



2.25.24 Being Honest With God | Job 13:1-13

A preacher was going to preach on honesty during the next Sunday evening's service. As homework, she asked everyone to read Joshua chapter 25.

Next Sunday evening she asked by a raising of hands, **“How many of you did your homework for tonight’s sermon on honesty by reading Josuah chapter 25?”**

Half the hands were raised. With a big warm smile she said, “Great! Okay, those of you who raised your hands, could you please sit right here, right in front of me. I want to spend this evening with you.

After some shifting about, and with big grins on their faces for preferential treatment, they sat up front, ready to be praised.

The pastor, looking them in the eye, continued with **“Because, friends, the book of Joshua only has 24 chapters. And I am especially concerned about you tonight.”**

Busted!

We know honesty is the best policy. We are Minnesotans. We know honesty is the foundation of any good friendship and healthy relationship.

We know honesty builds character, helps us be truthful, transparent, and sincere in our words and actions in our daily lives.

Honest builds stronger connections with others.

And yet, and yet with all those benefits...we still might struggle in being honest all the time.

We struggle as Minnesotans with honesty, not from lack of integrity, rather we don't want to hurt people's feelings.

And as humans, we face the universal struggle in being honest with God. Because he is all-powerful and honesty might not be...wise.

Maybe we need some extra encouragement to really believe that honesty is the way to go in our relationship with God. That God values honesty.

Lent is a time for raw honesty – with God, ourselves, and others. Lamenting is emotional honesty directed towards God in prayer.

In day-to-day life, there are layers to the truths we are willing to share.

For example, when we ask each other “How are you doing?”, we often give and or expect the response “Fine!” or “Good!” Sometimes that’s all we need in our social interactions.

But what if we occasionally stopped and asked...those we’ve built up trust with, “How are you REALLY doing?” We might give or receive a different answer, or at least one that is more complex and nuanced.

And as Methodists, we live in the legacy of John Wesley, who taught people to ask, “How is it with your soul?” And then wait for an answer.

To push past layers of simply being polite...to the bed rock of our souls, of true honesty.

Our practice of lament can STRETCH us to move us past surfacey layers into deeper honesty.

But learning to lament, like any skill, takes time and some teaching.

Thankfully, we have the wonderful book of Job. The main theme of the book of Job is the problem of suffering...where does suffering come from, do innocent people suffer, or more personally, why am I suffering?

And how Job learned to process his suffering by lamenting.

Job experience shows us we can be authentic and candid with God too. Job shows us how to be honest with God in even and especially the most painful of situations.

If God helped Job in his extreme case of suffering, we can believe God will help us in our suffering. Teaching us to lament and teaching us to see God himself with us in the process of our suffering.

Now for a little bit about the book of Job. This book never answers the origin question as in WHY we suffer. It doesn’t even try to answer the question of why we suffer.

Clueing us in, that perhaps that question is not really the primary question.

The Book of Job also does not support or reinforce that tired self-rightousness, that incorrect belief that suffering is only visited upon those who deserve it, for those who sin.

Job’s friends believed this. But as modern believers, with a global perspective, we know innocent people suffer every day.

So, if innocent people suffer and they may never know why they are suffering...what question is truly left for us to answer as it relates to suffering?

That real question is...

“How do I suffer? Is there a way for me to carry my suffering, a mindset or orientation of my heart in which I am to carry this difficult life situation?” That is the question.

That third question is the hardest to answer and takes up about 39 chapters of the 42 chapters of Job.

How do we face and endure suffering in a way that pleases and honors the Lord?

In our reciting of scripture today, we didn't get to read this part. Right after the end of our text, four messengers came to Job and explained all he had lost.

That just as one finished sharing a loss for Job, the next messenger showed up to tell of more calamity and disaster.

Ultimately, Job lost all of his children, servants, livestock, and all his wealth. Severe multi-layered tragedy.

First, we can notice how Job initially responded to his news of losing everything. Job reacts with calm acceptance of the will of God as he says in Job 1:21,

**“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”**

If you can accept misfortune in that same way, you are fortunate indeed! This is instructional and accurate and wise. Can't fault Job's response is surrendering to the will of God.

