

Job 42:1-17

Then Job answered the Lord: '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?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

"Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me."

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite:

'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.'

So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this Job lived for one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

"Remembering Forward"

October 25, 2009

Rev. Charles Schuster

The sermon title, "Remembering Forward," comes from one of the chapters in Krista Tippett's book. It comes on the Sunday, which is ironic, that I need to have you remember "fall back" because next week the time changes, you get another hour to sleep.

Sometimes the best way to understand something is to accept the idea of the conflation of opposites. Poles apart are put together. Things that don't make sense really do, and if we want to get at the truth we have to embrace a mystery that only makes sense if we're willing to embrace the paradox. For example, the human race is polarized, the species in conflict. We are, as a race, a species, a house divided, and I don't mean because we're liberal and conservatives, we are, nor do I refer to the idea that we're Democrats, Republicans or some other party, we are. It's not an eastern versus western thing, thought that's there. It's not CSU versus CU, both are equally bad in football.

I saw a truck this week, it was on I-70, the bumpers said to me "Warning, Danger, Contents in this truck may contain political promises." And the truck was a septic tank service truck. Some of us will think that is funny, some of us will not, depending on who's in office and how we relate to them. But that's not how the human race is divided. Mel Green got it right in part, but not exactly. It's women and men." A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband," he says, "a man never worries about the future until he gets a wife." "To be happy with a man you must understand him a lot and love him a little; to be happy with a woman you must love her a lot and not try to understand her at all." "Any married man should forget his mistakes, because there's no use two people remembering the same thing." "Men wake up looking about the same as they did when they went to bed. Women somehow deteriorate during the night." The Staff-Parish Relations Committee is currently in the congregation, you may want to speak to them about this. "A woman always has the last word in any argument. Anything a man says after that is the beginning of another argument."

The human race is in conflict with itself, men and women, but there's more than that, it's a deeper problem. It has to do with good things and how we deserve them, and bad things that we do not. Do we get what we deserve? Do we deserve what we get? Do we, do we not? Do we deserve what we get or do we not deserve what we get? And the answer is yes. It's both. We do. We don't.

Job is in this conflict, competing ideas in the Book of Job. The beginning, scholars think, and the end of Job were written by the same source, it's just separated by the middle. In the beginning, what you're finding is the idea that bad things happen to good people. In the middle of the book of Job, his wife doesn't understand him, his friends want to convert him. They tell him the bad things that have happened are because he's done bad things, he should confess. His children are killed, his crops destroyed, his livestock die, and he has a skin condition, he must have therefore done something terribly wrong. Which is it, bad things happen to good people? Or they're consequences for the bad things we've done? It's both. Sometimes, we get what we deserve. Sometimes we do not. It's Job. It's life. And the most amazing part of the story is the end of it all, when it says Job lived a long, long time and he saw his children and his children's children, and so forth, and Job died old and full of days. What a wonderful statement, what a great tribute when you think of it. Bad things happened. We don't deserve it. Job didn't. Nobody deserves what happens sometimes, and to the end of our life, as Job, to live your life full of days. How do we do that? How do we do that? Life isn't always fair. I think one of the things that we can do is to realize that love, if we love, it will last. It may be the only thing that does, but if we love, it will last. Job knew it, he felt blessed at the end of his life, and even after he lost everything, at the end of his life, he was full of days. If we love, it will last. Be a lover, a long lover.

Elaine Stenowski said it, she believes it, so do I. "There's a difference between people of faith and those who have no faith. The difference is this. When we read the newspaper, all the bad news, we keep reading, we don't stop, because the bad news is not the last word, and we know it." Because we are lovers of life, long lovers, and when things go wrong, someday they'll right themselves. When it seems that there is no hope, love tells

us that we just stopped hoping too soon. When there is life, there is potential, and when there is death, we are told, and we believe it, there is resurrection. Whitehead said it, Alfred North Whitehead, "God is in the world continually creating in us and around us," and we believe that. If we love, we never lose. Paul the Apostle believed it, he called it right, he said "Faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love" and another translation, "Love is the one thing that stands when all else has fallen." That's exactly right.

