

The Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany
February 12, 2012
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Job 7:1-7 – Epiphany 5

“Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. (NIV)

Life is hard. Would you agree or disagree with this statement? Perhaps it would depend on which day or week I asked. But all of us have times in life where we would agree wholeheartedly with the statement that life is hard. Have you experienced pain recently, maybe the sharp short kind of pain from a paper cut or migraine headache? Maybe others of you have you been dealing with the long nagging drawn out kind of pain from a chronic backache or a torn rotator cuff. Have you been sick or tired? Have you been treated unfairly? Have you suffered the pain of losing a job or a loved one? The fact is all of us suffer. All of us will suffer. Aren't you glad you came to church this morning to hear this? Yet, the truth life is hard is exactly what God told Adam and Eve it would be after this world became corrupted by sin. God said life would be painful. God said people will suffer, they will get sick, they will get tired, worn out, and then they will die.

So the question we have before us today as we look to God's Word is not whether we will suffer or not in this world, but how will we react to such suffering? To whom will we turn? Will we become bitter? Will we complain? Do we have friends and family around us who will support us and give us godly advice? When we suffer will we do so in faith and utter words similar to Job? It is important for us to realize how hopeless and helpless we are on our own – to recognize our lives go by like a breath – to remember that we are weak yet He is strong. When we suffer and begin to feel like we are on the brink of despair, we too would do well to cry like Job *“Remember, O God”*:
Remember Me, O God.

Isn't it annoying when you are suffering and someone says to you: *“You think you have it bad you should have seen the time when...?”* Well, sorry but I am going to do that today! If we consider our sufferings great, perhaps we need to look at what Job suffered. Looking at what Job suffered will help us understand also the words before us. Job is described as an upright and blameless man who feared the Lord and shunned evil. God pointed to Job as a great example of faith. But Satan said the only reason Job feared God is because God surrounded Job with so many blessings. The devil said that without those blessings Job would curse God. So the Lord told Satan: ***“Everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”***

The devil quickly got to work on having Job suffer loss. One day, a messenger runs to tell Job all his oxen and donkeys were stolen and carried away. While that

messenger was still speaking, another servant comes in and explains to Job how fire came from the sky and burned up all his sheep and servants. While that messenger is still speaking, another one runs in to tell Job about raiders who came in and swept away his camels. While that messenger was still speaking, Job now gets word that his seven sons and three daughters were all killed suddenly as a mighty wind collapsed the house in which they were eating. Talk about a nightmare! Talk about suffering!

Yet, after all this, Job falls to the ground and says: ***“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”*** Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. God points to Job’s faith as an example once again, but Satan’s reply is ***“skin for skin.”*** The devil says strike this man’s flesh and bones and then he will surely curse God. The Lord says to Satan: ***“Very well, then he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.”*** So Job is afflicted with painful sores from head to toe. To make it worse Job’s wife tells him to just curse God and die. Job rebukes her: ***“You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”***

Next, Job’s three friends come to visit Job after hearing about all his suffering. Job’s condition is so awful we read that his friends barely recognize him. Seeing Job, these friends begin to cry aloud. They sit by Job for seven days without saying a single word because they saw Job was in so much pain. Then they end the silence, but it would have been better if they remained quiet. Instead of offering comfort and support, instead of pointing Job to the promises of a good and gracious God, Job’s buddy Eliphaz tells Job God is punishing him for something. He tells Job he needs to repent of whatever it was he did so that God will give Job relief.

This heartless judging stings Job and causes a predictable reaction. We begin to see Job’s sinful nature as he becomes bitter and angry. These words of our text are a small portion of Job’s response to his friend. Job says life on earth is hard. The word translated *hard service* is the same word used for warfare. Job calls man’s days like that of a hired hand. A person’s days are long and tough and in the end the most a person hopes to receive is a wage. Like a slave Job says he looks forward to the end of the day to get some rest from his labor. Yet, the night provides no relief.

Have you ever had one of those restless nights where you are so sick or in so much pain you can’t wait for the morning? Night after night was like that for Job. He had months of futility and nights of misery. Job says, ***“When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering.”*** Job compares his days to a weaver’s shuttle. He feels like a tiny thread that will soon be cut loose. Job recognizes his days are short and begins to think ***“they come to an end without hope.”*** He wonders if his eyes will ever see happiness again.

Have you ever been there? Perhaps none of us can come close to saying we have experienced the extreme suffering of Job, but Job’s suffering is by no means unique. We too suffer. Do we ever complain or become bitter? Do we ever wonder what God is doing at times in our life and what His plans are for us? Have we ever felt as if our burdens are too much for us to bear?

So where is the hope in these verses? Where is Job’s hope and ours in time of suffering? It is simply in the fact that at such times Job has Someone to go to at all. He has a God who hears and answers him. It is in the very fact that Job is able to turn to the

Lord in prayer and say: “**Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath.**” In pain Job’s only recourse is prayer that trusts in the mercy of God and in the power of God to relieve and to rescue. The devil causes and uses misery to drive us away from God, but God allows it to drive us to our knees. God wants to drive us to our knees so that He can raise us up again with His grace. The Lord uses our suffering to teach us to rely on Him - to look again to the gospel in hope and trust that triumphs even if the suffering stays.

Did God remember Job? Does God remember us when we cry: “*Remember me, O God?*” I pray we do not even have to read the rest of Job’s story to know the answer. God remembers. He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not along with Him graciously give us all things? God did more than remember us. He gave us His Son. Jesus never complained or became bitter even though He suffered the greatest of injustices. The exchange is we get Jesus’ righteousness, and Jesus got our sins. We get a crown, Jesus got a cross. We get to be free from sickness, pain, and death forever in heaven, Jesus had to suffer hell.

If God cared that much, will he not also care about us when we suffer? God’s children are the apple of His eye – and like most God is very protective of His eye. He loves and protects His children at all times. This might sound like a strange statement to make after seeing what happened to Job, but did you notice that God put limits on what the devil could do to Job? God will never allow more than we can bear. God will never allow anything to come into our lives that will not be for our own good. Even our suffering serves a purpose! What comfort these truths give!

So again the question is not whether we will suffer, but how will we react to such suffering? Will we despair? Will we complain and be bitter? Will we want to curse God and die? Or will we turn to the One who hears us and answers us? Will we pray to God and rely on His good and gracious promises? Will we put our trust in the Lord at all times? If we skip to the end of Job we see how God blessed Job with more possessions, and more servants, and even more children. But if that is all we see we missed the point – the greatest thing God blessed Job with was a stronger faith. Even more Job learned to place His trust in His God who remembered him. I pray our sufferings teach us to do the same. I pray with the confidence of Job we proclaim even in our greatest of suffering: “***I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!***” Amen.