

October 8, 2017
“Let Us Pray ~ A Harvest Sermon Series”

NO, WHY, HELP

First Reading ~ Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Once upon a time, in the land of Uz, there lived a man named Job. Job was honest and upright, revered God, and turned away from evil.

One day the heavenly court came to present themselves before YHWH, and Satan was among them. YHWH said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered, “Here and there. Roaming around the world.” YHWH said to Satan, “Have you noticed Job, my faithful one? There is no one on Earth like him, he is blameless and upright, reveres God, and turns away from evil. His integrity remains intact, even though you incited me to ruin him without cause!”

Satan replied, “Skin for skin! A person will give away every possession just to stay alive. But reach out your hand and strike Job’s flesh and bone, and he will curse you to your face.” So YHWH said to Satan, “Very well, Job is in your hand. Just spare his life.”

So Satan left YHWH’s presence, and afflicted Job with painful boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Job would take potshard to scrape his skin with as he sat among the ashes. Job’s wife said to him, “So you’re still holding onto your integrity? Curse God, and die!” He replied, “Only foolish people speak like that. If we accept happiness from God, we should also accept adversity.” Through all this, Job did not sin with his words.

Second Reading ~ *From Uncommon Gratitude: Alleluia For All That Is,*
by Sister Joan Chittister and Rowan Williams, Former Archbishop of Canterbury

Until we ourselves have borne the blows of life, it is so easy to become swaddled in the superficial. Suffering is what puts us in touch with the rest of the human race.

But suffering is not a steady-state position. On the contrary. It is suffering that moves us to rethink life, to find other kinds of meaning in life, to realize that life is made up of stages, each one different from the last, each one a new challenge- a new pitfall -as we begin to negotiate the tasks peculiar to each of them.

We begin to ask new questions of life as we deal with suffering. We consider everything we’re doing and wonder, “Is what I am doing worth it? Is this worth my time in a life that gets increasingly shorter? Is what I am doing worth my time, my energy, my effort? Is what I am doing worth what I cannot do while I am busy doing this instead?”

These questions lead us to focus on worthier things than status or property or social contacts. They lead us to focus on our own ongoing growth and wisdom.

Third Reading ~ from Anne Lamott in *"Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy"*

When Julian of Norwich wrote that all will be well—and all will be well—she meant that things will be well at some point, in the infuriating fullness of time, when sick bodies dissolve back into light and spirit, or when God restores much of what the locusts have eaten, someday down the road. But what about this lifetime? What about sub-Saharan Africa, and the severely depressed teenager in my family? What about poor old Earth? What about me?

If only the answer were anything but time and the willingness to be changed. I desperately want to stop minding so much about other people, life, and myself. Krishnamurti, the great Indian teacher, when asked what was the secret to his serenity, said in his soft, shy voice, "I don't mind what happens." This is so not me—I mind his having even said this! I want to change, but it hurts; waking up is miserable, and transformation is terrifying. Given the choice, who would decide to grow from a clueless, shiny black tadpole to a skittish baby tree frog on a twig? The Indian Jesuit Anthony de Mello said that most people don't want this metamorphosis— they just want their toys fixed or replaced. Well, yeah. He made this sound like a bad thing.

If, against all odds and indoctrination, you do seek to emerge from tadpole stage to a wilder, more expansive, bouncier kind of life, it is probably not going to go well. Maybe this is good news, that we must crave evolution, must be willing to pay, because it means we may stick it out when life seems too hard, and take shards of progress when they come, wherever unlikely place we may find them.