Have You Considered My Servant, Job?
Job 1 and 2; Hebrews 1

“Have you considered my servant, Job?” Two times God ask this question. Where I Job, and knew that God was asking that question by the second time, maybe I wouldn’t want to be considered by God – at least not quite so much. Let’s take a look at what happens. On the surface, it is an insane story! It makes no sense!

When we first visit with Job in these verses – for him life could not be better. Job was on top! A winner in every sense! In his day, patristic wealth was measured by the amount of livestock one had. For example, in Psalm 50, God declares that he has cattle on a thousand hills (v. 10). Did he actually, no; it is a metaphor for unimaginable wealth. Cattle and camels, goats and sheep – that’s how real wealth was measured.

Last year my niece Leah was traveling through Egypt. Her dad is a Greek. She got his genes. Leah’s skin browned to perfection by the genetic born from the Mediterranean sun. Her eyes the color ripened olive black and her flowing hair is of like hue. She has magazine Mediterranean looks. She was approached by a stranger on a street in Cairo and he asked her how many camels her father had and how many would he want for his father want for her? Not exactly a western notion of a marriage proposal – but you get the picture. Even today, vestiges of past measures of wealth persist. Job was a man of unimaginable wealth.

We also learn that Job loved and cared for his family. But they did not share Job’s righteousness. However, in patristic times a large family is another barometer of prosperity regardless of their ethics. Job had 7 sons and 3 daughters. Sons were considered a blessing because in his and his wife’s old age even Job would need someone to provide for him – Job was wealthy by all accounts.

We read that Job offered sacrifices after his sons and daughters partied all night. When I first read, the Hebrew text – verse 5 literally reads that his sons “blessed God,” but in the context of this reading that their blessing was not what it seems. It was more of, “Well blesses her heart, she wore white shoes after September.” In other words, she is dumber than a prune pizza. So it seems that Job’s children mocked God.

In his love, Job being the high priest of his family, like Abraham for his, consecrated his children to the Lord. Job was rich in the eyes of the world and faithful in the eyes of God.
“Have you considered my servant Job?” We first find God in the throne room of heaven – angels coming and going, seems to be a busy place and right there in the very presence of God is Satan. Not the place I expect to find Satan – I think that I might find him serving as the ball boy for the LA Lakers. But, God ask Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answers that he has been going back and forth in the earth.

The first question in the story of Job is asked by God, “Where have you come from?” And then a bit later almost as if to tempt Satan, the second question, “Have you considered my servant Job?”

Job is “the” poster boy for God – righteous, faithful, morally and ethically pure with unmatched integrity; his great wealth a symbol of perfection and God’s favor. Truly this is a man blessed by God. God is singing Job’s praise, before the angels and Satan. Don’t we all wish God looked on us as God looked on Job? It is no wonder that he does – Job was righteous and faithful – the whole package. “Have you considered my servant Job?”

But it is a wonder why God agrees to let Satan challenge Job’s faith. In fact, it does not make any sense what so ever! What kind of God would permit this? In Greek mythology, the gods fooled around and played with human for sport – they were capricious – whimsical and erratic. Don’t we worship a different God?

In one day, Job loses all his wealth, all his son’s and daughters, all his possession; all of them gone! It’s as if they didn’t exist beyond the bounds of Job’s own heart. Then Satan and God have a second conversation and God ask Satan, “Have you considered by servant Job?” If I’m Job and I know this conversation is happening, I’m thinking perhaps I don’t’ want to be so visible on God’s radar screen.

Then, Satan goes out and puts another hurting on Job, sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Now if Job had a bad case of dandruff that’s one thing, but sores, literally boils on the bottom of his feet, he can’t even walk – God has allowed even his mobility to be taken. What kind of whimsical and capricious god is it that would allow this?

“Have you considered my servant Job?” Seems that Job’s wife had, she offers Job the first bit of advice, “Curse God and die.” Right now we might agree with her. What kind of God allows this to happen to righteous and faithful man who was seen by the world as such and blessed by God? God is getting a bad reputation in this story; not exactly the stuff for “Four Step” street corner evangelist. Why does God permit i
We have asked this question is many ways. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book that raised the question yet again in 1981, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner was a good devout Jew, a rabbi, a religious man, who loved and served the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Kushner wrote the book in reaction to a personal tragedy—his son Aaron had the disease, progeria, which leads to premature aging, and from which he died. This provoked a crisis of faith for Kushner.

How can a loving God permit, 11 year old little boy die a death which was marked by a life lived every day is pain. What kind of God is that? What was Aaron’s sin?

What kind of God allows innocent children to suffer at the hands of abusive parent, examples of which we can read daily in our newspaper. Where is God when the rest of the house is asleep and a father slips into his little daughter’s room – how can that little girl grow up to utter the words, let alone love *“Our Father.”* Where is God in that? What sin die she commit?

Where is God when the righteous have evil visited upon them – today Coptic Christian who have lived as a faith community in Egypt since 42AD, are persecuted, their church burned by a raging mob. How can they pray or believe Psalm 91, “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’. Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence” (2, 3). Really! What kind of fortress is our God?

These are real questions and answers to them elude us. In fact, there is no answer and to try to construct one leads to folly. Our answers fall flat at best and are harmful at worst.

The well-meaning parishioner who says to the mother of a dead 3 year old son, “Well God just needed a little angel for his choir.” What kind of God takes 3 year old boys so he can flesh out a choir?

Or “God never gives us more that we can handle.” The husband thinks to himself, “If I weren’t so strong, if I couldn’t have ‘handled it’ then my wife would not have gotten cancer because God would know that I couldn’t handle it.” What kind of God sends cancer into the world because we are strong? Make me weak would be our prayer to that kind of God.

Kushner wrote his book for people "who have been hurt by life", to help them find a faith that can help get through the dark places, rather than making things worse. In my opinion he failed. His attempt did not hit the mark – in the end, Kushner blames it all on “capital F” fate.1 As if God could not have done anything about it.

I think there is much more to it than that. I don’t believe that in the end we will have an absolute truth to hang the problem of pain and suffering on. I believe we worship a God who does not leave us alone when suffering persistent
A potter shaped the urn that we have resting her in the chancel today. Skilled hands threw it and fired it in a kiln. But now it’s cracked, and a piece broken off. I think it’s a good metaphor for our lives – for Job’s life. The question we ask is this, “Where are the potter’s hands that shaped Job out of the dust of the ground?”

The answer – they’re still there, in the dirt, underneath and alongside Job, molding and shaping and breathing life into creation. Those hands are powerful, capable and loving hands. But they are not beautiful, they are hands that have been pierced; they have been distorted by the violence thrust upon them. They are gnarled and broken by the suffering and pain they have known – just like Job, just like us.

Those hands belong to the one who sits next to God in the throne room of grace; sitting as both judge and advocate, when the Satan, the Accuser, brings a case against us. Our Advocate is a Son who was accused and broken, who now rules from that throne in heaven with hands just like ours – once broken and now healed. Jesus’s story is an insane story; it makes no sense, except when read through the lens of faith.

Over the next four weeks, we will continue to read the story, our story, one often marked by persistent suffering. The good news is this: God has the last word, the Word. Amen.

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1 From a lecture by Tom Long at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary’s Mid-Winters Lectures in 2009.