

Text: Job 7:1-7 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. **February 1, 2015.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus. Amen.

Life stinks and then you die. I know, a happy start to a sermon. But you've heard that before, haven't you? Life stinks and then you die. What if this were your life story? Life starts great. You are wealthy, one of the wealthiest people on earth. You have a loving wife, ten beautiful children. In fact, your daughters are the most beautiful women in the land. Your kids even like hanging out together. You are respected. When you talk, people listen. When you show up, people are quiet in awed reverence. Then, in one day, it's all gone. The kids. Dead. The possessions. Stolen. Even your wife turns on you and tells you, "Curse God and die!" Life stinks and then you die. It gets worse. You get painful, nasty sores from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. Worse than any adult with chicken pox. Now no one wants to be near you. No one will talk to you. You are in terrible physical pain, all the time. The only way you think the pain will be over is when you die. You kind of agree with your wife. I wish I could just die and get it over with. Life stinks and then you die. I know, this sermon is getting much, much happier.

But you don't agree with your wife on her first point. You don't curse God. You wonder. You question God. You doubt. You even rant and complain to God sometimes. Who wouldn't? But you never give up on God. You still pray to him and call on him in your day of trouble. Will there be rescue? Will there be deliverance? Will there be an end to the pain? Or do I continue on with this hopeless existence: life stinks and then you die?

In case you hadn't figured it out, the above story is a true one. It's the account of Job. I think we can well relate to much of what Job says, maybe some parts more than others, maybe some of us this part more than that, but we can relate. Don't we have hard service on earth? Aren't you just a hired laborer? Don't most days feel like, "Work. Eat. Sleep. Repeat.?" Work is hard. It never changes. Consider that at that time, most hired laborers worked from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., from dawn until dusk. From can't see to can't see. That was on a good day that you got hired and actually got paid and actually had something eat. On a bad day, you didn't get hired. Didn't get paid. Didn't get to eat. Maybe we can't relate.

But we can understand longing for the evening shadows. That meant quitting time! You watch the clock until 5:00 p.m. But then by 5:02 you are already dreading tomorrow and the same routine and the work that piles up. All day long, you can't wait for work to be over. Then when work is over, all you can think about is work. Even at night, when you can finally go to bed and get some rest, you can't rest because you are thinking about all you have to do.

It was much the same for Job, only worse. We'll get to his physical pain a little later, but maybe that pain and those sores made it impossible for him to work. Maybe he could work, but just as a hired laborer. All day long, he wants to be done working. But when he finishes, what does he get? Don Pardo, tell him what he's won! Well, congratulations, Job. You've just won a sleepless night. Enjoy six beautiful hours of tossing and turning. We'll even throw in a large numbered alarm clock, so you can watch the minutes tick slowly by. I don't mean to make fun of Job's plight. He just felt like he couldn't win. When it was day time and he was in pain, he wanted it to be nighttime so he could try to rest. When it was nighttime, he didn't rest, so he wanted it to be daytime. His life stunk. And then he was going to die.

Let's talk now about that physical pain for Job. I just mentioned earlier painful sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. I'll try not to be too nasty and gross here, but Job is pretty vivid. His body was clothed with worms and scabs. Think about that. Picture it for a second. His clothing was worms and scabs. Yuck! His skin was broken and festering. He had some sores that were starting to heal. Some were fresh and oozing and bleeding and pussy. This is pretty nasty. Elsewhere Job describes his condition with putrid breath, rotting teeth, fever, emaciation, failing vision, nightmares and fits of depression. Who can blame him for questioning God?

Who would fault him for saying, "Life stinks and then you die"? Can you really get on Job's case when he says, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle"? If you've seen a skilled weaver, you know that's fast, probably the fastest thing Job can think of. The days go by so quickly, they are meaningless. There just doesn't seem to be any hope. Life stinks and then you die!

I think there's a couple of questions we want to ask right about now. One is, "Why is this in the Bible? Why depress us? Why talk about these nasty sores and sleepless nights and hopeless days?" Because that's real. That's what really happens to real people, even Christians, here on this earth. God doesn't just fill the Bible with only the great moments of faith, the miracles, the incredible accounts of love and forgiveness. God also puts in the Bible, the bad days, the downs as well as the ups. The bad along with the good. And the more I thought about that, the more comforted I became. God knows what it's really like on earth. Christ has compassion because he suffered sadness and sorrow and sickness and loss and beating and whipping and something worse than Job ever did, death on a cross. God is real with us. God is upfront and strikingly honest. There will be days when even Christians think, "Life stinks and then you die."

