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Why Me? – Job 13:13-27

I chose this text and topic weeks ago. I had no idea the turn current events would take, or how deeply the lesson this book presents would affect me in the light of the murders in Oregon Thursday. In fact, it wasn't until Friday that things truly began to sink in.

Probably all of us, instinctively, think or act as if “good” and “evil” are not just as qualities, but personified. So, for example, we label someone or some group as personifying evil, like Democrats or Republicans or Muslims or Mormons. The story of Job puts evil right in the heavenly council.

The book begins with God bragging about how great Job is, and Satan – whose name, interestingly, means “adversary” – calls God on his boast. God then lets Satan test Job’s righteousness and faith, taking away everything he has, including his family.

Yes, you heard right. God is in on Job’s tragedy from the start. We tend to forget that, because it’s just so hard.

Job responds to the loss of his family and fortune with the famous words, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.” That statement in itself is a book: Job’s position is that everything is God’s to begin with, so who am I to complain if God takes it away?

So much for earning brownie points for being good. But Job’s response is a sign of great faith and reliance on God – much like Francis plunging into crowds, touching and kissing and driving his security nuts. Demonstrating with his own life, in a way few get to display, total dependence on the will (or, in Job’s case, perhaps even the whim) of God.

And then, since this test hasn’t broken Job, the adversary takes away his health. If Job’s response to the first trial was, “Whatever,” his response to this one is, “Sigh.”

But, as if things could not get worse, his friends show up to comfort him. Oh, and by the way, when his family is all killed, his wife remains, and suggests that he commit suicide.

The book of Job is difficult.

Three important things to know about Job’s story: 1. The setting. This is crucial: we are told that it happens before the time of Abraham.

2. Neither Job nor his annoying friends know that God is behind what is happening. His friends blame everything on some unknown

fault in Job, while Job protests his innocence. The twist here is that *we know that Job is right*. Job is blameless, except for being so good.

3. No really satisfying answer to Job's predicament – or our question – is ever offered. In the end, God tells Job to his face that everything that happens is God, the creator's business, and that he should not look to God for what humans consider fairness or reciprocity, since humans are just creatures and God is, well, God.

Which brings us to the ongoing horror that erupted once again, in a nice, little community college classroom in a nice, quiet community, when evil found a body and used it to kill a bunch of people. What does our faith – what does Scripture, especially Job's story have to say about events like these?

We're a pretty tight bunch in our Presbytery, and one thing I can tell you is that this has hit many of my friends and colleagues much harder than any of the other really big-time murders has. You can count me among them.

Some people are saying, "oh well," others are calling for prayer for the families and loved ones, and others are saying that's just not enough – calling for all manner of responses. There's more than enough outrage and heartbreak and carefully calibrated distance to go around out there.

But let me say this. And I do so primarily as a Christian pastor, trained as one whose primary calling is to lead people in the way of Jesus Christ: *we must not learn to tolerate such violence.*

Not only can we, can you do something; if our faith means anything at all, we *must* do something. The path that took Jesus to his violent death, and in doing so made that violence the work of the Christ, the means of our infinitely more intimate relationship with God than even Job knew, means that we have to something.

Do what?

If this sort of useless, tragic violence outrages you, channel it. Use the power of that outrage to pull your attention away from yourself and toward others. Spend some time trying to live in others' positions: your friends, neighbors, people *out there*, refugees, the sick and homeless. Listen for where God is speaking to you as you reflect, and then act on what you hear. You may have an important part of a never-before considered solution put in your heart by God.

If this *doesn't* outrage you, then take some time to ask yourself why, and if your purpose as a disciple of Jesus Christ is being met.

What else?

As I said, plenty of people are saying that the pious platitude of praying for the families is not enough. While it may not be *enough*,

don't think for a minute that prayer is not absolutely essential in a time like this. Anyone can do it. It has power, but precisely because it seems so simple, we don't recognize its power.

Let's direct that power toward the heartache of the families. Direct it toward changing our human love for violence. Direct it toward our humans urge to choose violence over love and care. Let's direct it at finding ways to get help for those who aren't getting it, for those who don't know they need it, and for those who need it but don't want it.

Direct it at our own calloused hearts, that anyone could even for a second entertain the thought that murderous tragedies like this are just business as usual.

At the end of Job, he submits to the power and purpose of God, as I said, without getting much more of an answer to his question "why" than "because I said so."

So, why me? Why them? I don't know. God does. Is God pulling us to awareness of how sick we are? We're certainly not in Job's position of innocence, despite the ongoing forgiveness and forbearance of God.

Much has changed since Job walked the earth. At one point, God was willing to offer up someone (and his family) to prove a point. But then God gave up his Son, part of himself, for us. In Job's time, before the covenant with Abraham, God *was* so distant. Then, in the first

covenant, God came to us, came closer. And in Jesus Christ, God not only came down to our level, God became one of us. God is beside us, within us, through the Spirit.

What that means is that we can no longer sit back and wait for God to capriciously bless or set evil on us, but take the other part of Job's character, that part of our faith that reminds us that "in life and in death we belong to God," hold on loosely to the things we think are ours, and seek to serve Christ by serving others.

God invites us close, invites us in, gives us this Sacrament to give us a taste of what *could be*, if we can open our hearts to God. Let us be your witnesses, Lord.