

Sunday, August 9, 2020

Job 7:1-6, 19: 23-27, 42: 1-3 Hebrews 11:1-3 and 12:1-2 Romans 8:28-30

Bad Things, Good People and Faith in God

We continue in our "At Your Request" summer series with today's focus being "Bad Things, Good People and Faith in God". As part of God's creation, let us consider this story as we begin to understand our relationship with God. A husband and wife had been married many years and were good parents to their children and provided them with a loving caring Christian home. Eventually all the children were on their own and the couple were able to enjoy each other's company travel the world and just be happy. Then the man became sick with cancer. For six years the woman cared for her husband as he experienced different treatments. Most often he suffered with pain until medication helped him. When possible they tried to do what they enjoyed. But soon it became apparent that cancer cells had spread throughout his body. Eventually the man died leaving his wife alone to mourn. Throughout her husband's illness the wife looked after herself with regular checkups and she was doing well. But soon after his death, the woman was diagnosed with cancer her treatments started. The difference for her was that her husband could not support her and encourage her as she had done for him. The woman was very ill and to her family and closest friends she asked why? Why me? I've been faithful to God all my life and why must I experience cancer and face this illness alone?

This week, a massive explosion rocked the Lebanese capital of Beirut, Lebanon on Tuesday evening, leaving at least 150 dead and thousands injured. The death toll will probably rise as debris is cleared and bodies are found. At the time of this explosion it was learned that thousands of people lost their homes, three hospitals were closed down and medical aid was a fair distance away from the explosion site. The blast took place near Beirut's port and central district, and was close to many highly-populated areas and tourist sites. It has been confirmed 2,750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate, a highly explosive material, had been stored at the port for the past six years "without preventive measures." This compound of ammonia and nitrogen, is a highly volatile material used in agricultural fertilizers and bombs and the question of why was it there has been asked over and over again. Could this have been prevented and these lives saved? What will happen in the months ahead when the need for food arises?

This year 2020 started out like many in the last decade. We knew of a virus that had been discovered in China yet here we are in Windsor-Essex Ontario Canada still in Stage 2 of Canada's re-opening after a global pandemic. The stories of many businesses seeking

assistance or closing are numerous. Charitable groups like food banks and missions are seeing high numbers of people who are in need of food, and with a slow return to work people are uncertain about how bad it will get before a change for better will begin. The possibility of a second wave of cases is a possibility as indicated in the US. The US has over 5 million cases now. But we must also realize that over 94% of these cases have recovered as symptoms become known and assessed. But you might recall the images of caskets being buried in mass graves in Italy and New York not that long ago. For the last 5 months of staying at home, many people have questioned their relevance, their lives and what life is all about. And each day when we hear the news we might ask again -Why do bad things happen to good people?

No doubt the person in China who acquired this new illness asked, Why me? Not knowing that the virus would be easily transferred and eventually bring the global economy to a halt. No one predicted the explosion in Beirut to occur or that its destruction was so widespread that people many kilometres away could see it and feel its blast. And no one person knows what their life will include from illness, to grief, to loss and uncertainty of tomorrow. But what we do know is that this world in which we are living is not the intended creation God had in mind when he first made the world. God made the Garden of Eden to be perfect. When Adam and Eve first lived in Eden it was paradise. But when sin entered that garden and God's creatures disobeyed, the world as Adam and Eve knew it changed forever. They were sent out of paradise and made to work to live. This is still our daily task- to work, to live in order to provide the basic necessities of life. Yet when we reflect on this, was it really fair to take Adam and Eve out of paradise for one small act of disobedience against God? We know that one sin often leads to many so from looking at this from God's viewpoint, it was the right thing to do. However had Adam and Eve not sinned against God would we still be living in Eden or would someone else have chosen to sin against God? Maybe someone else might have eaten not only from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also from the tree of life.

Yet when we reflect on Adam and Eve's sin, we become empathetic to their situation as their lives changed. But isn't this what happens to us as well? We feel for other people; people we do not know as we only see on screens but they look to us to speak on their behalf. Then we must ask, do we speak up at all?

The story of Job is a story of how he responded to being a pawn in a testing game between Satan and God. Job was tested again and again about his relationship with His Creator, God and his faith and belief in Him.. After Satan took away his wealth his family and everything he had he did not give up what was most important to him—his faith in God. His

closest friends and his wife told him to deny God in order to get back to living life as they thought he should. Yet Job's faith is what enabled him through those turbulent moments, tests of grief and mourning losses, of stress, disease and the knowledge that he was alone. But his faith did not falter because he believed in God and that God would see him through the test and not leave him to die. Job would receive new life. Yes Job questioned God about what he was doing using him and testing him. And Job asked why people were working so hard as they lived their daily life. He also worried about life itself but each day for Job was 'swifter than a weaver's shuttle and come to their end without hope.' Yet even after his friends questioned him for having and keeping his faith in God at all, Job knows that he has done nothing wrong. He has been tested, tried, broken, is grieving on many levels and he questions his hope. But down deep inside of this man is his spirit which met God's Spirit in his earlier years and he says, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth and I shall see God." By faith Job knows that he is good person, and bad things have happened to him, but he still has faith to carry on whatever life he has left and that he will experience this life with God. He is not alone. God is with him each step of his journey because Job believes in God and that God will see him through everything.