Let me tell you about a man who was a winner. Ten national championships, nobody came close to that. 88 straight games that he won. Nobody has come close to that. The closest was 42. He's a winner, but he's a winner because he taught his players to discipline themselves, not to lie or cheat or steal, and to earn the right to be proud and confident, and never score a point without acknowledging the teammate who helped you do it, and treat your opponent with respect. He's ninety years old. His steps are a little smaller, he's a little more hunched over. He coached 180 players and he knows exactly where 172 of those players live because they call him, because they want to check up on him to see how he's doing. One sports writer visited him recently on the twenty-first of the month. This writer said, "The best man I know. I have no doubt what he'll be doing on the 21st of the month. He'll sit down and he'll pen a letter to his best girl. He'll tell her how much he misses her, how much he loves her, and he can't wait to see her. And he'll fold it, and he'll put it into a little envelope, then he'll walk into the bedroom and he'll go over to the stack of love letters sitting on her pillow, and he'll untie the yellow ribbon and slip that one in on top of the stack. The stack will now contain 180 letters, because the 21st will be 15 years since the day Nelly, his wife of 53 years, died. And in her memory, he sleeps only on his half of the bed, only on his pillow, only on top of the sheets, and under the old bedspread they shared to keep him warm. John Wooden, basketball coach at UCLA, is a winner. His record is better than any others, but he's a winner because he's a lover. He loved his wife, he loved his life, he loved what he did, and he loves what he does, and he knows you never lose with love, because love will last forever. To live our days, full of days, we've got to be long lovers.

Secondly, we learn until we die. Because there's no wasted time. We must be slow learners. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "It is tragic how few people possess their own souls before they die." It's not that faith takes away the bad things from us as if they never were, but faith gives us a way to learn from them as if they had no power. It's why Jesus put those words as a summation of the law, to love the Lord your God with all your mind. We be slow learners, learn all of our lives, every experience teaches us. Krista Tippett will be here November the 11th, "Remember forward" is a phrase she likes to use, it's about how all life is learning, it's about being open to where we are and what can be taught us, and if you follow her life story you see how she was a lifelong learner. Her grandfather was a Southern Baptist preacher. That's where her faith journey began. She believed God would protect her. And then she read Dietrich Bonhoeffer, you know Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German who participated in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler, was arrested, put in prison then executed. Christianity doesn't protect you. She spent a year living in East Berlin, through a study program at Brown University, and then when she graduated she became a Fulbright Scholar and studies in West Germany. She saw

East Germany under the Communist domination as dark and black and oppressed, and she saw West Germany as light and bright and full of hope, but she learned something that surprised her. "A practical irony," she said, "took hold of my years in Berlin. I felt most alive on the bleaker gray Eastern side of the wall. I spent evenings with teachers and doctors and writers in the dimly lit pubs with thick cigarette smoke and poetry and yearning. Dreams made more beautiful by the fact that the dreamers believe they would never, ever come true. Many of their desires were easy, as if they could be fulfilled on the other side of the wall in West Germany things like to ride a motorcycle across America or to publish an essay or to see Rembrandt in the Louvre. But in those hours drawn out by drink and food and music, few inconsequential words were spoken," she said. "Joy and laughter were deepened because they were tinged with the sadness that other experiences lost possibility. Vicariously, in the now-vanished Communist capital, I learned the exhilarating intensity that can accompany catastrophe."

If we learn until we die we're slow learners. Tragedy is not the enemy, it's the teacher. Sadness is not the lingering downer, it's the prelude to joy. And life is not unfair, it's bearable and it's discernable. I have a very good friend, Paul Murphy, United Methodist pastor in Denver. He died in 2006 after 12-year battle with cancer. His good friend and my good friend, Don Messer, was taking him to the doctor's office for a treatment one day just before he died. Don asked him, as they were in the car together, "What do you miss most?" Quietly, Paul responded, "I miss taking a walk, going to get ice cream, and seeing people at church." Don then adds, "Our conversation stopped in silence there." A note was found in Paul's diary, it was Paul Murphy's life lesson. He wrote, "I want to live and laugh and love to be fully alive because no one else can live my life for me." His grandson said to him one day, "Grandpa, I want to follow in your footsteps because I know your footsteps always lead to ice cream." If we learn until we die, slow learners, there is the wisdom that puts fear in perspective and puts faith into action. If we learn until we die, then we realize with Helen Keller, "Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it." If we learn until we die, then we can look at our problems as Barbara Johnson looks at the rocks in a river, "The brook would lose its song if God removed the rocks." To learn until we die is to live our days, full of days. Learners and lovers. If we love, we will not lose. If we learn, we will not die in vain.

