

**Job 1:13-22 + Turn to the Lord Beneath the Cross + Series: Turn to the Lord
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 2nd Sunday in Lent + 25 February 2018**

Ever have one of “those days”? Your alarm doesn’t go off when it should. As you race to get ready for work, the hot water turns cold in the shower and you bump your head on a shelf. It’s a frosty morning, which means the windows have just enough ice on them that you have to scrape each and every window. On your way to work, you manage to hit every red light on the way. At work, there’s a pile of work that was left undone from yesterday. Your computer starts acting buggy. Oh, and come lunchtime, you accidentally spill your lunch all over. You’ve had it with that day and wish you could just go back to bed and start over.

Maybe your daily routine doesn’t quite look like that, but we’ve all been there. We’ve all had one of those frustrating, pull-out-your-hair kind of days where everything that can go wrong goes wrong. How do you respond when you have to endure a truly awful stretch like that? What happens when the proverbial straw does break the proverbial camel’s back? What happens when you go one “gone wrong” too far and you’re done? Do you lose it?

That can happen when the troubles piling up are small and insignificant, but what happens when the troubles that start piling up are big, significant, even massive? What then? A car accident leads to days in the hospital and weeks of rehab. The one reliable vehicle that your family depends on completely dies. The doctor gives a worst-case-scenario diagnosis. A loved one has a medical emergency. A round of layoffs at work come at the worst possible time. Retirement savings take a hit when the economy dives. Bills pile up and the money isn’t there to pay them. Conflict and hardship hit the family hard, you begin to wonder “Why me, Lord? Why us, Lord? Why now?” But God hasn’t promised to answer why.

We do experience times like that in our lives. Trouble piles on top of trouble, and we struggle to remain at peace, to remain confident in God’s promises, to even trust in him. We struggle because the piling weight of those troubles feels heavy like...a cross. Crosses are heavy. They hurt. They have slivers. They crush, but where can you turn beneath such a cross? Where can you turn when the bottom drops out or you face loss and all the grief that comes with it? Where can you turn when your plans, your expectations, your hopes and dreams shatter? Where can you turn when life seems like a nightmare from which you can’t wake up? Where can you turn when your mind and soul cry out, “Why?”, and your sinful nature just begs you to point the finger of blame at God? Where can you turn when things get worse?

Perhaps you and I could learn something from the ancient believer Job. The inspired writer tells us. **“He was a man of complete integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. His estate included 7,000 sheep and goats, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large number of servants. Job was the greatest man among all the people of the east.”** (1:1-3)

In his time, Job was like Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. He had a big family, vast wealth (3,000 camels was like having his own personal fleet), a huge business, and respect throughout the region. He could’ve been an engine of the eastern economy in his day, but above all, Job was a man whose heart belonged to the Lord of grace. Job cared so much about God’s will that every time his kids got together, Job would offer sacrifices for them in case they sinned. God cared about him. He blessed and sustained Job every day.

...But then in a matter of minutes, Job lost everything. **“One day...a messenger came to Job and reported: ‘While the oxen were plowing and the donkeys grazing nearby, the Sabeans swooped down and took them away. They struck down the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you!’”** Without warning, Job lost 1,000 oxen, 500 donkeys, and the many servants tending them at the hands of Sabean raiders—a tremendous loss! Yet while that messenger **“was still speaking...another messenger came and reported: ‘God’s fire fell from heaven. It burned the sheep and the servants and devoured them, and I alone have escaped to tell you!’”**

Without warning, Job lost 7,000 sheep and goats and the many servants tending them when **“the fire of God”** rained down and consumed them. Perhaps it was a terrible lightning storm. Perhaps it was volcanic activity. In either case—a tremendous loss! Yet while **“that messenger was still speaking...yet another came and reported: ‘The Chaldeans formed three bands, made a raid on the camels, and took them away. They struck down the servants with the sword and I alone have escaped to tell you!’”** Without warning, Job lost 3,000 camels and the many servants tending them at the hands of Chaldean raiders—a tremendous loss! His wealth was gone, his business obliterated, but he could start over again. Yet while that messenger **“was still speaking...another messenger came...”**

“Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house. Suddenly a powerful wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on the young people so that they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you!” The loss of wealth and business was one thing, but the loss of every last one of his children? All ten of them? Job stood up and tore his robe in sorrow. He picked up a knife and sheared the hair off his head and his beard. The knife clattered out of his hands as Job sank to the ground.