Job's faith was tested on so many levels in this story, but in the end, he states, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? There I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." And what he learns is that by faith he sees God and he is humbled in his presence. What a deep faith conviction Job had! What endured was extreme but he did not give up on God. His faith grew stronger in these times of being tested with losses and uncertainty.

Sometimes when we hear bad news, or events from around the world where there is immediate death and destruction, where explosions kill innocent men, women and children we ask why God? Why did you allow this to happen? Why were these chemicals there for 6 years without no one doing anything to get them away from the port of this city?

Why did Covid19 virus spread worldwide? Why do people get seriously ill and suffer? Why can't we heal everyone? The answer needs to go back to God's original plan and what occurred in Eden. People chose disobedience then and this is still happening. Would we have all things cases of Covid19 if people had obeyed the stay home order, wore a mask sooner or not travelled once the virus was discovered? This is a great question with no answer.

God created people to think for themselves to make decisions based on information and today we are living in the information age where everything may be found instantly. We are also living in the age when everyone has an opinion and can state it but what do these opinions mean when we are all 'in this together' and searching for answers. We know we need to be safe and well if our region country and world can move forward but we must do so based on information knowledge and trust in those who know what they are talking about.

We are also called to have faith to be assured that what we hope for is not in what we see on every screen today, but in believing in the Creator who made us and to respond to the needs of others. We don't know why that explosion occurred in Beirut or why this chemical compound was stored in this area near the country's grain supply. All we do know is that there have been lives lost, people are grieving and others need help. Humanitarian aid is being welcomed by the country from around the world and what is significant is that hope is being restored.

As believers in God, we are to have faith in the conviction of things not seen. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. And if we recall those named in the Bible who acted by faith, God approved their gifts, their actions and how they obeyed. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, by faith he offered up Isaac for a sacrifice, and by faith Moses mother hid him as an infant only to be raised to live out the faith of his ancestors, and by faith many people- conquered kingdoms, administered justice, made promises, won strength in weakness. Other people who were faithful to God were tortured, imprisoned, chained, stoned and many wandered. They were commended for their faith.

Yes bad things happened to them but the sufferings of this world cannot be compared to the glory of God and what we will experience in his heavenly presence. We who believe in Jesus Christ have received from God the gift and promise of eternal life. Yes we will have difficult days but we will not face them alone. God is with us. Christ is with us and the Spirit will lift us up! This is because we have faith and believe that Jesus came to die for our sins, to redeem us from sins of the past and to show us that having faith is better by far than those bad things that might occur. Having faith and believing God as creator, as Jesus our Saviour and as the Spirit moves and guides us is better because we have hope that goes beyond our lives here on earth. This hope leads us to the time when we shall see Christ at the right hand of the throne of God. But we must believe, must have faith and know that we can trust God in all of those bad

moments that life will throw at us. This faith is not something we carry by ourselves as we walk each day on earth. There is a great cloud of witnesses as Hebrews 12 states. Those who went before us, those faith-filled people followers and believers of God are walking with us as they and each one of us looks to Jesus for strength guidance and how to live.

Sure they didn't have to deal with explosions wiping out cities, or a global pandemic, or even knowing of terminal diagnoses of diseases, but they also did not know the wonder and joy of travelling beyond 50 miles or living with the simple joy of playing or listening to music as we know it, or even air conditioning on a hot day. Our daily living might be different from the people who went before us, but God's love for us has not changed. God still calls people to him to live by faith in him, and to trust him like Job did.

When we think about this world what must we hold in our hearts? For those who love God, who are called to do God's work and fulfill his purpose, we know that all things work together. This is because God and Christ has called us to be one with Him. This is made possible because God's Spirit reaches inside of us and says you are mine and I am yours. This is how we come to faith in God. This is how we discern our need for God. And as human beings we need God through all those moments when bad things occur, whatever and however you define this. Bad things will occur to good people but how we respond to them makes a difference. And to respond in faith means to know God's love for you. It means to know that God wants you to act out in His love for others as you care for yourself too.

The good woman who faithfully cared for her husband and became ill herself knows that she will be reunited with her husband in God's presence. The people who died in the Beirut explosion are being held in prayer by people around the world and those affected by losses are being cared for through human care and love. And those 'cases' of testing positive are people who were sick and who are now recovering due to the diligence, care and love of those on the frontlines of this pandemic who have seen the symptoms and know how to respond.

By faith we must believe and have hope that the new normal of this world will be filled with caring and loving people. People who need to obey God's teachings, live by the laws and follow the directives of each country so that all things may work together for good to those that love God and are called to serve and be served in His name. This is difficult to acknowledge and receive but we are no longer living in the Garden of Eden. We have sinned and need forgiveness. We need to live and love others in Christ's name, for he is the One who died for our

sakes. He is alive and in the hearts and minds of God's faithful people. Let us rejoice in this for by faith we may strive for perfection through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

LET US PRAY:

Holy God of grace and love, we praise you and thank you for all those who lived before us and did so by faith in you. Help us to come before you in these moments to be filled with your loving Spirit as we need to stay close to you to acknowledge you as our Creator and as you seek us to be your hands and feet at this time. Hear our prayers O God we ask SILENCE. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray. Amen.