Probably the other question, after, "Why is this in the Bible?" is, "How can believer like Job say these things? Maybe Job wasn't a believer?" Come on. Look in the mirror to answer that question. When you are in the midst of, "work. Eat. Try to sleep. Repeat." Have you ever thought like Job? Would you want every rant on every bad day recorded? If you suffer from chronic pain, do you long for the night during the day and long for the day during the night? Do you ever feel like just a hired hand, with only months of futility, days without hope lying ahead of you? Is it harder to get in and out of the car than it used to be? Does the prescription on the glasses keep getting stronger? And who hasn't allowed the humble prayers to God for deliverance and strength to cross the line into an angry shake of the fist, a sinful complaint against a God who must not love me anymore, a selfish rant that all this suffering isn't fair, a hopeless resignation, "Life stinks and then you die"?

Yes. Job was a person. Just like us. He had downs, but also ups. The same Job who spoke these apparently hopeless words in front of us also said, "I know that My Redeemer lives. And that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And even after my skin has been destroyed, (this nasty, worm eaten, festering skin), yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes. How my heart yearns within me." What Job was really yearning for was not his pay at the end of the day or a night with some sleep. Job's heart yearned for Jesus. Job's heart yearned for his Savior. Job knew that God would one day put an end to all Job's suffering, sickness, sorrow, sadness. Job trusted that his God was holy and perfect and loving and in heaven, so Job trusted that his God had declared Job holy and perfect. Job trusted God loved him, even in his terrible physical pain. Job believed that God would take him to heaven. Job knew he would get a better body, perfect skin, new flesh, and that would be forever. Maybe his life stunk, but he would get to die and be with his Redeemer.

Maybe your life does stink. You can be real with God about that. But you know what? You too will get to die. God already punched your ticket to heaven when God raised his Son Jesus. And because Jesus is raised to perfect and eternal life, you will be raised to perfect and eternal life. Because your Redeemer lives, you will live. Your new life will be perfect and holy and with God and without suffering. Think about eternal life after you die. You can leave the glasses at the door. You will see God with your own, perfect eyes. You can leave the ibuprofen and oxycotin and morphine behind. You won't have any more pain to relieve. Your life won't stink. Your life will be perfect. It isn't over when you die. Your life, real life, perfect life, just starts when this temporary life of stinkiness ends. God has already given you the ultimate rescue: the rescue from sin, from sadness, from suffering. God will rescue you from every other problem as well.

You know, Job was wrong about something. Now, I'm not saying that there's a mistake in the Bible. But Job was mistaken when he said, "My eyes will never see happiness again." Job did see happiness. But it's almost like God had to bring Job to the point of despairing of any happiness on earth so God could help Job focus on the real, eternal happiness of heaven. Every one of Job's sufferings was a blessing in disguise, a chance for Job to refocus his attention on his Redeemer and recenter his life on his ultimate rescue in heaven. God has to do that for us, too. God uses suffering so we realize, "this earth is not heaven. This life is not all there is." It's often only when we see, "life stinks," that then we pray, "Lord, let me die and be with you."

Once Job thought, "My eyes will never see happiness again," then God had Job right where he wanted him. Once job stopped looking for happiness on this earth and focused on the happiness of heaven, then Job could really enjoy happiness on earth as a gift of God. You see, God promised forgiveness, not happiness. God saved us from our eternal sins, not from our earthly sadness. Once we realize that, and only once we realize that, can we fully enjoy the happiness God gives on this earth. There was a happy ending for Job. Job's health was restored. Job lived 140 more years. He had ten more children and saw their descendants to the fourth generation. God used these trials to bring a happy ending. Once Job was ready to die, then Job was really ready to live. Once Job realized, "Life stinks," then he could really look forward to getting to die and be with his Redeemer. Maybe life stinks, but then, as a Christian, you get to die. And once you are ready to die, then you are really ready to live. Amen.