

“Confronting Chaos - With God”

Perhaps it is all this 24 hour news or the volume of information or the graphic nature of reporting or the numerous ways of receiving instant messages, BUT the world at present seems to me to be in utter chaos! Dafur, Sudan: with all we know about the tragedy there, the world community doesn't seem to have the political or moral will to stop the slaughter! At times I'm overwhelmed and stop reading and watching television ... which is not the right response! Other times I find myself very emotional about current events. I'm not a military expert, but I do remember that my generation promised the next generations that they would never face another Viet Nam. I now have this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. All I have to see is a picture of The Wall and I well up with tears!

I seek my comfort in the study of Scripture. I find at the end of the Book of Job a promise that God battles the chaos ... that the world lies in the hands of God ... and therefore ... I have hope ... right now a fragile hope! This is comforting as well as perplexing ... comforting in the sense that I am assured God stands with me while the chaos is happening ... perplexing in that ... if God is also battling the chaos ... there is a sense that the world may be out of control ... that chaos is a given and ongoing ... that I live on the edge of the abyss of chaos and life throws me into the darkness of chaos, and I have to fight my way up and out ... only to be pushed back down!

If this is so, like Job, I must ask God, “Why?” “Why, God, do You allow the chaos, the darkness to envelope our lives?” At this point, today's lesson from the Book of Job confronts us with a difficult truth to swallow. For like Job, our thoughts about God are way too small. Our view of the world puts the individual human being at the center. The term to describe such a belief is “anthropocentric.” Anthropology is the study of humans ... anthrop means human beings and centric means center. Anthropocentric means that humans beings believe and act as if they are the center of all life, and everything God created is for humans beings like us: all earth's resources, all plant and animal life, everything created for humans to use as needed without regard to the balance of nature. Anthropocentric thinking has serious ramifications for the environment, for mental health, for the total welfare of the planet.

In fact, the very philosophy of anthropocentric thinking has contributed in large measure to the today's world chaos. If we assume we are the center of the world, then we also assume that God primarily reacts to human conduct. In other words, all God is concerned about is us. When we are broken, we expect God to mend us. When we're faced with tragedy, we assume God will make things right. When there is an injustice, a Good God will rain down justice --- and so on!

This may come as a shock to you, BUT God does not work that way ... and neither does life! God is not only concerned for us. God is concerned for the whole of His Creation. We are not the center of all life. We are but a piece of a very complex puzzle that makes up the whole. God is not a Super Fireman, putting out all the fires. God is not a Super Engineer, fixing all the broken structures. God is not at our beckon call. Putting it crassly: God does not serve us ... we serve God!

Much of what goes on around us, we don't understand; nor can we understand; nor should we try to understand. We can not read God's mind, nor play God. However, we are to worship God, and be in tune with what we were created to do on God's behalf. We are to trust God, and rely on God's presences to be with us in the chaos. We are to confront the chaos of our life, not expecting to fully understand, but trusting that God will eventually subdue the chaos. Instead of anthropocentric thinking, we are to view our life, our world in “Theo-centric” terms -- “Theo” meaning God. In other words, God is at the center of life ... not humans being!

You may respond by thinking, “Well, that makes sense!” But it's not that easy. Who here lives all the time, as if God is the center of their life? More often than not, we live from a self-center, not a God-center. Today's lesson is a word out of the chaos. Job has just lost his home, his business. All Job's children are dead. Now Job has lost his health, his body disfigured with open sores. In chapter three, Job wishes he is dead, “Let the day perish wherein I was born.” In chapter seven, Job cries out, “My days are without hope!” Job constantly petitions God in prayer, beginning with “Why?” Why this? Why that?” “Why me?” We've had the “Job Syndrome” ... because from our self-center we question God, and expect God to fix every human disaster.

For a moment, think how easily we push things off on God! What do we say to those who suffer and raise questions about their suffering? Listen to us: “It's just God's will. You'll have to accept it.” “God never puts more on us than we can bear.” “I'm sure that the president knows more about what's right in this situation than we do.” We mean well ... but listen closely to our platitudes ... silly little mumblings that explain nothing. This is our “anthropocentric” nature that pushes the

responsibility of events that cause suffering off on God. "This is God's will" --- to which I have heard numerous times ... "If this is God's will, then I want no more to do with God!" Or, as Job said, "Why is light not given to one in misery?"

