Sermon: "Not Yet" Pentecost # 22 (C) Luke 20:27-38; Job 19: 23-27a November 9, 2025
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"O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
O that with an iron pen and with lead they were
engraved on a rock forever!"
" For I know that my Redeemer lives…"

These are the opening lines in our reading from Job today. And I must say, they really hit home this week- primarily because Job is the book we associate with immense suffering. And let's face it, we all experience suffering at one time or another. This week we, as a church, suffer with Jackie Staple on the sudden death of her son, Keith. And I know I'm not alone when I see an empty space - right in front of the first pew where Keith would sit and emphatically tell us the day, month and year, listen to the 'living' Word and share a meal as the body of Christ. This has been a hard week.

There are no easy answers to suffering. In fact, I believe there are more questions associated with suffering than there are answers. I surmise that nothing invites us more into an encounter with God, than suffering. It was true for Job and perhaps it is for you, too. I know it does for me. And thankfully, the words from Job in those first couple verses today provide, for me, a somewhat sense of hope in the midst of suffering. You see, Job has a story to tell about a God who redeems. A God who confirms our innocent suffering and heartache. A God who knows pain firsthand in the crucified Christ. A God who welcomes our honest cries of anger and anguish. A God who restores and repairs pain.

Job's story you see… is one of a good, innocent man who suffers terrible loss. Everything he has is destroyed: his wealth, his beloved children, and …his health. And his friends were of no help whatsoever. Some of that may have been the ancient belief that suffering.. was somehow a result of sinful behavior. But

Job protests that longstanding belief, and enters a dialogue with God. And I'm grateful that Job puts his ultimate trust in the God of the cosmos and…he receives the vindication from God - the vindication that innocent people do suffer. He had done nothing to "deserve" the suffering. And for Job, it was important to have his testimony written down or carved in stone so future generations will know the bigger story of God. But still, it's hard at times, for me to fathom how life can be so painful when we worship a loving God?

But suffering, you see, does not see color or race or religion; suffering knows not of socio-economic status; suffering does not happen on one side of a border or the other; suffering spans the globe and settles into every nook and cranny of creation.

However, I know…my redeemer lives.

I know the one who knows everything about me is there for me. So even my suffering will bring on a deeper meaning when I put my trust in God. NowThis could have been the shortest sermon preached but I said to myself, "Not so fast, Paula, there's a lot more to the story of suffering."

This shoebox, you see, holds a piece of suffering from my own life. A piece of my life when it felt like the rug had been ripped out from underneath me and life made no sense. No sense at all. You see, in this box are several newspaper clippings. The front page articles are dated January 1986 and state: Grand Rapids Man Killed in Plane Crash in Guatemala - 93 people were killed. There were no survivors. Walter Chize was among the dead. Walt… was my fiance. He was four days from coming home. The Guatemalan government gave no reason for the crash. The plane had passed inspection, the weather was clear with great visibility and the pilots were some of the most highly trained in the fleet. The plane was seven minutes, seven minutes away from landing. The black box showed no indication of a problem prior to landing.

And I know my friends meant well when they sent cards, called and stopped by the house. But in all honesty, some of the sentiments written in the margins of the cards were, well… not always helpful. “Things always happen for a reason, Paula. You will be stronger because of this.” Or, some cards said, “Don’t worry Paula, God will never give you more than you can handle.” But it was more than I could handle and I turned to God in an angry, vindictive voice and even questioned the fact that there even was a God - especially one who would allow this suffering in my life. And to be honest with you…it took a long, long time before I could see through the murky tears, doubts, and disappointments, to move forward. But I knew, deep down, there was a certainty and unwavering conviction, not just a feeling, or someone’s opinion, or a message written in fancy script on the front of a Hallmark card. I knew this was a profound, unshakable faith in God that he was my Redeemer, even amidst intense suffering and shallow comments from people.

The Redeemer was the one who would make room in my heart again to love and experience joy. And “this” Redeemer, my Redeemer and yours, too, always makes room in our heart to love again. You see, this shoebox from a time in my life, a time of suffering - was and is not… the end to the story. So I get it Job - I, too, want to write about a God who cares for the good of creation that God made. I want to carve this love in stone so my children and my grandchildren and for all who come after me…will know what sustains me, what sustains us, during times of trial.

The theme for today is, *Not Yet*. Last month when I preached the theme was *How Long?* How long do we have to wait for the suffering of the world to end? And how do I live in the “not yet” place of life? We are nearing the season of Advent in a few weeks - that season of waiting. And as I’ve mentioned on

several occasions, waiting is not always my strong suit. But as children of God, we wait. We trust. We hope. We lament. We cry. We grieve. I don't know the reasoning behind the suffering of the world. I don't know why Walt died in such a tragic manner and thus changed the trajectory of my life. I don't know why people we love get cancer. And why some go into remission and live cancer free the rest of their life - and why some do not. I don't know why those who seem to suffer more heartache and loss, keep losing…and keep suffering.

But there is one thing I do know… and I think Job got this, too…

God is God of the living. Therefore…

I know that my Redeemer lives. Amen.