

Sunday August 8, 2021
 Lesson 10: Resignation
 Scripture: Job 1:21-22; 2: 7-10

Context:

This week we continue our last section of the unit Respond with a focus on themes in the book of Job, found in the Old Testament. This week's theme is on Resignation and the willingness we possess to "let God be God." Our focus will be on surrendering to God and seeing the complexity of life in the highs and lows.

Last week, we explored how Job found himself in a state of grief. He lost nearly all his property, his livestock have been stolen or killed, and all of his children are dead after a house collapses. Job goes into a state of mourning tied to worship.

Part of Job's response during his mourning is a phrase: "Naked I came from my mother's womb; naked I will return there. The Lord has given; the Lord has taken; bless the Lord's name." Job's words are more about grief and the sadness, yet do possess the philosophical truth of how we come into this world with nothing and leave with nothing. Job experiences an initial death of life as he contemplates what has been lost.

The story intensifies as "The Adversary," continues by coming from the Lord with severe sores to inflict sores on Job from the sole of the foot to the top of his head. Job takes a shard of pottery to scratch himself as he sits in a pile of ashes. This loathsome skin disease probably leads to itching and potentially contains pus and blood from the shattered pottery.

Another character enters the narrative. Even though Job's children are dead, he still has his wife. However, she offers no words of comfort. She asks Job why he clings to his integrity, not cursing God and his continual state of mourning as he sits in ashes.

Job pushes back against her counsel, even calling her a foolish woman. He exhibits a proverbial "patience" with God. This exchange points to a central tenet of the book: Job is an innocent person who suffers at Yahweh's hands.¹ As he understands it, his piety is not dependent on divine favor.² Thus, Job continues to bless God and refuses to dishonor God with his lips.

The exchange begins the ongoing conversation in the book of theodicy, or the will of God. It also brings up the age-old question: Why do bad things happen to good people? Job and his wife demonstrate how there are differing beliefs as a potential suggestion of Job's wife words might be for him to go ahead and curse God, indicating sin and cursing God is tied to death somehow. Job offers up a different model and understanding even though we will eventually receive an outburst from Job against God and thus enter the varying understandings of theodicy and the plight of the innocent who suffer.

¹ Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 475.

² Ibid.

Application

Our text today does not leave us with warm fuzzies or a happy resolve. And nor should this text. Job has endured trauma, where he has momentous changes in his life within a short window of time. Today, Job is numb and resigned to all to happen. He cannot feel anything from what the text indicates and appears on the outside to be at a place where he just sits as the calamities stack up. There is no straight forward anger or even sadness really. He is resigned to the reality this has happened between all the calamities and the sores now festering all over his body.

Any person who has been in a state of grief or post-traumatic stress disorder knows there is a cycle of numbness. While it is not one of the stages brought forward in Elizabeth Kubler Ross's five cycles of grief, numbness plays a role in grieving. While one could argue it might pass for Acceptance, one of the stages, I would counteract the numbness comes early on and is a tad different.

As we know in hindsight, there is more to happen to Job. At the point we find him today, he is simply going through the motions of life. He speaks words about God being God and tries to even enter into theological conversations with his wife to stop her from talking. Yet Job stands firm in his convictions to follow and not curse God. Or at least for this moment, he cannot even think of cursing God.

When we read this text, it might be easy to highlight Job as some paragon, thinking that if we just resign ourselves to calamities or trauma, everything will be ok. Yet I think something else is going on here as we read the text. We see how Job is numb and while he may say the "right" words, there is still more going on inside him. He may be resigned and yet resigned does not mean he does not feel or need to process what is happening to him.

Before we comment on the merits of denial or try to stick Job into some cookie cutter template for how to grieve properly, we are given a chance to see how at times we the words don't even have to articulate what we feel. At times, we might recite cliches simply so we can get through the day. We resign ourselves to be in a place of numbness. And that is ok.

God can handle our being numb. God can handle us delaying the inevitable anger which is perfectly okay to eventually be thrown back in God's face. God can handle our resignation as a coping mechanism as we resign ourselves for the time being.

I think any attempt to use this as a text to explain away anger or sadness towards God in the midst of trauma and grief misses the whole point of the book. Good people have bad things happen to them. And when they do, there will be struggles and a grief journey which may be anything less than pretty or ideal. Grief is hard and it is painful.

When my dad died in a car accident, the most overwhelming sensation I remember was a numbness. Of course, the other stages of grief came and still do from time to time especially around certain times and triggers: the anger, the denial, the sadness, and the heavy acceptance of his mortality. Yet it was the numbness to pervade me for especially the first few months. I went to school, I interned at my church, and I went to worship. And to be honest, there were times I went through the motions. I said and did all the right things because it allowed me to not deal with the pain. And there was a place and a time for that mind-numbing routine.

And then the other things did come: the anger at God for the loss of someone I loved who was young and loving, the sadness of losing someone I considered my best

friend, and the denial he was gone. The feelings came when a word was said in worship, when I have to do something to remind of my dad, or just a random moment in traffic. And then the numbness would come again.

What I have come to find in grieving my dad, even seven years out, is the resignation of how my feelings are normal. God can handle all of them and from time to time, I even need the numbness to get from place to place. We see the same with Job today and we are reminded that even as “God will be God,” we can be human. We can be numb, anger, sad, and God will still be there.

Why do you think it is important to see resignation to life as hopeful? When you are grieving, how do you allow yourself to feel everything you feel? How can numbness allow you to process where you are in your spiritual journey? How can you “let be God be God” in your everyday walk with Christ? Who do you turn to when you have moments of pain or numbness, or when the feelings flood in?

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