The book of Job is an attempt to understand the paradoxes of the ways of God and the mystery of our life. Today's lesson concludes that the ways of God are past finding out and beyond human understanding. After Job finishes questioning God, God interrogates Job, and Job answers each question with a "No." The conclusion being, that if these things are beyond Job's reach, how can he understand the great mysteries. One commentator sums it up in this unique way: "For a moment God paused, then He resumed: Do you, who had so much to say about the way I govern, really want to start an argument with me? Then please, first answer the questions I have put to you? The floor is yours!"

But Job replied: I now realize I can never speak with You on a basis of equality. I am too puny and all of what I would say would be irrelevant. So I am keeping my mouth shut and cover it with my hand ... I have no answer. To all your questions, God, that began with "Who? I have to admit the answer is You, not I." We can never fully understand life, the world, and why things happen the way they happen. There are events beyond our understanding. There is the chaos, which includes our misunderstandings; and there is the darkness, which we can not comprehend. The best we can do is confront the chaos with trust and hope in God.

There is a story about an old woman in Ireland so poor that the Catholic parish had to pay her bills. This was despite the fact her son had immigrated to the United States and had become very wealthy. He opened a string of retail stores in New York City and business had boomed. "Why doesn't James help his ma?" her friends often inquired. One day the priest dropped by and asked, "Mrs. Gillhooley, do you ever hear from James in America?" Proudly she told the priest, "Yes, James writes me every week and always encloses a picture." "Have you put the pictures aside?" asked the priest." "Certainly," she said, "I put them in my New Testament."

The pastor examined her NT and found it stuffed with 50 pictures of Benjamin Franklin, all resting comfortably on \$100 dollar bills. The woman did not understand because she did not understand foreign currency. We see only what we are trained and want to see. The fact is our vision is limited, so much so that most of life is shrouded in mystery beyond our understanding. However, if our vision of God is made broader, the chaos becomes tolerable and we can withstand the onslaught of life's many tragedies ... we can face the chaos unafraid and without the compulsion to ask "Why?" We even come to know the futility of asking "Why?"

Ferguson Jenkins had a wildly successful career in baseball. He played for four teams over 19 years as a pitcher, winning 20 or more games in seven seasons and is the only Canadian in baseball's Hall of Fame. In January of 1991, four days after he made the Hall of Fame, his wife, Maryanne, died of complications from injuries in an earlier car accident. Then, just before the Christmas of 1994, his second wife, Cindy, and three-year-old daughter, Samantha, died from carbon monoxide poisoning, caused by an apparent suicide. "How can anyone understand?" Ferguson Jenkins later told a writer, "How can anyone understand if I can't understand?" Jenkins maintains a strong belief in God. When Cindy and Samantha died, he called a local minister and they talked for hours. "He told me that God will not put more pressure on an individual than he can handle," Jenkins said. At the time, Jenkins did not think he could handle it. If there is a 100-point scale of grief, he was nudging the high 90's. The paradoxes of the ways of God are part of the mystery of our life. But, like Job of old, Jenkins made it and while he still doesn't understand, he trusts God ... and that's about all any of us can do when we don't understand.

Job cried out at the chaos and disorder in his own life desperate to sustain his own innocence. Fine! But how much greater the chaos against which God strives. I didn't say this sermon would give answers, at least not the answers we want. Job's story is a picture of reality in which God struggles. Human suffering is only part of the chaos ... one little corner of the chaos against which God is in battle. However, God and Job do have something in common, after all. Like Job, God is also busy trying to bring some sense out of the craziness ... some order out of chaos and, like Job, God will not give up the battle.

For some reason, chaos and evil are part and parcel of the world. Even God's rule does not destroy them. Yet, God will keep them in check. It is a vision of the world that's complex, not simple. God created the world. God made us all and God continues to struggle with us all. Do not give up your faith when faced with chaos. Do not give up on God when life crumbles. Shake your fist at the chaos and cry out, "You will not have me! You will not defeat me! I have a bigger God and I trust that God is with me!" If you can boldly, courageously do that, you will be triumphant!! Amen!!