

There’s a saying popular in African-American churches that is a kind of call and response. The saying goes like this: The call—the invocation—is, “God is good,” and your reply is, “All the time.” Have you heard this saying? Let’s try it: “God is good!” [**All the time!**]

Of course, the reverse is also true, and this is said, also: “All the time,” [**God is good!**]

I think the reason people in African-American churches say this is to remind themselves that no matter what bad things happen to them, “God is good.” No matter what bad things God’s people do, “God is good.” No matter what God allows to happen in the world God created and sustains, “All the time,” [**God is good!**]

Of course, bad things—terrible things—happen to everyone, not just to marginalized people. These bad things are not of God. These painful things are NOT the way God desires things to be. But God does allow bad things to happen, even to those who live for God, even to us.

We don’t know why God allows bad things to happen, not really. We have our theories because we want to KNOW. Because when we know, we can judge God for letting bad things happen to decide whether God is worthy of our worship. By the way, this “judging God” business isn’t recommended, isn’t the path to a lifetime of happiness and joy. But we do want to KNOW why God allows suffering, even if just so the knowledge gives us one step on the way to fixing the problem, the problem of suffering and pain. Because that’s what we humans desire above all is to control our own lives, to control our own destiny so that we can avoid bad things happening to US, so we can avoid pain (and, oh yes, while we are “fixing” the universe, why not fix things so we won’t have to die, right?).

We humans have been trying to understand and “fix” the “problem” of suffering ever since, well, forever. And our first lesson today contains a very ancient reflection about why God seems silent when we are in the depth of pain and suffering and despair.

Last week we learned that Job was a God-fearing person, the very epitome of love. He was an upright person: he attended church every Sunday, no doubt; pledged a tithe of his considerable wealth; personally performed good works as the hands, voice, and heart doing God’s work. And yet, Job’s fortunes were reversed “to test him,” the story says.



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But Job’s story isn’t about God. Oh, no! Don’t go on THAT wild goose chase. This story is about Job, and we are Job, so this story, this lesson, is about US. “What should our response be,” the story asks, “when bad things happen to us?”

Last week we learned that casting blame on the victim, that ascribing blame to the victim, is also a dead-end logic path. Bad things happen to good people, so blame isn’t the answer. Bad things happen to US, and that doesn’t mean we are bad, doesn’t make us bad.

This week we wonder why God seems silent in the face of our pain. We hurt. We pray. We beg God to ease our hurt, to rid us of pain, to fix things, to fix US (and oh, by the way, we beg God to keep us or our loved ones from dying). And God is silent, or seems silent, feels silent; we are in pain, suffering. We say, wrongly, that “our prayers didn’t work.”

Job, on the other hand, said something like, “If only I could find God, if only I could get a response from God, get God to listen to me, to notice me and my pain, God would fix things because God is just and God is good (all the time, even when I suffer!) and God is loving. So,” Job added, “I must not be seeking God in the right way.”

The lesson here is in what Job DIDN’T do. Job didn’t blame God. Job didn’t curse God. Job didn’t even quit searching for God. In short, Job remained faithful.

Today’s portion of the Job story is incomplete. The resolution comes later, along with his vindication, his healing, the return with interest of all he had lost. For now, though, Job insisted, “Even if I can’t feel God’s presence, GOD IS GOOD, ALL THE TIME. And even if God seems silent, “ALL THE TIME, GOD IS GOOD.”

Where is God in our terrible times? Where is God in our times of terror? God is here with us, holding our hand, assuring us that he loves us, that he is right here with us in our suffering. And God sends help. When all feels lost, look for the love, because that’s where God is, in the love he sends our way.

Now you may be wondering, “What kind of lesson is this? WE can feel God’s presence; that’s why we are in church, worshipping God, because God is HERE.” Well, no-one can feel God’s presence all the time (though God IS present always). Sometimes we are distracted by things or just distracted by life. Sometimes we are in pain, physical or psychic pain, so our awareness of God’s presence is weakened. Sometimes we have put God on hold (as if we could!). What we need is our church to help us “tune in” to God’s presence. We need our church to remind us, “All the time,” **[God is good!]**

But—as you know—our church is not our building. Rather, our church is the community of the faithful, our church community. Don’t confuse the building in which we gather as the HERE in which God is presence. God is present everywhere, in everyone, in everything, in and between us, sustaining us with his life-giving Spirit, and urging us to share all he has given us with others.