

Temporary Trials Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B February 4, 2018 10:00 AM
Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; **Mk 1:29-39** (How we are coping with the inevitable disappointments, disillusionments, and suffering that comes our way in life?)

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle; they come to an end without hope.”

I don’t believe you’ll find this quotation in a Hallmark card, but **sooner or later everyone experiences disillusionment and disappointment in life**, sometimes way too early. Ordinarily the young are very optimistic; it is their nature. So when we find a young person who is depressed, we know we have a very serious issue that must be addressed; but the older we get the more normal, natural, and even healthy it is to experience depression. The reason is that **we are traumatized by life-altering events**, and these events leave us reeling. At times it may seem that life is not worth living, that life is pointless and depression, therefore, is perfectly logical.

So **Job** speaks for all of us in aspects of our life, in episodes of our life. And he is **presented as a wise man**, not because he avoids suffering or hardship or depression, but rather because **he never blames anyone**. He does not blame God. He doesn’t blame himself. He doesn’t blame “this lousy world” or anything else. **He simply accepts what he cannot overcome**. And indeed, in the story, **God allows Job to experience trials to test him**. And it is clearly in the story a test: **is Job’s goodness merely dependent on the good circumstances he enjoys? Is Job’s righteousness merely a matter of giving back what he has received, or is there something more there?** That’s the question.

Now the gospels make it very clear that **God is offering us an eternal gift: life with God, whereas all our trials are temporary**—all our trials are temporary. That’s something Job himself saw. So this brings up some worthwhile questions about **how we are coping with the inevitable disappointments, disillusionments, and suffering that comes our way in life?** I have often heard, and you probably have too, people questioning: Why did God do this? Now I understand where that’s coming from; however, we need to prepare ourselves by realizing what Jesus tried to teach about life: that **God is not controlling what happens in life**. And those who believe in a god who does control everything, and there are people that believe this way, they are believing in a false god. That is not the God revealed in Christ or in the prophets. The reason for this of course is shrouded in unexplainable mystery, but there are some clues.

We see that the world is unfinished and that we are created with tremendous power, intelligence, and ability to transform it. We are capable of bringing the world and ourselves to perfection. That is a fundamental understanding of Christianity, always has been. **We do not believe in determinism** in any form, surely not God determining everything. Nor do we believe something else, some fate, is determining everything. No, **it's a world in which human free will is very important for better or for worse.**

And Jesus himself is the prime example. If Job didn't show us this, then **Jesus** should show us this, that **his life in union with the Father and the Spirit in no way exempted him from suffering and death.** And in his case his suffering was not the result of problems like diseases or inevitable misfortunes, which everyone experiences to some degree. Rather **his suffering came from deliberate malice, which he absorbed and forgave.** But **Jesus made a positive impact on people's lives in two ways.** First of all as the gospel this morning said, wherever he could he applied divine aid to the sick, to the possessed, to the burdened. **He left people much better than he found them.**

But second, and actually much more importantly, **in his resurrection he overcame the whole gamut of sin and death, thus pointing to the real thing: eternal life with God.** In contrast to eternal life with God, nothing can hold a candle. St. Paul rightly muses that his sufferings, which were extensive involving imprisonment, torture, rejection, derision, were nothing in comparison to the glory that God has in store for all those who believe in him, for all those who love him. And this offers us perhaps, only perhaps, but it offers us **a possible reason for suffering, namely, separating those who really do love God and want to depend on God from those who only believe in what they see and depend only on themselves.** But even Jesus prayed that this cup would pass, and it did not. But even Jesus' suffering on the cross was temporary on the road to eternal blessing. And he is our way, and he is our life, and he is our truth.