**What did I Do?!**

**October 3, 2021, Pentecost 19b**

Job 1:1, 2:1-10 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Mark 10: 1-16

This week for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, one of the things I did was watch the movie, [*We Were Children*](https://gem.cbc.ca/media/we-were-children/s175). It follows the story of two survivors of residential school, Lyna Hart in Manitoba and Lyna Hart in Saskatchewan. The movie moves back and forth from Lyna and Glen telling their story, to the story being shown as a movie. It is very moving and powerful and painful. There is one section of Glens’ story that was something I had not heard of happening before. He had a conversation with his cousin who was going home for a visit. Glen decided he would like to go home for a visit as well, even though he was an orphan and was being raised by his grandfather before he was sent to school. He was granted his wish and a priest is seen putting his suitcase in the back of a truck in the winter time. The priest tells Glen that he just started the truck so why don’t we go inside while it warms up. They go into the priests house and he asks Glen if he likes secrets. Glen nods yes, and the priest removes a rug from the floor of the living room to reveal a trap door. He opens it up and encourages Glen to come down and see what’s there. In the basement, he takes him thru a dugout hallway, to a room with two closets with latches on them. He opens one up and tells Glen to go in and look. As Glen hesitantly edges his way in the priest pushes him in, shutting the door and locking it. Glen pounds on the door, screaming, let me out, please! What did I do??!! What did I do?! He figured he was in there for about a week and a half and each time the priest came to give him a bit of food, Glen would plead with him to let him out, and as the door closed again, he would yell, what did I do??!!, as he pounded on the door.

When we experience suffering for no reason, we sometimes wonder, What did I do? That is the question being explored in the book of Job and in our reading today. The book of Job was written to address the simplistic doctrine of retribution in Deuteronomy. It is most clearly expressed in Deuteronomy 28: “all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God … But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you”. So people believed that if they suffer it is because of something they did. The story of Job challenges that, because Job is blameless and upright, faithful to God in all areas. Jesus challenged this belief as well when asked by his disciples about a man being blind, was it because of his sin or his parent’s sin – Jesus said it was neither. In this passage from Job, it seems God and the one named as Satan are playing with Job’s life to see if his faith holds up when faced with suffering. It is important to note that the satan being named here is not the same satan as identified later in the bible and in the Gospels. This is more of an angel who is acting as a prosecuting attorney – presenting an adversarial position to make a point. The whole book of Job, is about trying to understand suffering in the world, more than it is about God allowing satan to toy with Job, and as such is a literary tool to explore the questions of suffering. The message in today’s reading, is that through all the challenges Job faces, losing most of his family, his wealth, and now his health, he still remains faithful to God, naming that God is in the good and the bad. We might name it as God is with us in the good and the bad.

Many of us would agree that God does not cause bad things to happen and that suffering is not a result of anything that we did. Especially suffering such as tragic death in the family, cancer or other disease, mental illness, the list could go on. However even though we know this in our heads, we can still find ourselves asking the question of why me? What did I do to deserve this? When we are experiencing suffering. This can be part of the process of moving through the suffering. The God of love and compassion is with us in these questions and in the pain we feel. When children are suffering, it can be much more difficult for them to experience as they try to understand or make sense of life that sometimes does not make sense.

Maybe that is why Jesus, in our passage today, once again emphasizes the importance of children and being like children. While children experiencing pain and suffering in their lives can be very difficult for them, it can also lead to truth telling and them not putting up with suffering they know is unnecessary or can be changed, as they get older. We have seen this with the Climate Change crisis. This week, there has been an international gathering of youth addressing the climate crisis called [Youth4Climate – Driving Ambition.](https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/press-releases/young-people-ready-join-global-climate-conference) While Greta Thunberg challenges leaders to do more than talk, because she is tired of their blah, blah blah with no action, Vanessa Nakate from Uganda identifies that we are still waiting for funds promised by 2020. She says: “No more empty conferences. It’s time to show us the money. It’s time, it’s time, It’s time.” She also identified how ironic it is how much climate change is affecting the continent of Africa when Africa is the lowest emitter of CO2 emissions other than Antarctica. She recently witnessed police taking away the body of a man who had been washed away by violent storms. It is traumatising for young people to witness such things, and yet they are strong and determined to speak out and work for change. Can we become like them in the midst of our suffering? I believe God is in and with these voices of young people and all who suffer. It is important for us as well to support those who are suffering and in pain, to be God’s presence of love, compassion and support as we can, even if we don’t have words. Sometimes a silent presence is better than struggling for words.

As we move through times of struggle and suffering, when we wonder What did I Do?, may we know our personal suffering is not because of anything we’ve done, nor that God is punishing us, but that God is with us, and suffers with us. May we move in the suffering to speak the truths that need to be heard. May we know God is with us in the good and the bad that we experience, not causing it, but bearing it with us. May God stir us from the placidness that enables us to continue to accept the status quo that we may dream dreams, and see visions, and arise to support those in need, with boldness and love.