Laughter, laughter. Third thing, laughter. If we laugh instead of cry, there is joy in every eye. Sorry, it rhymes. It's hard to know, and I don't see it. Job had to have a sense of humor, with all these clowns, his friends coming to tell him he must have done something wrong, he ought to confess it, because they believe that bad things happen because you did something wrong. G. K. Chesterton was right, he said "Life is serious all the time, but living cannot be. In anything in important, you must have mirth or madness." What's it going to be, mirth or madness? Three of our ministers, I and Rebecca and Joel, have been on a retreat this week in beautiful Winter Park at the Y camp. Y'all go to Hawaii on your business. It's beautiful. Bob Kaehler is the pastor in Park City, Utah. He remembers when he was in fourth grade Sunday School. His teacher, Miss Roterhaven, she was one of these people that have these half-glasses on a chain, and whenever she wanted to make a point, she'd whip her glasses off and let them dangle on the chain at her chest. She was telling the class one day, she said, "Children..." she whips her glasses off, and they're

bouncing back and forth, she says, "It's just going to be so beautiful when we all get to Heaven. Oh, it's going to be so beautiful." Bob raised his hand and said, "Miss Roterhaven, is there anything on earth that will be like it?" And she puts her glasses back on her face and whips them back off. They dangle on the chain. She got an ethereal look on the sweet face and said, "Yes, Robert, it will be like being in church forever." Bob slumped down in his chair, raised his hand again, and said, "Could you tell us a little about Hell?" He thought that might be a better choice than eternity in church. Wow. Mirth or madness. Bob Kaehler is one of the funniest clergy we have. I think he's dedicated his life to whatever church is, it's going to be fun, because of Miss Roterhaven.

G. Robinson was on an airplane listening, but trying not to listen... did you ever listen but try not to listen? to an argument between a mother and daughter. She was a mother, she had been a daughter, she could have taken either side. She heard the daughter say something that let her know that everyone else on the plane was listening as well, because everyone laughed at the very same time, when this daughter said to her mother: "I don't care what you say, you can make me go on this vacation, but when I get home I'm going to see him again, and you cannot stop me. And furthermore, Mother, you're wrong about him. I know you are. He's a good person. Why else would he be doing 200 hours of community service?"

We laugh instead of cry. It's the only way. It ought to be in the Bible, love the lord you God with all your heart and all your mind and all you soul, and laugh every now and then, because it's either mirth or madness. Terry Bradshaw was in Denver a couple weeks ago, I got to hear him. He is a character, I gotta tell ya. What you see on the screen, quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers, he wrote a book which tells you sort of his theme in life. *It's Only a Game* is the title. In the book there's a story. The Pittsburgh Steelers are playing the Rams, and it's the last game of the season, and he's being chased by the Rams huge defensive tackle, three hundred and some pound Deacon Jones, "and Jones was closer to me than my shadow. I couldn't shake him. He chased me all over the field, on the sidelines, up into the stands, out onto the team bus, and back to my ranch in Louisiana. I mean, the man would not give up. Finally he got me, and the two of us, exhausted, lying there in a heap, and the strangest thing came over me. I started laughing. And Deacon started laughing. And the two of us were lying there hysterical, difficult to explain why we laughed. Maybe it was the fact that two grown men had exhausted themselves playing tag on national television. I don't know how the broadcasters handled it. Probably somebody said, 'Well, it looks like Bradshaw pulled a muscle in his brain again.' But I really couldn't stop laughing." In Denver two weeks ago Bradshaw said, "I haven't had good luck in my marriages." That's an understatement. "My last wife had had it with me and she kicked me out of the house, and I was living in a barn with the livestock. My Mom had called and she said to me, "Terry, I tried to tell you years ago, and I've repeated it to you frequently, so I'm not gonna say it again this time." Terry said, "Oh Mama, tell me. You're going to tell me anyway, just go ahead and tell me." She said to him, "You, Terry, will never be happy until you stop marrying outside the family." Of course he was joking, but how else do you deal with brokenness, or illnesses, or disappointments or mistakes, if we can't laugh?

It was W. C. Fields who said, "There comes a time when we must grab the bull by the tail and face the situation." We've got to be laughers, we must be learners, we must be lovers, to live our lives full of days, because bad things happen. It's not our fault, we don't deserve it. God didn't cause it, but God will not take the stones away and the brook will continue to sing. If we can love it will last, and we will not lose. If we can learn until we die, each happening is our teacher, and if we can laugh until we cry, there will be joy in every eye. Then we can live our lives full of days like Job, who knew his children and his children's children, and thought himself to be a lucky man. Let us pray.

O God, be with us in our down times, and when we are discouraged and afraid, give us hope and help. Amen.