STUFF HAPPENS?

10.10.2021

JOB 1:1, 2::1-10

STUFF HAPPENS. WE’VE ALL HEARD THIS SAYING….THIS IS THE SANITIZED VERSION. JIM FIXX, A WELL-KNOWN RUNNER WHO SPURRED ON THE JOGGING CRAZE A FEW YEARS AGO AND THE AUTHOR OF A FAMOUS BOOK……ABOUT RUNNING, DIED AT 52 WHILE RUNNING. STUFF HAPPENS! AMADEUS MOZART, DESPITE THE MOVIE AMADEUS MAKING IT LOOK LIKE HE WAS THE COMPOSER FOR THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE AND WELL OFF, DIED AND WAS BURIED IN AN UNMARKED GRAVE BECAUSE ALL THOUGH HE WAS FAMOUS, HE DIED WITH NOT A PENNY TO HIS NAME. STUFF HAPPENS! IN THE 1400’S MARTIN OF ARAGON DIED FROM A COMBINATION OF INDIGESTION AND [UNCONTROLLABLE LAUGHING](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_from_laughter). HE ATE AN ENTIRE GOOSE AND HIS JESTER TOLD HIM A FUNNY STORY. STUFF HAPPENS! 1884 ALLEN PINKERTON OF THE FAMOUS PINKERTON DETECTIVE AGENCY, TRIPPED ON A CURB, BIT HIS TONGUE, IT GOT GANGRENE AND HE DIED. STUFF HAPPENS! AT THE AGE OF 50 A WOMAN WENT INTO THE HOSPITAL FOR A RIB BIOPSY TO SEE IF IT WAS CANCEROUS AND DIED FROM A BLOOD CLOT. STUFF HAPPENS!

 WE KNOW THINKS HAPPEN IN THE WORLD AND THERE SEEMS TO BE NO RHYME OR REASON, OR AT LEAST NO GOOD REASON AND THEN WE COME TO THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF JOB AND IT SEEMS TO BE TELLING US THAT GOD AND SATAN ARE PLAYING A CHESS GAME WITH OUR LIVES, ALWAYS TRYING TO TEST OUR FAITH. IS THAT WHAT GOD IS REALLY LIKE AND IS THAT WHAT THE BOOK OF JOB IS SAYING TO US? GOOD QUESTIONS……

ONCE UPON A TIME…..THERE WAS A MAN NAMED JOB FROM UZ. THIS IS A STORY, A PARABLE, SOME CALL IT WISDOM LITERATURE. THERE WAS NO MAN NAMED JOB AND THERE WAS OR IS NO PLACE CALLED UZ. THIS STORY WAS WRITTEN BY SOMEONE OR SOMEONES TO MAKE SOME POINTS ABOUT WHO GOD IS, HOW SUFFERING WORKS, WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, AND A WHOLE LOT OF OTHER GUT WRENCHING QUESTIONS AS WE LOOK AT BORN TO TROUBLE, THE BOOK OF JOB AND THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE.

ORIGINALLY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN WHILE THE HEBREW PEOPLE WERE IN EXILE AND THEY HAD LOST EVERYTHING AND THEY WERE WONDERING, “WHERE IS GOD AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US NOW?” AND IT IS ALSO THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN TO COMBAT THE COMMON NOTION OF THE PREVAILING CULTURE AND WHAT WAS WIDELY BELIEVED BY THOSE WHO WORSHIPPED YAHWEH AS EVIDENCED IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY. YOU WILL BE BLESSED IF YOU ARE FAITHFUL AND CURSED IF YOU ARE NOT. EASY PEASY, RIGHT? GOD IS THE GIANT VENDING MACHINE IN THE SKY. DO WHAT YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO DO AND YOU WILL BE BLESSED, MESS UP AND ALL SORTS OF THINGS WILL BE FALL YOU.

BEFORE WE THINK WOW, HOW PRIMITIVE OF THOSE FOLKS, I BELIEVE THIS IS WHAT MOST OF US THINK ABOUT GOD IN OUR HEARTS. HOW MANY OF US KNOW OF PEOPLE AND MAYBE OURSELVES WHO EXPECTED SOMETHING MORE, SOMETHING BETTER BECAUSE THEY/WE ARE GOOD GOD FEARING PEOPLE. JOB’S STORY TRIES TO SHOW US SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY BUT YOU HAVE TO HANG IN THERE FOR THE RIDE.

