

**Full of Days**  
*Reflection for Aurora United Church*  
*200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, October 28, 2018*

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your worship today, celebrating 200 years in the life of this congregation.

What a life it has been..... starting with that log church in 1818

.....To the larger frame church built in 1855 to accommodate a growing congregation.

..... Then there was the **fire**, (the first fire!) March 23, 1877, that partially destroyed the frame church

And the decision by the Trustees to rebuild..... so the new grander edifice was built in 1878.

.....Then, in 1893..... the **cyclone** that blew off the large spire and damaged the smaller one

That wasn't the last of the problems with those spires..... in 1943 the decision was made to remove both spires after they has been struck by **lightning** several times....

These are all part of your history, things you have been told about,

And then there is the one that all of you who were here four years ago will remember vividly – the **fire** on April 11 2014 that destroyed the church and most of its contents.

Yes this church has seen some times! This church has experienced some trials and tribulations, more than your share....

But somehow you have continued on as a Christian presence in this community, proving, providing, as the Auroran noted earlier this year “two centuries of joy, sorrow and spirituality in this community”.

You have nurtured generations of people in the faith, including Canada's 14<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister Lester Pearson, whose father was called to the ministry of this church in 1903.

And you have served the broader community too.....all these trials have not held you back from that....

It was strange when I read a bit of your history and realized the many hardships and trials that this congregation has experienced, and then I looked at the lectionary and realized that one of the readings was from the book of Job.

Remember Job, the guy who had it made, he was wealthy and he was blameless.....and then he lost everything, lost his riches, lost his family, lost his health.

Even people who have never read the Bible know something about Job, they know he was the one who suffered so greatly. They may know of him as being patient, "the patience of Job" although if you read the text you will see that this is a bit misleading..... he was angry with God, he cried out angrily, letting God know that he wasn't being treated fairly.....

But actually our text today is not about Job's troubles, but about the less familiar story of what happened after.

.....**Job died old and full of days**..... that's a lovely phrase isn't it.

According to this story, he actually was full of days..... 140 years worth of days.

Not quite as old as this congregation, but I am confident in saying that none of us here today are that old!

Job's life had some other parallels to that of this congregation, not just longevity. You have had your share of setbacks. Cyclones! Lightning! Fires! Maybe not quite like Job, but devastating blows - you have had more than your share. People in this congregation must have wondered after each of these terrible events, "What did we do to deserve this? Where is God in this?"

I have to admit that I find the particular section of the book of Job that we have before us today quite challenging.

It isn't that I don't like happy endings. I go in for movies where the unlikely couple falls in love, where against all odds the horse wins the big race, where the ship lands safely after tossing on the stormy seas. I like those movies and novels that come to a happy resolution.

That isn't always my experience of real life though. That's where I struggle with the Epilogue from the book of Job, as this section is referred to. After all Job has been through, it almost seems a little too easy. A little too Hollywood!

There is debate amongst the scholars about the epilogue, and the prologue too for that matter. Were they written at the same time as the rest of the book? They are in prose where the parts in between are more like poetry. Were they added later? Are they really part of the same story or are they later additions woven in from some other story?

These are things that academics may discuss, but since I am not an academic, I will simply say that this IS included as part of the story. How that came to happen matters less to me than the fact that it is there. So let's just try to figure out what to make of it.

Earlier in the book of Job, for most of the book of Job, Job is arguing with God.

Why would someone put so much energy into an argument that they can't win. Surely it is clear that we can't win an argument with God.

But come to think of it, maybe it is kind of a human thing, maybe it is something that we all fall into some times..... Engaging in an unwinnable argument. Needing someone to blame when things go wrong. Yes, maybe I can see a bit of myself in Job.....

But all through his lament, his anger at God, he is still communicating with God. He is questioning God's fairness, but he isn't doubting God's presence.

He is struggling with something that we all struggle with sometimes. Looking at the world we live in today – *with events like the horrific shooting of people at Sabbath worship in a synagogue in Pittsburgh yesterday* - which of us does not struggle with how, if God really loves us and the world, how can so much hardship, so much violence, so much injustice, exist?

On one level we know that this thinking reflects a somewhat shallow human understanding of God, but still, we wonder. We try to make sense of it. And sometimes, like Job, we want to call God out on it.

Job found himself living in an unjust world.

The world is still unjust. Maybe, like Job, we don't always remember that when things are good for us.... It starts to feel like our due, no more than we deserve..... but when our luck turns for the worse, we are quick to see the injustice.

And if we think beyond ourselves, to the experiences others in the world, the injustice is always apparent.

Walter Brueggeman, a beloved theologian from our partner church in the United States, the United Church of Christ, says:

*....Faith if it is to survive knowingly and honestly, must live in an unjust world....Job learns that while the world may not be to his liking, the world will hold at its centre because it is God's world. The world does not rest in Job's virtue. In the end Job is released for yielding and submission, for trust and praise, and finally he is released for freedom to live."*  
(Finally Comes the Poet, 61, 62)

What is it that lets Job move on? Is he rewarded for pleasing God, for saying the right thing about God's supreme power? Or is it more a matter of accepting that he, Job, is not in charge, that his actions neither earn him good things or cause him to deserve bad things. There is someone greater, there is a greater power.

We have all known people, good people who suffer too much, people who do not deserve to suffer. That's a funny term isn't it, but it's a common phrase, "that person deserves better!"

As if we earned the good things in life! As if those with misfortunes were somehow to blame for them!

Isn't it more important..... and ultimately more comforting, to understand that in good times and in bad God is with us. Whether we feel his presence or not, God is with us. God is with us in the times when we feel deserted by friends and deserted by God. God hears us when we do not feel heard.

So what do we do with this happy ending that today's reading presents us with?

Was he rewarded for finally saying the right thing in his long angry conversation with God? Or did he just find a way to let go of his anger and his hardships and find acceptance that let him move on. That let him look for new possibilities instead of staying tied to his losses.

When everything turned out so wonderfully for Job, don't you wonder what it was really like for him? Could he just relax and enjoy his new riches and his new family? Did he treasure every moment, knowing how fragile the good times could be? Did he think of those blessings as his due, or did he know that they truly were **blessings**, as undeserved as his hard times had been?

I wonder how he was transformed by his experiences. Did he live differently this time?

Would Job as he was in earlier times have taken that unusual step of leaving a share of his inheritance to his daughters?

So what do we do with this story? Where does it take us? Maybe this.....

In the midst of hardship..... look forward. Have faith the possibility of better days ahead, even when things are so bad that it seems impossible that life will ever get better. Remember that God is faithful to us even when we are not getting the answers that we want.

I have a feeling that the people of this congregation, those who saw the church through the cyclones, the lightning, the fires..... oh yes that is you isn't it, you are

still living through the aftermath of the most recent fire ..... You people of this congregation know something of this. You know how hard it is to feel God's loving presence in the midst of adversity. You also know the importance of faith in God's accompaniment to those better days ahead.

Yes, God is with us through the ups and downs, through the highs and the lows, through joy and adversity.....

As we remind ourselves every time we say the New Creed of the United Church of Canada, "God is with us, we are not alone".

Thanks be to God.

**Job 42:1-6, 10-17**

42:1 Then Job answered the LORD: 42:2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

42:3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

42:4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.'

42:5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

42:6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

42:10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

42:11 Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.

42:12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys.

42:13 He also had seven sons and three daughters.

42:14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.

42:15 In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.

42:16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations.

42:17 And Job died, old and full of days.