

**JOB: THE STORY FOR THE AGES**  
**What It Is to Be Human (Job 42:1-6, 10-17)**  
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**The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost (Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52)**

**October 24, 2021**

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“After slogging our way through 41 chapters of human tragedy and god-awful suffering, Job’s world is suddenly put right again in just a handful of verses.”

Rev. Patrick Willson

**Job 42:1-6 (10-17)**

Job answered God:

*“I’m convinced: You can do anything and everything.  
Nothing and no one can upset your plans.  
You asked, ‘Who is this muddying the water,  
ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purposes?’  
I admit it. I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me,  
made small talk about wonders way over my head.  
You told me, ‘Listen, and let me do the talking.  
Let me ask the questions. You give the answers.’  
I admit I once lived by rumors of you;  
now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears!  
I’m sorry—forgive me. I’ll never do that again, I promise!  
I’ll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor.”*

*After Job had interceded for his friends, God restored his fortune—and then doubled it! All his brothers and sisters and friends came to his house and celebrated. They told him how sorry they were, and consoled him for all the trouble God had brought him. Each of them brought generous housewarming gifts.*

*God blessed Job’s later life even more than his earlier life. He ended up with fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand teams of oxen, and one thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first daughter Dove, the second, Cinnamon, and the third, Darkeyes. There was not a woman in that country as beautiful as Job’s daughters. Their father treated them as equals with their brothers, providing the same inheritance.*

*Job lived on another 140 years, living to see his children and grandchildren—four generations of them! Then he died—an old man, a full life.*

The Bible tells us Job was an ancient man who walked faithfully with God. A sign of this kind of life is witnessed when everything you count as “the goodness of life” (defined in Hebrew

culture by a wife and grown sons and daughters, all the bounty of sheep and camels, oxen, etc. are enough to make you an example of a faithful and blessed man).

Then, in a sudden flurry of one loss after another all these blessings are ripped away and even his health was wrecked, only then did he discover he had been a social experiment to settle a bet between God and Satan, and then he was left to wonder what it all meant.

After Job's fall from an exemplary life, his tragic loss of children, the devastation and loss of all the signs of his vast wealth, we come to this too-perfect ending. Perhaps you've thought something like this: *So, Job gets a replacement family, new flocks and all, ... that's supposed to make the tragic obliteration of the first ones okay?*

The problem with the ending of Job is that it sounds too much like a quick fix. After all the tragedies and all the speeches by his wife and friends, the end of Job is altogether too neat as if it's so disconnected from real life that it's not truthful. From Job's final testimony, we realize he has come to acceptance about everything that's happened, but does it ring true?

In this Fourth Act of Job, he is candid but penitent of the intense dramatic struggle we've witnessed in the last three weeks that comes to an end. Job submits to a theological tour de force because God is simply too powerful and too wise for any mortal to challenge God. Job realizes he cannot contest God's justice. He has come to realize God's ways are greater than his own and the only dialogue he's been capable of maintaining with God has essentially been one-way. Job comes to accept he must stop speaking and to listen.

In the arduous journey of the self, most ministers take a course known as CPE, Clinical Pastoral Education. In CPE, we are run through the grindstone of pastoral anxiety of what is called a study of "the living human document." There's no telling what personal crisis might show up! When a patient is wheeled into the ER, the damage is not limited to just the physical injuries that brings them in. There are multi-generational family members and lovers involved. There are friends that show up and church members and occasionally enemies come in as well who fill up the waiting area.

On your first night to serve the emergency needs that may show up, your supervisor may take a moment to say to you as you begin your first shift, "Don't worry, you'll do fine." Almost predictably, in the middle of the night, you are called to the ICU just as a gurney is brought in carrying a grandmother who died in a tragic car accident and the doctor wants you to be there as she gives this dreadful news to the family who have gathered.

What are you to do? There's nothing to be done other than to be there with the family. The dead are done with the cares of life; the long struggle of life is over. There is no hope they will be rescued or brought back to life. That's when the sense of helplessness settles in for the young chaplain. That and the overwhelming sense of having nothing to say in the face of this devastating loss.

The next day, the young chaplain goes over the circumstances with the supervisor. “Here’s the deal,” she says. “You can’t do anything to ‘fix’ the problem. That woman is still dead and nothing you say is going to bring her back. Your job is to make sure these people, the family and friends, know they are not going to go through this alone.”<sup>1</sup>

When someone passes through a Jobean season, there are no simple fixes, no miracle fixes that will reverse the tragedy one is facing. There’s no advice worth giving, no fixing one another, not setting one another straight. The only thing we can offer is kindness and love. In the communal life of the church, there are occasions when a church member has lost a loved one or they are present to watch a dear family member take their last breath. There are circumstances in pastoral ministry where the minister does not have the words adequate for this moment of pain and loss.

Moments like that must be endured because when it comes to life and death, there is no such thing as a quick fix. The complexities of life and death, of sorrow and pain, of contrition and reconciliation are ever-present possibilities and the caring church must allow these things to exist while also testifying of the grace of God and the depths of friendship.

With three-quarters of a million deaths to Covid and countless others who have endured it but still struggle with the after-effects, how many among us are living the life of Job? How many are caught in the endless questions that surface but don’t seem to have an answer?

There is in Job this unexpected ending, “*the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.*” From beginning to the end, Job lost all his livestock and children, and his entire fortune. But God restored his herds and doubled their numbers. He lost seven sons and three daughters in chapter one and by the end of the story he had seven new sons and three new daughters.

The phrase, “as fate would have it,” is a robust way of observing that sometimes we twist and turn on the events that occur in our lives recognizing that sometimes they are good events and sometimes they’re tragic. But on occasion, more often than we can know, even the tragic events have a tendency to act positively in our regard. Isn’t that how life turns for us as well?

Sometimes we make the smallest imperceptible turn and our lives are spared. A job is offered, or a job is taken away. We get a phone call and with it our lives are changed. Inexplicably our lives take a turn here, or a twist there, and the arc of our lives unpredictably shift and twist in a new direction.

In her book *God’s Medicine*, Barbara Brown Taylor tells us that providence “is not about God’s will overriding our own. It is more like a dance, a mysterious dance that takes place between God’s freedom and our freedom, between God’s will and our own.”

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Lee Canipe, “Living By the Word,” *Christian Century*, October 16, 2012

In this dance, it is not God's job to keep bad things from happening. They do happen. Are fate and whimsy merely the shallow end of the pool in the absence of seeing how God is involved in our lives?

God's job is not to prevent bad things from happening or to make good things happen. God's job is to stay present in our lives, creating whole worlds out of total chaos, breathing life into piles of dust, taking the unfathomable wreckage of our lives and making something fresh and new out of them.<sup>2</sup>

All of us want a happy ending to all the problems we face, but in life, our happy moments are mixed in with our share of occasions when we suffer. Life is a mixture of these kinds of moments. Some are accidents, unknown to us only in effect, while others are self-inflicted caused by our own actions. Perhaps Job is a highly dramatic story meant to illustrate that none of us live perfect lives, supremely happy in the most affluent ways, but that we all live the mix comprised of good and bad. Too much of one or the other and we wouldn't know what to make of it all.

In the end, Job's wealth increased and he lived 140 more years. Job saw four generations of descendants, and then, "*Job died, old and full of days.*"

Boom. The end. Roll the credits.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the dialogue between fate and providence, see Keith Herron, *Living a Narrative Life*, Smyth & Helwys, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Canipe, *Ibid.*