THE STORY BEGINS IN SOMETHING LIKE A COURTROOM WITH HEAVENLY BEINGS, GOD AND SATAN. THIS IS NOT THE SATAN WE THINK OF AS IN THE DEVIL BUT THE HEBREW HERE MEANS THE PROSECUTOR OR THE ADVERSARY. HE HAS BEEN GOING TO AND FRO LOOKING ACROSS THE EARTH FOR, APPARENTLY, SOMETHING TO DO AND A GOOD CHALLENGE AND GOD OFFERS UP JOB. “HAVE YOU MET MY GUY? HE IS BLAMELESS AND UPRIGHT, FEARS GOD AND TURNS AWAY FROM EVIL.” WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND WHAT ISN’T IN OUR READING TODAY IS THE FACT THAT JOB HAD EVERYTHING, 7 SONS, 3 DAUGHTERS, 7,000 SHEEP, 3,000 CAMELS, 500 PAIR OF OXEN, 500 DONKEYS AND A LOT OF SERVANTS. YOU GET THE IDEA, HE WAS WEALTHY BEYOND IMAGINATION AND SATAN SAYS TO GOD, “DO YOU THINK JOB REVERES YOU JUST BECAUSE? YOU HAVE GIVEN HIM EVERYTHING. YOU HAVE PUT A FENCE AROUND HIM. TAKE IT AWAY AND SEE IF HE DOESN’T CURSE YOU.” GOD SAID, “DO IT BUT DON’T HURT HIM”.

SO HE LOOSES EVERYTHING…FIRE COMES AND WIPES OUT THE ANIMALS, WIND DESTROYS HIS CHILDREN’S HOUSES WITH THEM INSIDE, ENEMIES KILL MORE ANIMALS,….ALL DEAD. POOR JOB, RIGHT?

JOBS RESPONSE, “NAKED I CAME FROM MY MOTHERS WOMB; NAKED I WILL RETURN. THE LORD HAS GIVEN AND THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY, BLESS THE LORD’S NAME.” WOW! WHAT? THEN THE STORY SAYS, “IN ALL THIS JOB DID NOT SIN OR CURSE GOD.

THE SECOND ROUND BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN IS PART OF OUR READING, SATAN COMES BACK, GOD OFFERS UP JOB AGAIN, SATAN RESPONDS, “BECAUSE EVERYTHING FOLKS HAVE THEY WILL GIVE UP TO PRESERVE THEIR LIFE, BUT TOUCH HIS BODY AND HE WILL CURSE YOU TO YOUR FACE.” GOD SAYS, GO FOR IT BUT SPARE HIS LIFE. WOW!!!!

BOOM….JOB WAS COVERED WITH PUS FILLED SORES, HEAD TO FOOT, BAD ENOUGH THAT HE TOOK A PIECE OF POTTERY, A SHARD AND SCRAPED HIS ENTIRE BODY. YUCKY! HIS WIFE SAYS TO HIM AFTER LOOSING HER CHILDREN, EVERYTHING THAT SHE HAS AND NOW HER HUSBAND IS COVERED IN HORRIBLE SORES, “DO YOU STILL PERSIST IN YOUR INTERGRITY? CURSE GOD AND DIE!” BEFORE YOU ARE TOO HARD ON HER…..ISN’T THAT WHAT MOST OF US WOULD DO? I AM AFRAID I MIGHT!

JOB REPLIES HAS SOME CHOICE WORDS FOR HER THEN ASKS THE QUESTION, “SHALL WE RECEIVE THE GOOD AT THE HAND OF GOD AND NOT RECEIVE THE BAD? IT’S AN EXCELLENT QUESTION. ONE FOR US TO PONDER AND TO THINK ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS AND WHO GOD IS. MORE ON THAT LATER IN ANOTHER SERMON. AND IT ENDS WITH…..IN ALL THIS JOB DID NOT SIN WITH HIS LIPS. HMMMMMM! DID YOU HEAR THAT? NO SIN WITH HIS LIPS! THAT’S A CLUE FOR THE FUTURE

THERE ARE A FEW GREAT AND DIFFICULT THINGS TO PURSUE IN THESE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF JOB:

1. WHY DO WE FOLLOW GOD? WHY DO WE HAVE FAITH? WHY HAVE INTEGRITY GOD MIGHT CALL IT.
2. AND DOES GOD CAUSE THE GOOD AND THE BAD TO HAPPEN TO US?

