

Happily Ever After

Scripture: Job 42:7-17

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Morning Service**

People of God: The hope and the message of Easter can only be appreciated in going through the season of Lent, and in particular the events of Good Friday. Some may want to short-circuit the process—going straight from the joy of Christmas to the joy of Easter and by passing the somber, reflective mood of Lent and Good Friday. After all, our society joins in with singing the festive Christmas carols and it's great to sing the Alleluias of Easter morning. But singing songs of confession and lament can be a bit of a downer. Dealing with the death of Jesus on the cross has a very serious tone to it. But it is only in the light of suffering, only in the light of the cross, can the good news of Easter truly be appreciated.

And this good news isn't limited simply to the assurance that Christ has conquered death and as a result, we can believe "in the resurrection of the dead." There is life after death. These are the words of comfort we can deliver at a funeral of a believer. And that's powerful stuff. Christ has conquered death. And that means death is not the end for the believer. Alleluia, Amen.

But Easter is more than that. On Easter morning, when Christ emerged from the tomb, he not only conquered death, he began the restoration of all of creation. His resurrection is the guarantee that all things will be made new. This "newness" isn't just for the future, it begins already now.

In Monopoly, there is a "Get out of jail free" card. It's card that you hold on to, until you need it; until you land up in jail. But until you land in jail, the card isn't worth much. It doesn't affect the rest of the game. You

even might forget about it, until you land in jail and someone reminds you of it.

Some think of Easter like that “Get our jail free” card. It’s just a message of hope for when death occurs. When we face death, we cash in that card. At death, we are reminded of the message of Easter. But that’s not how we ought to view the message of Easter. It’s not just hope for some distant future, but it is a life-changing experience in the present.

Paul in his letters constantly reminds us that in the death of Christ, our old sinful nature has died. And in his resurrection, we have been given new life. Paul puts in plainly in II Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” This newness isn’t just for the future—oh yes, it will be made complete and perfect in the future, but already now, in Christ, we are given new life. In Christ, we live the Easter life. Already now!

The ending of the Book of Job underscores these points I’ve been try to make. Here we see Job dying, a blessed man. The blessings come not after his death, as Job himself expected in chapter 19; no, he experiences them before he dies. Job experiences the blessings of Easter before his death, not afterwards. His business is restored, as he doubles all the possessions that he had in the beginning. He is blessed with seven sons and three daughters, just as before. He is given a long life, a 140 years; seeing his children and their children to the fourth generation. These are blessings in the here and now.

But these blessings cannot really be appreciated without having gone through the Book of Job, as we have done in these weeks of Lent. If we only had the last few verses of this chapter to go on, we might be somewhat impressed with his wealth and health, but it is only when we know all what Job had lost, it is only after we have heard the cold comfort of his friends, it is only after hearing the laments of Job, crying out for an answer from God, can we appreciate the sudden change in these verses. The suffering of Job is over. Alleluia. Amen.

But there are those who are disappointed in the ending of Job. There are those who think the ending it too good to be true, too neat, too unreal for what really happens in our world. The Book of Job ends like a fairy tale: And they lived happily ever after. But the objection is raised: Life isn’t a fairy tale. Life isn’t like this.

Elie Wiesel, for example, is frustrated by this ending. He was a Holocaust survivor and his gripping story of his experience in the death camps of Nazi Germany is a must read for any person. He knew what it was to suffer. For him, Job was a hero, a champion of dissent against God’s injustices. But Job caved in. He let God off the hook. No amount of

prosperity could make up for the suffering he experienced. Sure, material things can easily be replaced. But what about the ten children he lost? No parent could for a moment believe that a new brood of children would erase the sorrow of the ones he lost. And so Wiesel isn't satisfied with this fairy tale ending.

But Job's restoration is essential to the story of Job. Not that Job deserved this restoration; that he somehow earned it after all what he had gone through. It wasn't a reward for passing the test. No, this restoration is part of God's grace and mercy.

It is important to recognize that Job repented before this restoration. After God's answer in chapters 38 to 41, Job acknowledged to the Lord:

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted...
My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes. (42:2,5-6)

Job submitted himself before the Lord. While his questions about his suffering were not directly answered by God, God's response was sufficient enough for Job. He is the Creator, who cares for his creation.

And because God is that kind of God, in his grace and mercy he restores Job. I want you see how comprehensive this restoration was. I also want to show you how this restoration is a sign of what Easter has accomplished for us.

