

Sermon: Restoration

New North Church, Hingham

Steven Aucella

28 October 2018

Based on **Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Mark 10:46-52**

Our two readings today revolve around the theme of restoration, especially the Job reading, which comes at the end of a long and dramatic book that we could talk about for years. The Gospel reading completes a journey that began with Jesus and the disciples heading to Caesarea Philippi. Along the way, he asked them, ‘Who do people say that I am,’ which set the tone for the next two chapters.

So, just to review, for almost two months, we’ve been dealing with the question of Jesus’ identity as the Son of Man; we’ve been talking about the Kingdom of God; and three times, Jesus has predicted his own suffering and death.

It doesn’t get any lighter in the next four weeks, folks.

You may have heard that the First Baptist Church in Wakefield burned to the ground after being hit by lightning last week. This made me sad, because I love churches. When I was a little kid in Reading, right next to Wakefield, we witnessed another Baptist church burn to the ground. We know people who might point to these tragic events and say, ‘See? That’s why I don’t go to church! I could get killed!’

We also know people who were baptized and later married in the Wakefield church. For them, this is a disaster. But church officials are already talking about rebuilding. They posted a statement on their web site that said, in part, “We know that we serve a God who specializes in restoring brokenness and who can bring beauty even from ashes. So, we move into the future with trust, hope, and gratitude.”

While recognizing what a loss this is for the community and the congregation, it’s not stopping them from moving forward, which is typical of church people.

Speaking of rebuilding, a local steeplejack named Bob Levesque said, “It would cost you \$20 million to build a building like that today.”

That might be true if you built it in the same way. In Reading, the new First Baptist Church building is smaller, more compact – and made from bricks.

The Book of Job invites those who suffer unjustly, often suffering without knowing why, to vent their rage and frustration in the midst of God's silence. We can learn a lot about ourselves, about Creation, and about God all while sitting on the 'ash heap' of our despair.

Poor Job, 'a blameless and upright man' who feared God, had everything taken from him in chapter one simply because God and ha-Satan – the Adversary – got into it about how far Job's devotion to God might go if he had nothing. The story covers a lot of ground in its examination of the nature of undeserved suffering. Job's friends come along and blame him for his problems, that his sins invited God's retribution, but he knows better. No reason is ever given for his suffering; it just is. But Job does learn that there is more to God than he ever realized.

Today's reading, which ends this ancient epic, provides *restoration* but not necessarily a *resolution* to Job's overwhelming suffering, perhaps because nothing can ever completely resolve one's grief, not even a happy ending like this one.

And there is a lot here to make us believe that everything is going to be okay for Job. Notice that Job's perspective changed after his encounter with God. His awareness of God's presence, after God's prolonged and irritating silence, is transformative, and his transformation began even before his suffering ended.

In verse six, he recants when he becomes aware of God's nearness when for so long, he thought God was absent and uncaring. A more modern translation of this verse might be, 'Therefore I recant | and I am comforted concerning mortality | and repent in the human condition.' This repentance has nothing to do with admitting guilt for any perceived wrongdoing. This repentance implies a change in Job's relationship with God.

After God restored Job's fortunes, his previously unmentioned brothers and sisters, and all of his friends came over to break bread with Job. Just as it is happening now in Wakefield, God intervenes to use community to overcome suffering.

And finally, Job's transformation extends the meaning and reach of restoration. In the same way Mr. Scrooge brightens the world around him on Christmas Day, Job gave his daughters an inheritance, which was culturally radical, innovative justice.

Notice also that his daughters – but not his sons – are named: Jemimah means *Dove* and Keziah, *Cinnamon*. Keren-happuch means Horn of Antimony, or *Beautiflier*.

Just as faith transformed Job, so does faith transform the son of Timaeus.

The Gospel reading bookends a journey that began back in chapter eight when Jesus healed an unnamed blind man in Bethsaida, and it ends today with another healing. In between, Jesus encountered all kinds of *spiritual* blindness. Everywhere he went, he was challenged and resisted. His own disciples struggled to understand what he was teaching them. Just last week, James and John were more interested in where they would sit when Jesus returned in glory than they were in that suffering and dying part that would have to come first.

In contrast to them, Bartimaeus, hearing that Jesus of Nazareth was on the way, threw off his cloak, which we might interpret as Bartimaeus throwing off his old life to become a new disciple. Even before Jesus restores his sight, Bartimaeus sees, and he comprehends, better than the disciples, who seem not to perceive or understand, see or hear. Scripture invites us to see the relationship between faith and wholeness, faith and restoration, as it happened to Job and Bartimaeus.

It can be difficult to locate Job and Bartimaeus in our own situations. We want to know how Jesus did it. We want to know exactly how God restored Job and all his stuff, because we could use some of that.

What they are learning in Wakefield, what they learned in Reading 50 odd years ago, and what Job and Bartimaeus learned today, is that transformation comes from within. Bartimaeus' *faith* made him well. Even in the midst of suffering, encountering God transformed Job. His restoration helped him see a more just way of living.

In Wakefield, only a portrait of Jesus escaped the flames. Given all that happened there, how cool is that? It makes me glad to see a faith community resolve to rebuild without hesitation, resisting those things that might hinder them or hold them back. May our collective faith help us restore, conserve, and rebuild those things that we love in a future open to the possibilities of justice and salvation in a complicated world.

Amen.