FIRST QUESTION FIRST……WHY ARE WE OBEDIENT, WHY ARE WE FAITHFUL? THAT’S A GREAT QUESTION, RIGHT? A LOT OF RESEARCH HAS BEEN DONE ON THIS TOPIC. WE KNOW THAT THE MORE WELL OFF AND OR EDUCATED SOMEONE IS, TYPICALLY THE LESS THEY BELIEVE IN GOD. LOOK AT EUROPE AND A LOT OF THE UNITED STATES, THEY ARE CONSIDERED POST-CHRISTIAN. THOSE WHO ARE WELL OFF DON’T SEE A NEED FOR GOD, GOD IS BUT A CRUTCH FOR THE WEAK SOME WOULD SAY. MANY COUNTRIES WHERE FAITH IS THE STRONGEST, FOLKS ARE THE POOREST.

 JOHN WESLEY HAS THIS TO SAY ABOUT THE BOOK OF JOB. WE HAVE TWO DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD. ONE IS AS A SERVANT TO A MASTER. WE DO WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO, WE OBEY BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES COULD BE GREAT IF WE DON’T. HE WOULD EVEN GO SO FAR TO SAY THAT THIS IS BEGINNER FAITH/NEW FAITH. WE SHOW UP AT CHURCH SOMETIMES, WE DO GOOD WHEN IT COUNTS, WE TRY AND BE A LITTLE GENEROUS IF FOLKS ARE WATCHING, WE FOLLOW THE RULES. IT’S THE VENDING MACHINE VERSION OF GOD. WHAT I PUT IN IS WHAT I WILL GET OUT.

 WESLEY ALSO TALKED ABOUT THE IDEA OF THE FAITH OF ONE WHO IS A CHILD OF GOD AS OPPOSED TO SERVANT/MASTER RELATIONSHIP. THIS IS THE ONE WHO FOLLOWS GOD BECAUSE THEY ARE IN A RELATIONSHIP AND CAN TRUST WHO GOD IS AND THAT GOD WILL ALWAYS WANT THE BEST FOR US BECAUSE GOD IS THE BEST KIND OF PARENT, LOVING EVEN IF WE DON’T UNDERSTAND. NOT VENDING MACHINE LIKE….MAYBE JOB HAD A FAITH LIKE THIS OR MAYBE NOT?

 BUT IT IS NOT SO SIMPLE IS IT. THE SECOND THEME IS WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE? MANY WOULD SAY THAT THEY PROBABLY DESERVE IT OR THEY WEREN’T FAITHFUL ENOUGH OR THEY HAD SIN IN THEIR HEARTS. NOTHING HAPPENS WITHOUT A REASON. WELL, MY MOTHER WAS THE WOMAN WHO WENT IN FOR A RIB BIOPSY AND DIED FROM A BLOOD CLOT. I HAD PEOPLE TELL ME THAT SHE WASN’T HEALED BY GOD BECAUSE SHE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH FAITH, OR I, AS A 22 YEAR OLD DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH FAITH. THAT GOD HAD A REASON, OR NEEDED ANOTHER FLOWER IN GOD’S GARDEN. BAD THEOLOGY FOR SURE. SOMETIMES STUFF HAPPENS! SOMETIMES, TERRIBLE STUFF HAPPENS. PEOPLE DIE, THEY LOSE EVERYTHING, THEY ARE DESTITUTE, THEY HAVE NOTHING, THEY ARE BROKEN. THE QUESTION STILL REMAINS…... DOES THAT MEAN THAT GOD IS THE AUTHOR OF THE GOOD AND THE BAD LIKE THE STORY LEADS US TO BELIEVE? ARE WE TO EMULATE JOB AND SAY, “HEY, GOD GIVES AND GOD TAKES AWAY, BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD? “ MAYBE, THAT IS A SUPREME ACT OF FAITH, MAYBE SOME WOULD SAY WE DESERVE NOTHING SO ANYTHING GOOD IS A BONUS OR MAYBE???

 NOTHING IS SO SIMPLE AND THE CHURCH AND THEOLOGIANS HAVE WEIGHED IN ON THESE MATTERS SINCE THE BEGINNING

……NEXT WEEK WE WILL LISTEN TO JOBS FRIENDS TRY AND OFFER HIM THEIR WISDOM AND COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF HIS TERRIBLE SUFFERING. YOU MAY ENCOUNTER SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS IN THE SERMON NEXT WEEK OR YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF BEING DESCRIBED AS WE CONTINUE TO LOOK AT BORN TO TROUBLE: THE BOOK OF JOB, LOOKING AT LIFE’S BIG QUESTIONS. FOR NOW, I LEAVE YOU WITH THIS TO PONDER. STUFF HAPPENS!