First, it involved reconciliation with his friends. This is the first thing mentioned, before business and even family. Job intercedes for his friends. They had become his foes during this long debate. And their words of cold comfort made God angry. But God offers to them forgiveness. And God makes Job part of the process of forgiveness, as Job is asked to intercede for them.

What should Job do? What would you do? Surely, it would have been tempting to leave these so-called friends out in the cold. After all, they thought you had your suffering coming to you. At least, you would rub it into their faces that they were wrong. But Job, recognizing his own need for repentance, intercedes for them and God forgave them. Reconciliation takes place.

Isn't that what Easter has accomplished? Reconciliation. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, reconciliation is now possible. Reconciliation first and foremost with God. We can have peace with God. But also with each other. The wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female is broken down in Jesus. Whatever wrongs we may have done to each other can be forgiven in Jesus. Reconciliation is possible because of Easter.

Second, the restoration of Job involved the comfort and the consolation of his extended family. Verse 11 puts it this way:

All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him.

Hospitality, an important ancient virtue, was enjoyed again. But notice, that there is no glossing over what had been lost. It's not as if the suffering had been forgotten or ignored. It is faced up to. But Job is surrounded by his extended family to strengthen and encourage him.

Easter too involves the re-creation of a renewed human community—it's called the church, the family of God. At the death of Jesus, the disciples thought that their work and mission was over. But with the resurrection, Jesus called the disciples back together to their task. That was one of his main goals during the 40 days between his resurrection and his Ascension—to reconstitute the church and give her, her marching orders.

As a result of Easter then, we are part of the church, this community of faith. And part of our calling is to encourage and strengthen each other in times of suffering and difficulty. We are to show hospitality to one another and to the stranger. To comfort and console each other. What a blessing that ought to be for us.

Third, the restoration of Job involved the double of all his possessions: 14,000 sheep, 6000 camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. Twice as much as before. Job was rich beyond his wildest dreams.

There are those (especially in the health and wealth movement or the prosperity gospel) who just focus on this part of Job's restoration as if it's the most important. It's not. On the other hand, we can't ignore it either. The restoration of Job's wealth is a sign of enjoying the blessings of creation. Job could live life to the fullest—not in the sense of hosting hedonistic wild parties, but simply being able to enjoy life in God's creation, without the worry of being laid off or having your pension fail.

Now in applying this part of Job's restoration to Easter, it is easy to again fall into the trap of the health and wealth gospel—see God will only bring you good things. I have warned against the dangers of this kind of thinking before and I do so again. Faith does not guarantee financial success.

On the other hand, we do need to understand that because of Easter, Christ has guaranteed that we will receive our inheritance. The blessings of creation are ours. Like every part of this restoration we don't fully experience it now, but we can in part. Haven't we been able to enjoy the wonderful weather this weekend? Let that be a sign of Easter blessings.

Fourth, Job is blessed again with seven sons and three daughters. In a way, it is a sign of restored life. A hint of the resurrection yet to come. And these children all receive an inheritance, even the daughters, which was not the custom in the ancient world. But which now, in Christ, is always the case. Whether male or female, black or white, young or old, in Christ, we all share in the inheritance Christ won for us in his triumph over the grave.

Finally, the restoration of Job involved a long life; a good long life, being able to see and enjoy his children and their children to the fourth generation. He died, old and full of years—a sign of God’s blessings upon him.

Because of Easter, we too can enjoy a long-life. Longer than Job. Far more than 140 years. In Christ, we can enjoy eternal life. Yes, our years on this earth may be limited and in some cases, cut short. But there is more to our life than this world. There is the world yet to come. And that world will be for eternity. But let Job’s long earthly life be a reminder that the life to come will be more like life on this earth than many Christians realize. After all, heaven is not our final home, the new creation is.

The restoration of Job can act as a sign of what Easter has accomplished for believers in Jesus. All these blessings: reconciliation, being part of the church, the blessings of creation, receiving our inheritance, long life—while all these things will only be fully realized in the new creation, we can have foretaste of these things already now—to one extent or another. And when at times, we don’t fully experience these things in the present, we are assured that that we will in the new creation.

Is Job a fairy tale ending too good to be true? It almost seems that way. But then the whole story of the bible is like that, as Revelation ends with all things being made new. And they lived happily ever after. A fairy tale ending. But one that is true. Because of Easter and Christ’s victory over sin, death and the devil.

While most of our lives are lived in the circumstances described in the previous 41 chapters of Job, they are lived with knowing what chapter 42 brings. Though we live in the days before Revelation 21 and 22 are fulfilled, they are lived in that hope. They are lived in the light of the empty tomb. Alleluia. Amen.