

Disciples Live By Faith  
Job 19:23-27a  
Rev. Dexter Kearny  
Longview Presbyterian Church  
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“O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Job really does get the short end of the stick. Here is the prototypical follower and worshipper of God. He does everything right according to the story. He has a loving family and a successful business. He treats others justly and with respect. He goes to the temple daily to make sacrifices to cover all the sins that he committed as well as any potential sins that may have been committed by his children. He goes over the top to be a good person. He is a righteous man.

And then here comes the testing as the story phrases it. Job loses his flocks and his wealth, his home, his children, and his health. His well-meaning friends come along and sit with him for a bit before trying to convince him that he must have done something wrong and that is why he is being “punished.” This is too much for Job. He knows that he did nothing wrong. He knows that he is righteous and therefore God must be in the wrong for doing these horrible things to him.

Job does not understand why these things have happened to him. Questions all of us have asked at one point or another, “Why me?” “What does God have against me?” “What did I do wrong?” It seems to Job that God has abandoned him or turned on him. “O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book... and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God.” “Then even if I die, my words would prove that I was righteous and wrongly punished.”

Job had a choice. Job could stay in relationship with God fighting and clinging to faith, or he could throw it all away, curse God, and move on.

This week as I was working on this sermon, Pastor Liz reminded me of a story about this band called Over the Rhine. Over the Rhine is an Ohio based folk music group made up of a husband and wife team, Linford and Karin. They were popular in the late 90s and early 2000s.

Sadly, during the peak of their career, Linford and Karin were growing more and more distant. Linford talks about this growing distance and said that being such a public figure had caused him to try and “maintain a perfect facade...”<sup>1</sup> But this facade made real connection with Karin difficult. Karin described how working together was actually part of the problem, “[W]e thought we were feeding the relationship, but we were not.”<sup>2</sup> Their marriage was on the brink even as their band was taking off. They were experiencing success on the road but trouble at home.

Karin and Linford had a choice. They could choose to stay and fight it out which could be really hard and painful and there was no guarantee that it would work. Or they could choose to end their marriage and go their separate ways.

Job, when faced with this decision, chose the difficult path of staying. The theologian Kathryn Schifferdecker calls it a “posture of lament -- holding on to God with one hand and shaking your fist at God with the other; not letting God off the hook for one minute, but staying in relationship with that God.”<sup>3</sup> Job is teaching us all about the tensions of faith. Faith is not only available in the good times or the happy times. It is not only available when it feels good or when everything is going right. Faith is lived and made real when it gets hard.

Faith is choosing to believe and placing your trust in God. Lament comes when those beliefs are challenged, when the lived world looks different from the faithful visions of goodness and justice. Job’s proclamation of faith “For I know that my Redeemer lives...” is shouted in the midst of his pain and suffering. When choosing to stay and try and make things work out with no guarantee, Job shows us

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<sup>1</sup> <https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/spring2k6/bookfilm/marriage.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/spring2k6/bookfilm/marriage.asp>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3075](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3075)

a path forward. Job shows us how to hold the tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be. Job teaches us to lament.

We have more than enough reason to lament in our world today, whether it is the destruction of our climate, the lack of civility in public discourse, the broken relationships in our lives, the poor diagnosis that a loved one has received, or those painful moments that make us shake our fists at God. So how do we hold that tension between this broken world and the promises of God? As Job teaches us, holding onto faith is not easy in these times, but the choice is before us.

Over the Rhine chose the hard path too. They cancelled their successful tour halfway through. They started to go to counseling. Even with the divorce papers on the table, they fought to keep their marriage alive. And through the darkness they came back together, learning how to communicate and be with one another. Through counseling they began a new ritual of intimate conversations over the table with a bottle of wine. The apocryphal version says they would sit and talk until the bottle was empty. Through counseling and conversation and fighting for one another, they held onto the tension between their broken marriage and the hope of restoring it to be better than it was. Their ritual was a form of faith. A form of lament. A choice to hold onto the other even in the midst of brokenness.

This is what it means when we say disciples live by faith. It is not a happy go lucky, naive sense that everything is okay or will be okay. It is a difficult path that is not easy and there are no guarantees. And so Job and the band Over the Rhine teach us about the ritual of lament. The practice of holding the tension between this broken world and the wonderful promises of God.

We all have been given the choice, the freedom to choose to stay and tough it out or to give it up and walk away. There are no guarantees on either path. But as disciples of Jesus, we can walk in the footsteps of the Cloud of Witnesses, of Job, the persistent widow, King David, the psalms, or Over the Rhine, who all practice faithfulness through the ritual of lament. We hold onto faith, we hold onto hope, knowing that our God can handle our anger, that our God desires for wholeness and peace, and that the world as God desires it has not been fully realized yet. We talk, shout, and fight to hold onto our relationship with God!

So this week, I invite you to check out the homework journals and to write your own lament. There is a template and an example from Psalm 22. Express your

anger, your pain, your doubts, and your questions to God. Picture your hope for the way the world could be. Picture God's promises and God's future. And in this tension of lament we will live by faith and can proclaim alongside Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives..."