



The First Sunday after The Epiphany.

The Collect.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

We love him, because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

Love begets love, yet hate comes characteristically and without solicitation in the heart not begotten of God. Anger and violence, both corollaries of hate, arise in our hearts when we are unable to see as God sees – to think His thoughts, and to will His will. Even the Christian heart may flood with righteous indignation at gross injustice, but then may come the old man to rule the heart in hate and bitterness. If our hearts remain fixed on the Rock of our Salvation, such moments will be fleeting, if they arise at all. Job has a perfect right to expect succor and comfort from his friends, but they offend his sense of justice in siding with his tormentor. Job knows God. He knows God is all-powerful and just; however, he has trouble reconciling what has so completely changed in his own righteous living to warrant God taking so much that Job holds dear. It is a normal and natural human response – even in devoted Christians. The point that we often forget, and so does Job, is that God is always just, righteous, and good whether we understand our misfortunes or not. Job blames God! In a manner of speaking, Job is right in knowing that his suffering comes from God, though indirectly by way of Satan. God has a purpose beyond and above Job's temporary sufferings that exceed, in value, the short period of that suffering of His beloved friend – Job. In the end, Job will still enjoy the warm favor of God, and his heart will glow in peace and joy. We do not love Christ in our own right and initiative, but we love Him because He first loved us! His love for us calls us to His Heart. We have not chosen Christ, but Christ has chosen us!

We have no part in our salvation. There is no work of man that will save – only faith by grace!

Our bosom friends are the ones who have the power to hurt us most – we expect our enemy to offend, but not our friends. God is Job's Friend, yet Job perceives that God is bringing all of his misfortune upon him. He has forgotten that all suffering, pain, death, and separation came by the disobedience of man in the Garden. When Adam's knowing disobedience opened the gates of the furnaces of Hell, on tormentor emerged who could not be subdued by the Man who set him at large. Only Christ, in the fullness of time could suffice to conquer sin, death, and the Devil. **Then Job answered and said, How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.** It is worthy of note that the hypocrite is often more persistent in his condemnation of others than the Christian witness in professing Christ. General Patton once said, "If I have a luke-warm friend, I will make an enemy of him as soon as possible – then I shall KNOW where he stands!" It is probably more true that a luke-warm friend is ALREADY our enemy! Compassion is that nature that perfectly characterized that of Christ! We all feel passion when it belongs to us – pain, spiritual bewilderment, loneliness. But COM-Passion is the acute awareness of another's pain – so much so that their pain becomes ours which is shared. Do you feel sorry for a starving child? Perhaps you do. But do you feel sorry enough to take the bread from your own basket to share with the child? Do you FEEL his hunger enough?

When someone comes to us soliciting our sympathies over hurt feelings, do we then throw up to them every sin of their lives? Did Christ? When healing the lepers, the woman taken with an issue of blood, forgiving the woman taken in adultery, restoring vision to the blind; did Christ enumerate their sins to them? The approach changes in His dealings with the Pharisees, doesn't it? He condemns them outright and calls them a generation of vipers (not a compliment in most circles). Job, abandoned to his grief by his friends, now turns to combat their hypocrisy. **4 And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. 5 If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach: 6 Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. 7 Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.** If Job has sinned, the matter will remain between him and God to find reconciliation; but Job has had enough of man's condemnation. It is God that condemns and not man.

Job, unable to find fault with himself, though a summary self-examination would reveal it, resorts once more to blaming God. Do you know that the favor we have with God is never EARNED. It is a function of GRACE! If the best of humankind received their just deserts, they would languish in Hell forever. Don't EVER blame God! **8 He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. 9 He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. 10 He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree. 11 He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies.** Man has no glory except that in which he glories in God. God is the abundant reservoir of hope. There is no crown (power) except that power that resides in the Crown-Sovereign of Sovereigns. If God accounted Job His enemy, Job's light would go out as a 'candle in a whirlwind.'

Job's next comment reveals how ignorant even a righteous man can be of the nature of God: **12 His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and**

encamp round about my tabernacle. This is a precisely true in a perspective quite different from that which Job ascribes. Indeed, the Army of God encircles His saints, not to hurt or make afraid, but rather to protect! We often mistake the most thunderous applause of heaven as the rumblings of the fires of Hell. When the mighty host of Syria surrounded the city in which Elisha was staying, his servant interpreted the situation as hopeless and despaired of hope. *And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.* (2 Kings 6:15-17) When we interpret God in man's terms, we shall always miss the mark. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

13 He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. 14 My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. 15 They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. 16 I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. 17 My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children's sake of mine own body. 18 Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. 19 All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me. So Job now blames God even for the unfaithfulness of those around him. Did not Christ experience a greater betrayal of friends by far? While Job blames God for putting all friends, family, and servants far from him (they left of their own accord), God remains his faithful friend. How is it possible? God is not like any other friend. He is not fickle in his love and friendship. If He is a Friend today, He will be a Friend a thousand years later, too. *A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity..... A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.* (Prov 17:17, 18:24)

Here is an obvious moment of weakness and failure of faith in Job: 20 My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. 21 Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me. 22 Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? No one escapes in this life even with the 'skin of their teeth' – they leave all at the precipice of the grave that is flesh. Job has already admitted as much in Job 1:21 - *And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.* (Job 1:21)

Suddenly, the glimmering hope of faith comes as a twinkling candle to Job's tortured spirit: 23 Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! 24 That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! Ironically, this is just the case! Are we not reading and perusing his very words spoken and written in the Rock which we hold before us? So many lengthy discourses of the Caesars, the Persian Kings, the vane village chiefs, have disappeared in the desert sands, tint and tinsel. But the words of a once poor and tortured soul on a mountain of ashes of mourning are yet being study by theologians and believers everywhere, and at every time.

A tiny spark of dormant faith can feed the fires of the great forest! Job now makes one of the strongest professions of faith recorded in Scripture: 25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: 26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me. His pain-dimmed eyes see with a renewed vision the coming of His Savior, Redeemer, and Lord in the latter years. He knows that Emmanuel shall abide with men! He knows that, yes, his body shall become dust and brother of the soil, yet, Job also knows that he shall yet live with a glorified body, and that body can behold the brilliance of the Light of God! He will no longer need depend upon the witness of God's prophets, for he shall witness with his OWN eyes, and face to face. Though he may see now through a glass darkly, then he shall see face-to-face! (1 Cor 13:12). He will be able to say, as did David the King, *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.* (Psalms 17:15)

The just rewards for every false and malicious judgment shall redound upon the heart that supplied it. 28 But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? 29 Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment. A gunshot fired in jest may be returned by a withering fire of destruction. Wake up, friend. The care and correction of one's own soul should be sufficient labors of the day!