Sermon - The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost B
The Reverend Dale T. Grandfield
October 28, 2018

Job 42:1-6, 10-17
Psalm 34:1-8
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 10:46-52

“My ears had heard about you, but now my eyes have seen you.”¹ ... thus we come to the end of the book of Job, a book that sets out to discuss how, for all the wisdom, all the knowledge, all the goodness we might muster as human beings, awful things still happen to the best of us.

Job is portrayed as the paradigm of the Good Person: honorable, respected, kind, generous, prosperous. He loses everything - *everything* - as Jessie said last week “in one really bad day.”² In the book’s chapters he appeals his case against God to the heavenly court. Meanwhile his friends come and suggest that he keep looking for some trace of inequity in his life that would justify his misfortune, some part of him that wouldn’t stand up in a court of law. Job insists that he has lived blamelessly.

And so, in this final scene over these past two Sundays, we’ve seen God responding to Job’s suit against him. Job’s complaint: unfair and unreasonable treatment. God’s answer: a level of cosmic cross-examination that strikes terror into the reader. Then here, today, we have the end of the case. Not a verdict but a *theophany*, an encounter with God.

Job responds, “My ears had heard about you, but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I relent...” It’s as if Job realizes that, for all those years of living the perfect life, of striving and surpassing, he had never known God *truly* - only by hearsay. There, in the pain of his loss, in deep pain, in the coming-to-naught of his sense of self-worth, in the dashing-to-pieces of his belief that his goodness would protect him from tragedy, in the shadow of a whirlwind, Job met God:

God and human, in relationship, together.

I stand here today searching for words after another week when it seems, at least for my soul - I don’t know about yours - like I’ve had to beg not to fall into despair. Despair for what I see happening around me, despair for any sliver of hope to preach to you from this pulpit. This week, 14 bombs were intercepted in the mail. Yesterday, 11 people murdered and 6 more wounded in a place of worship... domestic terrorism that hits us in yet more defenseless places: our mailboxes and our places of prayer. It keeps clawing at us: *nowhere* is safe! Not schools, not movie theaters, not concerts, not churches, not even where you get your packages...

---

¹ Job 42:5, Common English Bible.
² The Reverend Jessie Dodson, Sermon, October 21, 2018 at St. Paul’s.
And those beautiful souls in Tree of Life Synagogue, those beautiful souls whose names will be released while we bustle around this holy home this morning… hated-to-death, why? because they were Jewish? Lord, have mercy.

Just a days over twenty years ago, 21 year old Matthew Shepard died a few days after being tortured, tied to a fence, and left for dead one freezing night in Laramie, Wyoming. Matt had hitched a ride home from a bar with two men who murdered him because he was gay. Just Friday, Matt’s body - his ashes - were committed in our National Cathedral. Matt, was, after all, an Episcopalian. Bishop Gene Robinson said, at the service, “Gently rest in this place. You are safe now. Matt, welcome home.”

Toward the end of the play “The Laramie Project”, there’s courtroom dialogue in the trial of the murderers of Matthew Shepard. Judge and jury deliver the verdict and Matt’s parents Dennis and Judy are faced with whether or not to ask for the death penalty for Matt’s killer. His father in a tremendous monologue says, “I would like nothing better than to see you die, Mr. McKinney. However, this is the time to begin the healing process. To show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy… I am going to grant you life, as hard as it is for me to do so, because of Matthew.”

And is that not the Good News? That even those who would threaten us to death, with death - those who get their power jollies by causing us to fear for our lives - that here, in this place not even they with all the guns and all the bombs and all the hatred the pits of hell can muster, not even they will have the last word?

They will not.

In Jesus Christ mercy and justice and peace and love has overcome the absolute worst evil can threaten us with. Even at the grave we make our song: alleluia. Therefore, because even in death we are made alive, and death is vanquished, we are a people that can have mercy because know that we are never alone…

That’s what Matt’s dad described, not unlike Job, in that courtroom, speaking to Matt’s murderers:

“You… left him out there by himself, but he wasn’t alone. There were his lifelong friends with him, friends that he had grown up with… First he had the beautiful night sky and the same stars and moon that we used to see through a telescope. Then he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him. And through it all he was breathing in the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind, the ever-present Wyoming wind, for the last time. He had one more friend with him. He had God.”

Matt had God. And so did Job. And so did those who died in Pittsburgh. And so do we.

We are never alone.

---

3 The Right Reverend Gene Robinson, Sermon, October 26, 2018 at the Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance for Matthew Shepard.
4 “The Laramie Project” by Moises Kaufman, Moment: Dennis Shepard’s Statement.
6 “The Laramie Project” by Moises Kaufman, Moment: Dennis Shepard’s Statement.