

Kailua Christian Church  
Sunday, September 17, 2023  
Message: "The Sad Song"  
Rev. Irene Willis Hassan

Scriptures:

**Job 7:1-16**

“Do not human beings have a hard service on earth,  
and are not their days like the days of a laborer?”

**2** Like a slave who longs for the shadow,  
and like laborers who look for their wages,

**3** so I am allotted months of emptiness,  
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.

**4** When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I rise?’  
But the night is long,  
and I am full of tossing until dawn.

**5** My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;  
my skin hardens, then breaks out again.

**6** My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle  
and come to their end without hope.[a]

**7** “Remember that my life is a breath;  
my eye will never again see good.

**8** The eye that beholds me will see me no more;  
while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.

**9** As the cloud fades and vanishes,  
so those who go down to Sheol do not come up;

**10** they return no more to their houses,  
nor do their places know them any more.

**11** “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;  
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;  
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.

**12** Am I the Sea or the Dragon  
that you set a guard over me

**13** When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me,  
my couch will ease my complaint,’

**14** then you scare me with dreams  
and terrify me with visions,

**15** so that I would choose strangling  
and death rather than this body.

**16** I loathe my life; I would not live forever.  
Let me alone, for my days are a breath.

### **Mark 4:35-41**

#### Jesus Calms the Storm

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.”

36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

41 They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

### **Sermon - The Sad Song**

This sermon is dedicated to my dear friend Jamie (June 13, 1986 - September 12, 2022) and her son Luka (October 28, 2021-January 12, 2022). Rest in peace, loved ones. You are missed.

Last week, I talked about Jesus’ promise that all things are possible through God, and when we knock on His door, He will always open a way for us. I think this is 100% true – when we go through even the darkest times, God always helps us find the way out, even if it doesn’t look like what we thought it would be. Sometimes, God’s plans are leaps and bounds better than what we had ever imagined for ourselves in our narrow human thinking.

However, I would never say “God has a plan” or “maybe it’s better this way” to a person that has undergone significant loss or anguish. Even minor loss or discomfort, when credited to God, seems insulting. If we as Christians are meant to lift people out of darkness and into the light of Christ,

then we have to be able to be present with ourselves and others about what it looks and feels like in the dark. This is a sermon that explores how to do that.

This week, we read some verses from Job, which is a book that is primarily about the nature of suffering in relationship to God. In the Bible as we have it now, The Book of Job has 42 chapters. The first chapter of Job was not believed to be an original part of the story for several reasons; it was likely added after this story switched from oral transmission to paper transmission. The fact that Job likely was a song delivered orally for thousands of years before it was written down is one reason why scholars believe Job Chapter 1 is a *redaction* (which is a fancy theology word meaning “an edit long removed from the original writing”). Chapter 1 and Chapter 42 - the final chapter of Job, also likely a redaction - are written in prose, like you would find in a written novel or news article, whereas the bulk of the book is written in verse, like you would find in a spoken song or a poem.

A 6th century BCE public musician, which is how Job was originally delivered before the days of mass print, would not be explaining a story before singing it as we find in Chapter 1. Explaining a song before singing it disrupts the flow of the presentation. Besides, songs don't usually need to be explained; we easily find meaning in them without having to encase them in logic. Anyone who's listened to a song knows that music can be understood because of its ability to deliver beauty rather than its ability to deliver resolution.

More evidence that Job's prologue is a redaction: Chapter 1 and Chapter 42 don't match the tone of the rest of the story. Chapter 1 (which I chose not to for us to read today because I find Chapter 7 more accurate to Job's essence) is about Satan making a bet with God that Job won't stay faithful to Him if he were to be tested - yet we don't see Satan again in the book at all past the redacted prologue. The prologue in Chapter 1 attempts to neatly explain suffering in a way that the rest of the story allows to be messy and unanswerable - in fact, the bulk of Job often denounces human attempts to explain away suffering. Instead, the book seems to be an internal dialogue of the protagonist, Job, crying out in unbridled pain, to the point of making everyone around him in the story extremely uncomfortable, and asking God to answer the question Himself rather than have his wife and friends try to answer it with fleeting and trite explanations.

