

Sermon 111515 Blame
Scripture- Job 19:23-27a
Sermon Title- The Blame Game

In 2007, the fabulous Meg and I took a remarkable seminary course together. The professors, there were two of them, said that they thought that this course was unique, maybe in the world. The course is on the Book of Job. That is not what makes it unique, however. It was being taught at Hebrew College, which is right next door to Andover Newton Theological School. One professor was an ordained Protestant minister and the other professor was an ordained Rabbi. The student group was split fairly evenly between Christians and Jews. They paired us up as study partners, a Christian and a Jew in a program common among Jews known as haveruta. My partner was named Rogerio and he came from Brazil. English is his second language. In seminaries there are lots of courses about other religions, but the professors don't know of any other courses where two different religions are sitting together studying the same text. I can't tell you how rich this experience was for all of us. The thing I liked the most about it is that everyone was there to learn, including the professors, who were paired up for study. There was no, "We are right and you are wrong." We were there with open minds and hearts. It was really something.

The other thing that made the class extraordinary was the text that we were studying. It is the book that I want to preach on this morning, The Book of Job. Now, some people only know the phrase, ‘The patience of Job.’ Some people have read this book from the Hebrew Bible and gotten stuck on a certain part that they can’t get past so they end up hating the book. I’ve got a family member like that regarding ‘Job.’ But I’ve learned in some ways Job is one of the most extraordinary documents in the Bible, or anywhere in literature for that matter. It pushes the reader on the biggest questions and issues that we ever deal with in life. It raises, in unique ways, powerful questions of faith like, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” and “What is the nature of God?” and “What is the source of evil?”

Now, you might be happy to learn that I don’t plan to wrestle with all those questions this morning. There is another question, among many, that bubbles up in Job, however, that I’d like to work on this morning. Here’s the question, “Why is it that when something goes wrong, we love to-maybe even need to-blame someone?” We love the ‘gotcha’ game. This happens at home, at work, in the schools, in the church, and at play. This, I will submit, is what sports fans love most about being sports fans. If the team loses, the blame game starts-fire the coach, or put in the rookie, or trade the bum. By the way, a wise coach once said,

“As soon as you start thinking like the fans, you’ll be sitting with them.”

Anyway, this compulsion to point a finger at someone when things go wrong is right off the charts popular and maybe always has been. Why is this so popular? Does it give us a chance to feel superior? Now granted, there are lots of times when blame is warranted. That’s why we have courts and jails. If you drive drunk and get into a crash, you are to blame. Period. But, we move that ‘justice system’ mentality into all aspects of our lives, including our faith lives.

Let me ask you this. Think of when you have been blamed for something, and we all have; at the time, did you have some well-meaning reasons for what you did? Were you ever blamed for something that you did but had no intention of or expectation of the negative results? Have you ever been blamed for something and known in your heart that you were doing the right thing but somehow it just didn’t work out the way you had hoped? Have you ever hit a low point in your life and have someone say to you, “It’s your own darned fault.” Did you ever wish that you could be innocent until proven guilty instead of the other way around? If we all know how painful it is to be unjustly blamed, why are we still so quick to blame others?

Let's take a look at The Book of Job to see what it does with the issue of blame. The story is a folktale of a man named Job who is virtuous in every way. He is quite rich with many herds and a large family. He prays to God every day and takes good care in all aspects of his life. Satan is in this story, but we need to be very careful here. This story is from ancient times. Satan is not the devil in this story. In fact, the Bible that Jews read doesn't call the character Satan, but the Accuser. Again, this is an ancient folktale. Think of Satan in this story as an angel who is still on God's side. So this Satan character, or Accuser, is in a discussion with God and says that it is easy for Job to be pious and virtuous because God has given Job so many blessings. God says that Job would be virtuous even without all that he has. God agrees to test Job's piety. God lets Satan strip Job of everything, his riches, his family, his health. So Job is left with nothing but boils on his skin. When we get to the 19th chapter, the part that we heard read this morning, Job not only is in a state of misery, but three of his supposed friends have come to visit and *blame* Job for what has happened to him. God must be punishing Job for something, they say. They know of nothing that Job has done to deserve this, but they are quick to point the finger, to play the blame game. They are saying to Job, who is completely innocent and at his lowest point, "It's your own darned fault."

How does Job answer? This is the pivotal question of life. How do you answer when the tide of life turns against you? How do you answer when things go badly? How do you answer when you are unjustly blamed? Some of us can't wait to point the finger elsewhere...to blame someone else...to play the victim card. Some even point the accusing finger at God when calamity falls hard upon them. "Why is God doing this to me?" is so often asked.

So, how does Job respond from his poverty and ill health with his friends blaming him? In his wisdom, Job says in our passage this morning, "I know my Redeemer lives." He is saying that there is a God somewhere. This is what Job can teach us this morning. When we are in our darkest night, there is a God somewhere. When we are blamed and we know we are innocent, there is a God somewhere. When we unjustly point the finger of blame, there is a God somewhere. When bigotry and hatred reign on earth, there is a God somewhere. When natural disasters strike, there is a God somewhere. When hunger and injustice prevail in large portions of our planet, there is a God somewhere. When illness and death overtake us, there is a God somewhere.

This is what faith is all about, my friends, and hope. Job goes on to say-he gives here the great foreshadowing that belongs to great faith. He says that the best is yet to be. You see; the

secular world loves to dwell on the past and try to explain it, which is why the blame game exists. It takes a life of faith, to see the best is ahead. Job, in his wisdom, understands that the future is not our future but God's future that we are blessed to be part of, even with all our sorrows. It is in Job's darkest hour that he says, "I know my Redeemer lives." Job, in his worst moment, has hope that is born not out of pleasure but out of suffering.

Here's what I'd like all of us to try this week. When things go badly for you, or when things go badly for someone else. When the much made plans just go *'phut.'* When you are ready to point the finger of blame, or when the finger is pointed at you. When you are ready to say, "It's his own darned fault." I want you to say, "I know my Redeemer lives." I want you to remember, particularly when you are in the 'dark night of the soul' that there is a God somewhere and that God loves you. There is no night that is not followed by the dawn. Yes, I know that my Redeemer lives.
AMEN