But later in the book, Job gives a different response and one that is probably more helpful to the rest of us mere mortals. Job can no longer deal with what is happening to him from a place of calm and mild acceptance.

Now he begins to feel anger and bitterness overwhelm his soul. He feels rejected and persecuted by God. Prompted by the unhelpfulness of friends and his wife. His sense of isolation and distress increases. It all becomes too much!

Job abandons his previous approach and cries out in chapter 7:

**“Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”**

When Job can no longer suppress his hurt and loss. He does what?

Job pours it all out. He doesn't cry out to the empty sky. He aims his pain directly towards God.

Job becomes honest with God.

Job laments.

And how does God respond?

God doesn't fix everything for Job.

But God does respond. God draws near and connects and talks to Job. God gives the best answer to suffering, God gives himself.

Why? Because Job continued to honestly direct himself towards God. God responds by sharing parts of who he is to Job. And he commends Job for lamenting.

And surprisingly, Job's anguish is calmed. Job finds relief in the Presence of God. He is uplifted by his encounter with God.

What does this book of Job have to say to us today? Again, for us who are suffering for no reason that we can discern, let Job's patient suffering be your model.

But when you cannot mildly accept all that is happening any longer, let your grief and anger move you towards God.

For God is ultimately allowing the suffering, there is a purpose in the suffering, and it is only with God that your anguish can find relief.

In light of Job, I encourage you to reflect on where in your life where you might not be fully honest or not fully directed toward God.

And yes, I know, as it relates to our difficulties, "It could always be worse". As self-sufficient Minnesotans we resist the idea of bothering God with our struggles. They can't be worthy of bothering God with.

Maybe you could ask yourself, "Why am I remaining silent? God already knows what is in my heart. What do I have to lose...a flat, empty religious experience?"

Ask yourself what do I have to gain? Emotional freedom, some relief from my anguish, and God himself.

If it is hard to identify exactly what you might be minimizing, avoiding or flattening in your experience with God consider this.

You might try engaging in a new spiritual discipline. Yes, there is prayer. But maybe try journaling your emotions and prayers or reading a well-written Christian book related to what is on your heart.

Reading scripture might help you become more tender, open and more honest. Again, remember who God is...patient, kind, and gentle, longing to spend time with you.

One spiritual discipline I recommend is spiritual direction. Meeting with someone who is trained and gifted, once a month to explore honestly, "How it is with your soul?"

After my dad passed away. I was angry with God. Done with Him! And shared this slightly embarrassing experience with my spiritual director. Hadn't told anyone this yet.

I shared, Lois, this is kind of embarrassing. I know I talk to myself but this seems different. This last month I have been finding myself saying this phrase and saying it many times to God; either while driving, doing laundry, washing dishes, decluttering the house...saying suddenly out loud in a loud voice, **"But I don't want to talk to You!"**

As if in mid-conversation with God.

We both paused. Lois just let that sink in.

For a moment I panicked thinking maybe God was mad at me. But Lois just waited for God to calm my heart and help me connect the dots.

I finally broke the silence. **"Lois, for me to shout back, "But I don't want to talk to you!" many times must mean that I had been hearing God calling out to me, many times this past month.**

**That the Spirit of God had been inviting me to just talk to God. For me to pour it all out, to lament."**

My anger made me blind and unwilling.

But God never gave up on me.

And God never gives up on us.

Friends, God is not put off by our rash and loud honesty. We are responding.

I just don't think he is a big fan of our silence.

I believe God wants us to share with Him what is truly going on inside our hearts. He is a good listener and can comfort us in our anguish.

This season of Lent, can you hear Him inviting you to draw near, to talk to him, to perhaps even lament honestly in prayer?

**As we take a few moments to reflect** on Lent and our opportunity to lament.

**And after the service**, remember the Cross and our journey to the Cross. It is another place to interact with God. Write down some strong emotions, a difficult situation, or even a sin. Just a word or two.

Tape your note up and “nail” it on the cross. Give it to God...asking God to help you face it, help you to be emotionally honest with God.

**Now as we reflect**...Again, are you open to being emotionally honest with God? Is there unprocessed pain, grief, longing or confusion in your heart? In all honesty, share what is on your heart, direct it now to God in prayer.