Because indeed, for anyone who has ever experienced loss, we know all too well that when people try to “explain” our suffering to us, it comes off illogical and even offensive. Humans understand each other's emotional defenses better than we give ourselves credit for, and in the deepest depths of our suffering we know that when someone tries to explain our own suffering to us they are really just trying to make themselves feel better. Even if you don't logically think that at the time, you know in your soul that those trite cliches are more comforting to the person espousing them than they are for you.

Yet, we continue to try to explain it because watching someone suffer is uncomfortable. Watching someone suffer is often unanswerable, and humans are naturally wired to problem solve so suffering does not make sense to our poor human sensibilities. For those in Lahaina, for the survivors of 9/11, for my friend Jamie who lost her son, trying to skip over the agony to find redemption doesn't work because there's a giant hole left in our hearts that's simply too big to leap over. When a serious tragedy occurs, all the things that made sense in our world crumble away into

that giant abyss and we're left standing naked before God, asking Him – or in Job's case, yelling at Him – where we are meant to go from here because we don't have the tools to cross a hole that big. From the 6th century BC until now, humans simply have never been able to “reason” the nature of catastrophic suffering, and it's likely we never will.

Through 36 chapters in Job, we find our protagonist yelling at God to give an answer only to be met with stone cold silence. Similarly, In Mark Chapter 4, Jesus and his disciples take a boat out to sea. There's a bad storm that happens on this trip, yet somehow Jesus is SLEEPING THROUGH IT. Ever been on a boat in a storm? Who sleeps during that?! The Son of God does, apparently. Yet, this is parallel to Job's experience thousands of years before, and nearly every account of diving into the darkness of suffering between then and now - when the world falls apart, when death and destruction and darkness take over and squash explanation and reason into a useless pulp, *God seems to be asleep*. What is the purpose of believing in God when God seems to lazily sleep when bad things happen?

Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, author of “When God is Silent,” suggests that God communicates to us primarily at the times when we feel He is far away, and we cannot hear Him. She suggests that the silence itself is where God primarily exists. Across the Hebrew Bible, from Job to Exodus, we see God refusing to explain Himself and instead self-defining as something ontologically unknown. In Exodus 3, when Moses meets God at the burning bush, Moses asks God who He is, to which God responds, “I Am Who I Am.” Indeed, the title YHWH itself in Hebrew - the most common names assigned to the God of the Hebrew Bible - comes from this statement, in Hebrew literally translating to this lack of answer from God about His own identity. God self-identifies in holding the vacant, unknowable space between heartache and restoration that we do often find ourselves in during times of peril and suffering.

When Jesus finally does wake up, annoyed (as he often is in the Gospel of Mark), he yells at the storm to stop it and then yells at the disciples for not having faith. He doesn't answer their questions about his apparent dismissal of their well-being (“teacher, don't you care if we drown?”) or explain how he was able to sleep through all that racket.

Likewise, in the Book of Job when God finally does answer in Chapter 38 (“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand!”) God doesn't justify the peril, but like Jesus, denies the questioner the ability to know the answer. It's super frustrating that God doesn't supply answers for our suffering, which is probably why the redactor added Job 1 to the story. Yet, in trying to remove the silence in our darkness, we remove God. In removing God, we remove a necessary space to reflect. The silence supplies a necessary time for us to reimagine ourselves and reimagine the world. The silence supplies a necessary time for us to see things in the way God sees them because our human understanding comes across as small and trite in the face of suffering's deep darkness. God's silence is the music of the soul, and anyone who's listened to a song knows that music can be understood because of its ability to deliver beauty rather than its ability to deliver resolution. God's silence is the music of the soul, and in that silence, we allow our souls to hear what we could not hear before, back when explanation and reason were our primary defenses. Adding prose to the song does not make it more meaningful.