

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost June 23 2024

Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-41

Do we believe God with us is enough?

The Gospel of Matthew gives Jesus the title of Emmanuel, God with Us! We celebrate it each Christmas season. That God has come down to us in this child, in the human who is Jesus.

But as one commentator asked about our Gospel reading today. Do we believe that God with us is enough? Is it enough that God is with us in the midst of the storm, as we sit on the ash heap, as we wait at the border, as we languish in the concentration camp.

In the book of Job, other the response we get today, the understanding that God is so different from us, is so Other, that we cannot even begin to think we can comprehend or judge what happens or why, Job never gets an answer to his putting God on trial for what has happened to him and his family.

But in the end, God is still in relationship with Job throughout this tumult, and even though Job says, "Do you not care that I am sitting on this ash heap, am unjustly bereft?" despite this, Job is still in relationship with God. Enough to cry out to God for justice. At the end, in Job's silence, it is apparent that even when there are no clear answers, even though he is still on the ash heap, for Job it seems that still being in relationship with God is enough. It may not be satisfying, but God with him is enough.

After he has told the storm to shut up and put a muzzle on it, Jesus turns to the disciples in the boat and asks, "Why are you still timid? Why do you not trust that

I have your backs? Have you still no trust in me? In what my ultimate goal is for you? Look inside and see if you trust my promise more than the danger you see around you.”

Jesus does not say what they should have done. This is not a “how to” story. Rather, it poses the question. Is it enough that Jesus is in the boat with us? Even if that boat is being tossed about like a cork and taking on water. Even if it seems like chaos and destruction will win. Is it enough that Jesus is in the boat. Ultimately, can you trust in him?

This is hard for us as humans. We want the world to be, as Job’s friends who come to comfort him on the ash heap, see it to be. That those in right relationship with God are rewarded and the wicked are punished or at least don’t get ahead. That’s our definition of justice!

The author of Job puts that understanding on a collision course with the provable truth that Job did nothing to deserve this. He represents the growing understanding that righteousness does not guarantee success in this world. That the evil do sometimes prosper from their ways. And we demand to know why.

It's also interesting that the author of Job doesn't resolve the tension among these ideas. God never provides a clear answer to Job, but God also chastises Job's friends for the way they have portrayed how God works. Ambiguity indeed.

All we know at the end is that God responds to Job, God never forsakes Job, and Job, for all his complaining, never forsakes God.

And the question for us is. When we are sitting on the ash heap that was our lives, is that enough? Is our faith built on a foundation stronger than our personal wealth, success, or comfort?

It was enough for Corrie Ten Boom and her family. During the occupation of the Netherlands by the Germans in World War II, Corrie and her family actively hid Jewish refugees from the Germans. Throughout the war they saved an estimated 800 Jews. Eventually they were arrested in February 1944. Corrie's father died soon after the arrest and Corrie and her sister Betsie were taken to a women's labor camp in Germany. Her sister Betsie died in December of 1944. Through a clerical error, Corrie was released just days after her sister died and about a week before all the women her age were sent to the gas chambers.

Before she died, Betsie told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."

For Corrie and her family, it was enough that Jesus was with them in the boat that was battered by the chaos of World War II, the evil of anti-Semitism, and the almost demonic pursuit of the "perfect" master race that led to the unspeakable horrors of the concentration camps and their gas chambers. It was enough for them so that even when they faced indefinite imprisonment and possible death, they held worship services using a Bible they had smuggled into the camp.

Why? Why did they believe it was enough? Why did Job stick with God even in the face of a non-answer to his valid question?

Because each understood, believed, trusted that it is God who holds the real power, not the rulers of this world, the vagaries of the weather, the storms and chaos of life.

It is God who set the foundations of the earth and spun the stars into their courses. Who set the natural laws in place and keeps them going. It is God who brought order out of the chaos of the deep darkness when God spoke- let there be light. And created. It is God who has the power to still the storms. God has the power to bring peace.

This is what we claim, and this is what we believe- that the resurrected Jesus- fully awakened- has the power of God to put a muzzle on the howling winds and to calm the seas, to help us find our footing again. With Jesus in the boat we need not ultimately fear anything. For even in death- nothing can touch us who have been claimed by God as beloved children and clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Even when it doesn't look like it. When we are terrified that God has gone AWOL and Jesus doesn't care, or at least we don't seem to be getting the full benefit of it as we think we ought. Even then- Jesus alone is Lord and God is dedicated to our welfare.

This life of faith is not an easy one. Like our democracy, it demands something of you. Thought, attention, trust. But it is a life that is fuller and more abundant than a life without God in it.

Because when the seas rage and the chaos of the storm beats into the boat. When the house burns down, and the sores erupt on your skin there is nothing you can do to stop it. When the tornado or hurricane barrels towards your house, you can't just say, shoo! We are helpless on our own in the face of that kind of power.

But God isn't. The thing we most desire and pray for, healing, restoration, freedom may not come according to our own timeline. But God is with us.

Is that enough for you? Not is it satisfying. Not is it what you want, or pray for, or demand from God.

Is it enough?

Whether your answer is a resounding, "Yes!", the plea of the father of the epileptic boy, "I believe, help my unbelief!", the mute acceptance of Job, or something else. I invite you to ponder this question as you come to the table to receive Christ's own body and blood freely given for you and as you go out into this world.

Where friends and neighbors stare as the waters rage and flood their homes. Where friends and neighbors go to bed hungry. Where immigrants fear their home countries enough to brave thousand plus mile journeys with no guarantees at the end. Where human beings kill one another because they are Ukrainian or Russian. Jews or Palestinian.

Go into this world and live as if Jesus is in the boat with us. Which gives us the courage to love our neighbors in the same way God in Jesus has loved us. By feeding us, healing us, comforting us. By being in the boat in the midst of the storm with us. And perhaps, for those who we serve, that too will be enough.