

Reflection

October 27, 2024

Job 42: 1-6; 10-17

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Title: If your heart goes fishing, go with it.

Prayer: Blessed Creator, you bless us with this time now to listen for your voice in our ears. You bless us with this time now to make space in our hearts for the movement of your Spirit. Give us the courage to welcome you. Amen.

Does it ever feel like too much to bear? Not just our own stuff, but all the stuff. The news on the radio, the scrolling feeds on our phone, the six o'clock broadcast, the dire topics that populate conversations with friends. The wars – that are expanding. The politics – that are their own battlefields. The housing – that is out of reach. The food – that is too expensive. And, then there is all the personal stuff – the illness, the treatment, the grief, the conflict at work, the family situation, the insecurity, the self questioning – fill in the blank. There is bad news for the taking.

And, it feels like too much.

There is not one thing to worry about. There are many. And everyday there seems to be a few more.

Too much.

I want to hang a sign on my heart that says "Gone Fishing" or "back in five minutes" or "Closed for business." Because it feels like the effort it will take to carry it all in my heart will break me.

Do you sometimes feel that way?

It seems like a good survival tactic – shut the heart down. Don't feel. Maybe if I stop myself from feeling I can stop myself from caring, we tell ourselves. And maybe if I can stop myself from caring I can get on with my own life and pretend that everything is okay.

I don't know about you, but when I start feeling that way I notice my head starts to grab the spotlight. I find myself quick to answer, focused on reason and facts. I begin

to talk about the minutiae in great detail while successfully avoiding the big picture. I keep my focus on the particulars, the information, the stats – and I talk more ... anything to avoid giving my heart a place at the table; anything to avoid feeling.

Before long this becomes habit – focus on the details. Avoid the feelings. And, it becomes such a habit that we get fearful of ever letting our feelings show. They've been bottled up so long that if we let them out now they are going to spill over everything and make a huge mess and it'll be embarrassing and we won't be able to control them and we won't know what to do about it.

So, turn it off.

At this time in the world right now it feels like anxiety hangs in the air like dust particles in a sunny room. It surrounds us. We breathe it in.

We have little or no space left to notice, address, explore, or even move through how we feel about what's going on.

Searching the internet, I learn there are 10 global conflicts to watch in 2024; that 92 countries are partially involved in conflicts beyond their own borders. I learn that there are long-term changes in our mental health from the Covid 19 Pandemic. I learn that politics is divisive more than its cooperative. I learn that last year climate disasters claimed 12,000 lives globally. I learn there are more missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. I learn that in Canada over 2000 hate crimes were reported to police in the first six months of this year.

Oh, yeah, shutting our hearts down seems like a solid choice.

But, we know it's not a choice at all.

We know that will only lead to separation from God, from others and from self. We know it will turn the anxiety and fear and grief inward and will eat away at our bodies contributing to stress, insomnia, ulcers and more.

We have to keep our hearts open. We have to stay connected to each other. We have to keep space for God's movement in our lives. But how?

Well, let's see what Job did.

Whether the story of Job is folk tale or real, it is a powerful story about the human condition, the power of God, the notion of justice, and the journey of faith. Around the time this story is set, people believed that the gods acted in people's lives – rewarding the good with prosperity and punishing the bad with disaster. It's why we keep getting the title of Harold Kushner's book wrong. It's not "Why bad things happen to good people" it's "when bad things happen to good people."

It's not about the reason, it's about working through what's happened.

What we discover with Job is that his piety – his faith in God – was never dependent on divine favour. When it all got stripped away, when he shook his fists at the heavens, when he questioned God – he still had reverence for God, deep down he still knew God was more than he could comprehend.

In a nutshell, Job had it all – he was prosperous, had a happy family and was devoted to God. One day the adversary approached God and said 'no one is that good. If you took everything from him, he would curse you.' So, God said "let's see."

Soon, invaders stole Job's oxen and donkeys and killed the field workers; bolts of lightning burnt his many sheep and shepherds to a crip; raiders came from three directions, took his camels and killed the drivers; a tornado hit the house which collapsed on everyone and killed all his children inside.

In response Job fell to the ground, tore his tunic, shaved his head and ... worshipped. He said "God gives, God takes. God's name be ever blessed." (1:21)

Then the adversary said to God, 'well people will say anything to save their lives, but if you took away his health'...

So God said, all right, go ahead.

Job ended up with sores and ulcers and scabs all over. He itched and oozed. It was so bad his wife finally said "still trusting in God, eh? Curse God and be done with it."

Job's friends stayed with him for about a week; and for 28 chapters the dialogue goes back and forth amongst them all.

His friends want him to understand that he must have done something wrong for all this to be happening; but Job doesn't believe in that kind of God.

Job gets increasingly frustrated; throughout this long dialogue he progresses in his outbursts to God. He starts with ‘obliterate the day I was born,’ then “my spirit is broken,” then “I’m standing my ground,” “My complaint is legitimate,” then “where does insight hide? Mortals have no clue.”

Eventually a new friend comes along, Elihu, who has some words of wisdom (33: 12b-14). He tells Job that God is greater than any human, that Job has no right to take God to court; and that God always answers, even when people can’t recognize it.

Finally, God addresses Job with questions like “where were you when I created the earth?” “How was its foundation poured?” “Where does snow originate?” He helps Job see that creation is far greater than his one life; and that creation isn’t always beauty – it is sometimes violent. And that God is really the only one with the authority to understand it all.

Job feels he has been heard. God has spoken. And Job’s response is “I am in awe.”

Through it all, Job never shut his heart. He stayed connected to God, to the others around him and to himself. He lived the experience, felt the experience, acknowledged the experience, lamented the experience, worked within the confines of his experience.

Just as we are called to do. When the world can feel heavy, when anxiety is in our very breath, we are NOT called to shut down. We are called to keep our hearts open, to stay connected to each other, and to keep space for God’s movement in our lives.

Yes, it might hurt. Yes, it might be hard. But, it is how we acknowledge, process and, most importantly, keep going.

When I searched the internet and found all that bad news, I also found:

- a website dedicated to sending messages of hope to the children of Ukraine.
- Multiple apps and websites with free resources on how to manage anxiety post Covid.
- a news clip of a Vancouver interviewer asking each politician interviewed to offer two positive characteristics of their opponent.
- Articles about volunteers who foster pets, rebuild homes and deliver food after a natural disaster.
- Resources for youth to help them stop racism in their schools

Avoiding bad news won't make it go away. And closing our hearts will only make us defensive.

Job wasn't going to make those boils go away by ignoring them. But, he was going to figure out how to live with them by paying attention to them.

At the end of his presentation at the 2013 Ottawa Writer's Festival, Rabbi Harold Kushner – author of the book "When Bad things Happen to Good People" spoke a little about Job. He said: "Like Job, I have met God. I have met Him in sunshine but more often in shadows, not in the elegant perfection of the world but in the resilience of the human soul, the ability of people to find even a pain-filled life, even a grossly unfair life, worth living. ... I have been sustained by the message that God has not abandoned His world."

As hard as it might be sometimes, let's go into this week with hearts open.

Amen.