her brood. Are we willing to acquiesce our pride and instead allow a humbler approach before the altar to be our demeanor? Unless we are willing to drop the pretense of knowing it all, as was the case of the apostles, we will constantly trip over our feet of clay. It is only as we choose to learn and strive to be more like Job, accepting life on its terms and seeking the comfort of God for effective coping, will our spirits truly mature.

In his exposition of this passage, biblical scholar Halford Luccock observed,

“another mark of the child spirit is spontaneity, and it is a mark of the kingdom. It is the capacity to act at once on what is prayerfully reasoned truth. The impulse is not strangled by calculation and cautious skepticism. Jesus always welcomed the spontaneous impulse, as in Peter's confession and the woman breaking the alabaster jar of ointment. That is indispensable to the enterprise of the kingdom. It is the checking of childlike spontaneity which has frustrated so much of the Christian achievement. There is evangelical wisdom in the remark, “Don't look before you leap. If you do, you will decide to sit down.” One finds throughout the Christian history far too much calculated, skeptical looking and far too little leaping. Let this mind be in you which is also in a little child. For to such belongs the kingdom of God.”

We will shortly share in the Sacrament of the Lord's Table and we are encouraged to receive it as gift from God. A friend often asks, “How can you call so simple a serving a Feast of the Lord?” My answer is this, 'I have enjoyed many a sumptuous meal, but shortly thereafter the memory fades. But, those simple peanut butter and jelly sandwiches shared with my grandson mean everything and fill my spirit with great joy.

May we welcome the Holy Communion in the way of a child and may it nourish us with hope eternal.