

What goes around comes around!  
21 Pentecost B

The first verse of the Job lesson reads, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Job has a change of heart. Job acknowledges that he misjudged God by not understanding things that were beyond his capacity to accept. They were too wonderful to believe. He remembers the words that God spoke to him: "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Job remembers the discourse God had with him as God says to Job, "I will question you, and you declare to me."

So why is Job a faith figure for us? Have we not always put him on a pedestal for being so strong through his adversity? Even the phrase "*the patience of Job*" has become an acknowledgement of what is good. But in reading the scriptures, we see that he, just like us, had moments of doubt and weakness. He is a study in the human struggle to understand God. He has shown us by example, what true faith in God's will means.

Who is God? For many, God is the traditional heavenly Father who cares for us as His children. The writer of *The Shack*, dares to go outside the box and challenge our sensibilities about our image of the living God. The book intrigues us because we don't know how to talk about God. That may be the greatest attraction of this story when so many Christians find it difficult to articulate what they believe or what their faith teaches.

Can we truly understand God? Can we know His mind and will? Can we foresee the future that He has planned for us?

Without seeing the whole map, we cannot know the final destination...or what roads will lead us there. That's where the pure faith in God's love for us must carry us onward. We must remember the Father loves us more than we know, and He proves that love by sending His only Son.

"God increase in us the gifts of faith, hope and charity. May we obtain what you promise ... *and* love what you command." This is the prayer of the Collect of the Day.

It is a lot of words for what the centurion told Jesus, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." The challenge to hold on to faith increases when we are faced with believing without seeing.

It is easier to believe something when you see that it works. The switch gets thrown and the light goes on. There is electricity! Job was blessed to have seen God. When he was able to see the One he doubted, Job was humbled in his own lack of faith. He finally accepted that God has a plan. The proverbial light bulb went on!

Trials and suffering can bring about the goodness of man. Why is that so hard to accept? Might it strain our belief in a God that is supposed to love us? We easily acknowledge that 'tough love' is good for children. A parent is wise to hold them accountable for set standards. So why do we not see that 'tough love' originated with God. God knows better than a human parent how to apply the right amount of love so as to produce the desired results.

It is human nature is to show pity instead. We want to reach out and "solve all the world's problems". Job's family felt sorry for him. It says in this lesson that "they showed sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him." They gave him tokens of their affection and sorrow. Yet it was God who blessed Job beyond his imagination; both materially and spiritually. The principal is simple. God watched Job struggle, with the love that only God can understand. God had faith in Job...that he would be the man He knew Job truly was. And when Job succeeded...THEN He stepped in and gave Job his just rewards.

The church needs people who can show sympathy and comfort. God has blessed us with a deacon who is much better at that than I am. I don't do well with sympathy.

But just like God, it does not mean that I don't love you. I will have compassion but I won't fawn over your wounds. It's hard for me to listen to stories of hardship and sickness. It is hard for me, because like God, I want the best for you. I care, but I won't ever question why God is doing this. I don't know what His plans are for each of you. But I do have faith that He has your best interests in mind. I may say perhaps that what is going on right now could be God's very best plan for you. It was for Job. It might be for you and me as well.

That is the way I see Job's story. You can see it as evil perpetrated against a man as Job once did or you can see it through the eyes of faith. God help us to believe in the midst of our struggle for faith! Amen!