

## **From The Pastor**

Life is lived at two ends of a spectrum. Today's readings reveal one end and then the other. However successful, happy, or productive life might be in the present moment there will surely be a time when weariness and woe will show its face. Healthy people never think they will ever be sick. Sick people worry that they will never get well. In reality we all live with both.

Job is in a time of deep woe and weariness. He has grown tired in his long suffering, and it distorts his perception of life. In an hour of woe, misery loves company. We can all relate to what Job is saying, and to some degree what he is experiencing. In every respect, before his calamity, Job had it all: wealth, fame, righteousness, large family, and secure faith.

Now that all has been taken from him he turns to that universal human response: complaining. In what has become an archetype of prayer in time trial, Job complains to God: 'I am in pain and suffering now and you who love me better help me because I won't be around here forever. You're the one who got me into this and you are the one who must get me out of it.' Job commiserates with God in his trial, pleading for divine help.

The Book of Job is powerful and essential in our wrestling with the question of suffering. Job is a voice for all who suffer. Job does not understand why he must suffer this present all encompassing calamity. As a person of faith, he questions God and challenges the Lord for an answer. He does not presume that God is punishing him. He trusts in his righteousness as a believer and places the burden in God's hands for a solution. In the process he gets pretty bold, even mouthy, as he speaks his woe to the Lord. God honors Job by listening and giving an answer. In response, God is just as bold and direct. God lets Job know that he is dealing with the Divine, and in the end, all will be revealed for God's good purpose.

We will continue to wrestle with the question of suffering. The final answer is not yet clear. What is clear is that we can be honest and direct with God about our suffering, confident that God will listen and give some response. We may not like the response, we may not perceive that a response has been given, or we may ignore the response. Still, God listens and is not without the wisdom of compassion.

You could say the gospel is the other end of the spectrum. Peter's mother in law is ill. Jesus takes her hand and helps her to her feet. By the time she is standing she is completely restored to health; so much so that she immediately begins to wait on everyone.

We may balk at her immediate service to Jesus and the others, as if to say that her healing was rather self-serving on Jesus' part. Not at all. This detail in the account is confirming evidence that she has in fact been healed.

Technically we should say she was cured; cured of a physical ailment that afforded her a healing wholeness. Now cured, she can resume her role and identity, her desire as a wife, and homemaker. She is not forced into this service. It is her role and happiness to do so.

When we are sick we are not ourselves. We are unable to attend to those things that make us who we are, and desire to do for our good and the good of others. Healing is for the sake of our wholeness and restoration as God has made us to be.

Jesus reveals the power to restore life, health, and wholeness, and He does so only with his touch, or a spoken word. Other remedies were used for common maladies, but they involved rituals, superstition, and what we would consider quackish behavior. In the day, it was the best they had. This made the work and power of Jesus all the more stunning and mystifying. Notice that Mark includes the casting out of demons; he mentions this twice in this short passage. Jesus has power over evil; both the evil of suffering and illness, as well as demonic evil. Love heals and calls us to wholeness.

We are being invited to see the power and the truth of God in Jesus. Such miracles and deliverance are for the sake of faith, calling forth of a new understanding of the power and action of God in the person of Jesus. Where else, or from whom could such power come? Now in Christ, all who love have the capacity to heal.

Jesus himself seeks to be restored to inner peace by going off to pray. He too must trust and depend on the power of the Father working in and through Him. Jesus does not work alone, but in union with the Father in the power of the Spirit. The health and wholeness of Jesus depends on His oneness with the Father. In this unity, He is not lost in His growing fame, but moves on with the conviction of his mission and purpose: to bring the wholeness of the Good News to all who will accept it.

The reality of suffering was not lost on Jesus. He knew both ends of the spectrum: union with the Father, as well as suffering and death. His suffering and death gives meaning and purpose to our suffering and trials. Speak your needs to the Lord in reverence and faith. Your prayer will never go unheard.

Father John Esper