

Good morning...my sermon today will be in two parts; first, about Job and the intent of the playwright - theologian who wrote this dramatic play, and secondly, about the Gospel and the story of the wealthy young man and what that story might mean for people of faith today, this morning.

Job. If you are quick to say when trouble or tragedy strikes that “it must be God’s will”, or, “It’s okay, God doesn’t send more than we can handle” or, “ this must be some kind of payback...I (or he or she or they) must deserve this.” Religious groups that focus on guilt as a behavior modifier would do well to study Job. Or again, and perhaps most challenging, “If God is good, why is there so much human suffering..” This perhaps the most troubling even for those deep in faith and service. Or, simply stated, “life isn’t fair!”

If we say, or think, or wonder about, any of these ideas or feelings, then we are included in the story; we become part of the drama of Job.

Again, the Book of Job is a dramatic presentation of the great questions; What is life’s purpose..., why is there suffering...why does God seem to hide when we most need a sense of divine presence?

Job’s friends represent the best theological reflection of that time in Jewish history...all of the ideas I mentioned earlier. What is truly revolutionary about Job is that, boldly and fearlessly, the writer takes on the conventional wisdom of the day, which assumed that Job had, in some fashion, offended God. The wisdom of Job says to the chattering class of theologians and legalists, offering faux-wisdom and bad advice, STOP TALKING! Prepare for an answer.

And then comes the answer:

“Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge. Brace yourself and stand up like a man; I shall put questions to you, and you must answer.

Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?

Tell me, if you know and understand. Who fixed its dimensions?

Surely you know!...much more follows in Chapter 38 of Job, generally along these lines; “Have you commanded the morning...do you know where is the way to the dwelling of light... did you proclaim the rules that govern the heavens or determine the laws of nature on earth..

The poetry is magnificent!

The theology is not for the faint of heart; the answer is enigmatic and for many, not satisfactory.

The answer requires that the hearer has already developed a certain level of spiritual maturity and wisdom about life. And a commitment to exploring the mystery of a God who seems obscure and hidden.

And then, from a Christian perspective, comes another mystery; the Mystery of the Incarnation...the heretofore hidden God reveals the mind of the Almighty and well as the heart of the Almighty (speaking metaphorically in both instances) in the person of Jesus the Christ, the Holy One of God.

In the person of Jesus we have more than a glimpse of the God-mystery; we have the story of his life; we have his insights into who God is for us...

“I no longer call you servants, but friends..”

Seek first the Kingdom of God and all this will be given you as well”

“ If God so clothes the wildflowers, will God not watch over you as well?”

“ I am the good shepherd”....

“You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world”

The composite of Jesus’ teaching illustrates his belief in a God who is deeply involved with all of creation, and most certainly those (us) made in the divine image and likeness.

Job and Jesus make for some powerful insights into the most challenging questions about life and its meaning and purpose.

Now, Part 2. The Rich Young Man.

Was it Mark Twain who said, “I’ve been rich and poor...and rich is better”!

Well, this story from the early church, that is, the question as to whether poor is better and rich is evil is not what this story is about. It’s primarily about intelligent stewardship of our personal and community resources. It’s about the development of a sense of spontaneous and hearty generosity. If God’s first impulse is compassion, then in Christ’s mind it follows that those who seek deeper relationship with God in Christ have that same impulse.

The young man takes a long time to weigh his options...he choose not to invest in Jesus or share the risks that accompany walking with him. The young man was not the first, nor the last, to dismiss the path less traveled as too demanding.

To put all this in a more familiar setting, I want to tell you a story that American theologian Stanley Hauerwas tells about the social prophet from the American South, Clarence Jordan. Jordan was visiting an integrated church in the Deep South. He was surprised to find a relatively large church so thoroughly integrated, not only black and white, but also rich and poor; and this was in the early sixties, too. Jordan asked the old country preacher, “ How did you get the church this way?” “What way?” the preacher asked. Jordan went on to explain his surprise at finding a church so integrated, and in the South too.

The preacher said, “Well, when our preacher left our small church, I went to the deacons and said, I’ll be the preacher! The first Sunday as preacher, I opened the book and read, ‘as many of you has been baptized into Jesus has put on Jesus and there is no longer any Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, males or females, because you all is one in Jesus.’ Then I closed the book and I said, “If you are one with Jesus, you are one with all kind of folks. And, if you ain’t, well, you ain’t.”

Jordan asked what happened after that. “Well,” the preacher said, “the deacons took me into the back room and they told me they didn’t want that kind of preaching no more.”

Jordan asked what he did then. “I FIRED THEM DEACONS,” the preacher roared.

“Then what happened?” asked Jordan.

“Well,” said the old hillbilly preacher, “ I preached that church down to four. Not long after that it started growing. And it grew. And I found out that revival sometimes don’t mean bringing people in but getting’ people out that don’t dare to love Jesus.”

Like the old preacher, our work here at St. Tim’s is to call each other to authentic ministry. Our energies for mission are significant, and we have reached that point where we are able to look with deeper compassion on the world around us and think and pray and plan on how to do more and have a larger impact.

And yes, as well, to engage our spiritual journey more deeply, as we break Bread - the Bread of the World - and freely share that Bread.

We have chosen not to walk away; we have chosen to embrace the Mystery!

Thanks be to God. Amen!