



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
6 October 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Many of you have heard me preach a time or two on the favorite line of our current social fabric – “everything happens for a reason.” If you are new to Ascension, ask someone who has been around for a while and they will happily or unhappily tell you why that line is simply not true according to Pastor Chris. It is the perfect introduction to this message reflecting on our first reading from the book of Job today. If ever there was someone who would argue against “everything happens for a reason,” it is Job.

The book of Job concerns itself with the question of faith in an all-powerful God. Can God be trusted? Is God good and just in his rule of the world? The book shows that the reasons for human suffering often remain a secret to human beings. In the book of Job, God seems both too close and too far away. On the one hand, Job complains that God is watching him every moment so that he cannot even swallow his spit. On the other hand, Job finds God elusive. Though God is greatly concerned about humans, God does not always answer their most agonizing questions. At the same time, Job’s friends offer no real help. They come to “comfort” him, but Job ends up declaring them “miserable comforters” who would console him “with empty nothings”. These friends represent an oversimplified view of faith. They think that all human troubles are divine punishments for wrongdoing. Their “comfort” consists largely of urging Job to identify his sin and repent of it. These friends are poor examples of how to comfort those who are suffering. The story of Job tells us that one does not need to fully understand God’s will in order to be faithful while suffering. Those who suffer need not be afraid to express to God their confusion and questions.

Job is the perfect beginning for us today. Since I have already dealt with my least favorite one-liner in church “everything happens for a reason.” Let’s jump into my second favorite. “God will never give you...can you finish it? MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE. I mean at least this one is actually in the Bible. Except, when someone uses this line as a moment of comfort, they tend to forget the second part of the verse which is, by far, the most important part. The verse is this - 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13: <sup>13</sup>No temptation<sup>[c]</sup> has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted<sup>[d]</sup> beyond what you can bear. THIS IS WHERE THE COMFORTING PERSON USUALLY STOPS. But the comfort actually comes in the second half of the verse. “But when you are tempted, God will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” God will also provide a way out. Do you need to hear that part again? God will also provide a way out.

In my office, over the door, hangs a sign. “God doesn’t give us what we can handle; God helps us handle what we are given.” Do you need to hear it again? “God doesn’t give us what we can handle; God helps us handle what we are given. Someone created the wall art as they reflected on 1 Corinthians 10:13. And as they reflected, they remembered God wanted the whole verse remembered not just the “too much” part. For me, the promise is that if God is going to allow me to be tempted, God is also going to provide the way out. I feel like we need to hear this more than once. I wonder where does your mind go when you hear the word tempted? If you google “temptations of the flesh,” you will get “corrupt inclinations of the heart. Doesn’t sound that bad. Then they unpack them for you...lying, smoking, gambling, drinking, pornography, sexual sins, overeating, and laziness. Anybody sweating yet?

When Ileen and I were first married – she took me to her corporate Christmas party. She worked for American Honda Finance. She was one of three out some 80 in her office who went to church. The only pastor’s wife, we sat down at a table and people were fascinated by us. We went to the bar and came back with drinks. You drink? Of course. Maybe more than you. The DJ started and we got up to dance. Wait, you can dance? Well, not well, but yes, we can dance. Do you play cards? Like what Rummy or Uno? Sure. I was amazed at the view several of her co-workers had of “church people.” But that can still be the prevailing view. Why would



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anybody go to church, if you do not get to enjoy the life God has given you? Drinking, dancing, gambling – those are the temptations that weigh people down? Hardly!

If we stop in the wilderness with Jesus – the temptations Satan offers Jesus are physical – do what feels right; emotional – questions God’s love for you; and control – take over the throne. And if I want to take one step further – there are temptations of doubt, cynicism, self-worth, and relevance. Those last four may be just mine. When there is great suffering, I am tempted to doubt that God even notices. When the same problems persist without new possibilities being offered to solve those problems, my cynical side takes over. All is lost! When I wonder if what I do or what any of us do in the name of Jesus matters at all, that is a temptation to leave everything behind. It is what I appreciate about 1 Corinthians 10:13 is that I do not read anywhere how God is the author of our temptations – or in other words – the one who sends temptation to us. Jesus even goes so far as to tell us this in the prayer, we know by heart – in Matthew 6. It is an old, old argument – you have heard too many times in my sermons – but why do we believe that God is the author of our pain and suffering. Why do we worship God who chooses to send pain and pitfalls for us? It is why the “God will give you a way out” is so important at the end of verse 13. God is the one who puts my doubt to rest when I see the communal good come to the aid of those who are hurting. The response to 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina, or the wildfires that destroyed whole communities in Northern CA or Hurricane Helene this past week. When I hear someone being housed at the shelter after sleeping in their car for days or being fed at the Hope Center – this calms my temptation to self-doubt. When I ask you to provide lunches for an entire school year for 1200 students in Tanzania and you cover the entire amount for the whole next year and the rest of this year when crop prices rose faster than our money could keep up. When school supplies come pouring in for students at Hawthorne. You are the way God provides a way out.

Poor Job. If you read the whole book – his wife tells him to curse God and die. His friends tell him that he is sinful. What good is any of that advice? And yet the surprising thing about Job is that he continues to be faithful. To worship God without fail. Now that is a faith – I struggle to hold onto and admire without regret. After several of us read the Story as a small group experience several years ago, an older member named Jean shared with me that she was surprised to learn that Through all of Job’s pain and suffering he continued to worship God. She said, “it was almost shocking.” And I told her, “Not almost, it absolutely is shocking.” We know suffering – all of us in different ways. I know no one who makes it through this life without a season of suffering – some longer than others. The good news is that God does not send the suffering to you. The good news is that God helps you handle the suffering you are enduring. The good news is that God promises to provide you with the way through your suffering. The only thing you need to trust that God will make good on God’s promise. Some days that is really difficult to do. It is why we do this – gather together for worship. To be reminded we are not alone – to lean on others when the suffering beings to overwhelm – to let God lead us out of the temptation to give up by letting others lead us back to the faith gifted to us from the very beginning. Thanks be to God! Amen.