Job had lost everything. He had almost nothing left that was his own. Later he would even lose his health. Job had lost nearly everyone. Most of his servants were dead except a handful of messengers and household servants. Even worse, he had lost almost his entire family in one fell swoop. So where does he turn? How does Job respond to such a crushing cross?

“He worshiped.” What? Job bowed low to the ground, prostrating himself there, and he worshiped the Lord, his God, who saves his people with free and faithful grace. Where else could he turn? He had lost everything! He had lost everyone! Even his wife later told him to **“curse God and die”** because of all the evil that had just piled on top of them (Job 2:9), but when all these earthly props had given way, where did Job turn? To the Lord of grace.

When Abraham was told to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, he trusted in the Lord and responded to his Word with silent obedience—and the Lord provided deliverance. Here Job loses everything without warning—not just one animal, but all of them, not just one child, but all of them—and he too trusts in the Lord. He responds not with silent obedience, but with a beautiful confession of faith in the Lord who is right there with him beneath the cross. **“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.”**

Job knew that he brought nothing into this world—neither possessions nor people—and he knew that he would take nothing out of it, yet he knew that the Lord of grace, who gives and takes all things, would also save him. He knew that the Lord of grace would sustain him—and that’s what the Lord did. The Lord sustained Job’s faith. **“Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything.”** The Lord held Job in the palm of his hand even when Job later complained to the Lord. In fact, at the end of this account, we find out that the Lord even blessed him more richly than before.

As Christians, how do we react to a life beneath the cross? We’d love to have a life free from pain and sorrow and grief and trouble, but Jesus makes it pretty clear that we will only get to enjoy such a cross-free life in heaven someday. In this life, following him means we can expect to live life beneath the cross. We can expect to have troubles and hardships even because we are Christians. Earlier Jesus told his disciples, **“If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it.”** (Mark 8:34-35)

...But that’s oh so difficult! It’s hard to deny yourself and what you want. It’s hard to take up your own heavy cross and follow the Lord, trusting in him, when tragedy or loss or hardship or pain or anti-Christian pressure strike. How many of us would fail to fall to our knees in worship, instead looking for someone or something to blame when tragedy or hardship piles up or the cross weighs heavily on us? How many of us would crumble at the reality of losing everything we have or losing everyone we love? Yet even if you didn’t crumble, wouldn’t you wonder why it’s happening to you or your family? Who of us wouldn’t be tempted to sin in such a moment, to even blame God for turning his back on us while we suffer here?

...But it’s true. The life of a Christian is lived beneath the cross, ever following the Lord beneath the cross, ever sustained and saved by the Lord beneath the cross. You see, as much as we’re tempted to think that God is turning his back on us or that God is withholding his love from us or that we’ve done something to earn God’s especially focused anger, we need to stop and turn to the Lord beneath the cross. Turn and see the Lord making his long, slow, winding journey from the mount of glory to the mount of crucifixion. Turn and see the Lord put his torn up back beneath a very real cross of wood, a back that bore the crushing weight of your sins and my sins and the sins of our entire world. Through his suffering, through his poverty, through his hardship, through his loss, through his pain, through his death, the Lord saved you. The Lord saved me. The Lord saved us by putting himself beneath the cross.

Turn and see that same Lord promise to bless you, as he has every other believer, through suffering, through trouble, through a life lived beneath the cross. With such crosses, God turns us back again and again to Christ, to his unflinching love, to his sure deliverance. He strengthens us not by praising how well we’ve borne the cross, but by the good news of his love that **“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8)

So through this life, we turn and follow our Lord beneath the cross until he brings us home to heaven. With Job, we recognize that we brought nothing into this world—neither possessions nor people—and we will take nothing out of it, including the crosses we bear. By faith, we recognize that the Lord of grace gives and the Lord of grace takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord of grace who bore the cross for us and for our salvation! Amen.