

February 28, 2016
Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Job 23:1–17

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Job 23:1–17 (ESV)

¹ Then Job answered and said: ² “Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. ³ Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ⁴ I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵ I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. ⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. ⁷ There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. ⁸ “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; ⁹ on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. ¹⁰ But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. ¹¹ My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. ¹² I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food. ¹³ But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. ¹⁴ For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind. ¹⁵ Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. ¹⁶ God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; ¹⁷ yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

I hate to admit it. In fact, I'm not totally comfortable telling you about it, but once I thought for sure my mother was trying to kill me.

She really did! No, I'm not talking about socially, the times when she would show up to school in my youthful mind it was the most embarrassing thing to have to see your mother at school. And no, I'm not talking about those situations she only threatened to ring my neck.

But when I was about five years old, it seemed like she actually tried to kill me. Let me explain. As a little child I often marveled over my mom's great biscuits. Why, these were biscuits that even Colonel Sanders would envy.

One day, when she was about to mix up a new batch, she got a phone call and went in the den to talk. Here was my chance! As she talked on the phone I would figure out the secret of her wonderful biscuits.

The first thing I saw was a container of flour. Since this was by far the largest item around, I put a spoonful into my mouth, "Yuck! That wasn't it, maybe it is the Crisco shortening. It looks almost like icing. But a big spoonful of that quickly killed that idea. The only item left was a container with an Indian head on it marked "baking powder." This had to be the secret to her biscuits. So I put an extra-large spoonful of baking powder into my mouth. Talk about "gag me with a spoon"—literally!

Then it dawned on me. My mother was trying to kill me! Right?

My mom was taking nasty ingredients, working them together, and creating biscuits that I scarfed down almost every morning. Separate they taste bad, but together, wonderful!

The secret is understanding how it all works together. Don't believe me? Then let's look at Job.

Throughout most of his book, Job thinks that God is trying to kill him—literally. But today's first reading includes these words in Job 23:10, "*...when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*"

Satan is out to prove Job's faith is false, but God is after a golden character, a mature Christian faith, a life marked by depth and compassion. So God takes strange and distasteful events, works them together and creates lives of beauty.

The secret is understanding how it all works together. There are four ingredients.

Shock: When your world falls apart.

No one is fully prepared for that time when you're sitting at your desk or driving home and you get a call that something tragic has happened to your spouse or child. Or you're shaving and you feel the lump on your neck or you're at the doctor's office and he says the "C" word—cancer.

When those things happen, it's like jumping into a bitterly cold lake. You can prepare yourself all you want for what it's going to feel like, but when you jump in, immediately the shock to your system takes your breath away.

After Job lost everything, chapter two says that for seven days he just sat among the ashes with a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself. Job couldn't say anything. He was in shock.

Sorrow: When your heart is breaking.

Whatever happened to the God who loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives? In chapter 23, when Job gives voice to his sorrow, he feels as though it's falling on divine deaf ears.

Job starts looking for God: to the east, to the west, to the north and the south—the four points of the horizon and the compass—but God is nowhere to be found.

If Job is a true and worthy servant of God, why then is God evading him and ignoring him?

Why is God hiding from him?

By the end of chapter 23, it's clear that, if Job lets it, this darkness will swallow him whole and he will drown in the ocean of God's silence.

We can sympathize with Job about God's silence. When I pray, I expect that God will answer. Isn't that what the Bible promises us? "Call on me in the day of trouble . . ."

When something goes wrong or I need help, I do what I think. I'm supposed to do—I take it to the Lord in prayer.

I claim my right as God's child to voice my complaint, to make my request, to tell my side of the story, and instead of an answer or a divine sympathetic nod of understanding, I get nothing. God doesn't hit reply to my e-mail.

There is no call back message on my voice mail.

God is silent despite my best efforts to provoke some kind of response.

Struggle: When you don't understand.

"Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning."

(Job 23:2). Why is this happening?

Why is this happening now? Why is this happening to me?

Why did my husband walk out on me? Why did my wife die in that accident?

Why did I lose my job? Why didn't I get that promotion?

Why was my baby born with spina-bifida?

Life just doesn't make sense. Bad people prosper. Good people suffer.

Why do we struggle with God?

There are two reasons: one, we doubt His wisdom. And therefore, two, we want to be in control.

Job says at the end of chapter 23; *"yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face."* (Job 23:17).

Life is tough. You can let it beat you down and you can get down and stay down the rest of your life.

But if you keep struggling, keep holding on like Job, having resilience, you learn from your losses, you profit from your pain, and you advance from your adversity.

Don't give up the struggle! Refuse to let the darkness silence your prayers!

Sanctification is when God turns bad into good. Sanctification is God's process of making us more like Jesus.

Too often we think that God's plan is to make us happy. I'm sorry to have to break the news to you, but that's not the plan. The plan is to make us holy, to make us more like Jesus.

Every problem has a purpose. We are transformed by our troubles. Other people may mean it for bad. But God wants to use it for good.

Anybody can bring good out of good. But God specializes in bringing good out of bad.

God loves to turn crucifixions into resurrections. "And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. ..." (Job 42:12).

This is the gospel that turns crucifixions into resurrections! What looked like a dead end on Good Friday when Christ died for your sins and mine opened up to an everlasting day on Easter morning. *"I know that my Redeemer lives!"*

Our nightmares are not random events that serve no purpose. Rather, they are wounds suffered in a cosmic war between good and evil, and God is weaving those wounds into a beautiful plan for ultimate victory.

That's what Paul teaches in Romans 8:28: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."*

This verse is one of the most misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misused verses in the Bible. Notice what Paul doesn't say. First, Paul doesn't say, "All things are good" because all things are not good.

They haunt us and confuse us and mess with our minds. Second Paul doesn't say, "We're pretty sure that . . ." or "Wouldn't it be nice if . . ."

No. Paul is convinced, "we know." We know that the God of Job, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, takes our strange and distasteful experiences, works them together, and creates a life of beauty.

Service: When we use our pain for God's glory.

God wants to take our greatest pain and turn it into our life's proclamation. He wants to use our mess for a message.

He wants to use our tests for a testimony. He wants to take the thing we are most embarrassed about, that we're most ashamed of, that we most regret happened and He wants to use it for good in the lives of others.

Who can better help parents of a Down syndrome child than parents who have had a Down syndrome child?

Who could better help somebody struggling with an addiction than somebody who struggled with an addiction?

The very thing you want to least talk about is the very thing God wants to use most to help other people.

There's a plan, a divine plan, a plan where all things are working for our good and the Father's glory. The secret is understanding how it all works together. Job 23:10: "*when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*"

Not because of how good you are or because of the good things that you have done...but because God has worked in your life, sanctified you by the Holy Spirit and redeemed you with the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ!

In Christ, you are golden...you are forgiven...you are saved!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Sermon Outline

“Job: Blessed Be the Name of the Lord”
Understanding How it All Works Together
Job 23:1–17

- I. Shock: When your world falls apart.
- II. Sorrow: When your heart is breaking.
- III. Struggle: When you don't understand.
- IV. Service: When we use our pain for God's glory.