

Sunday, July 20, 2014
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “Not Quite Good Enough”

Job’s friends have all the answers.

According to their belief system God *does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.*

God not only sends the rains, but he also raises up the righteous and frustrates the crafty.

The needy are saved, the poor have hope, injustice has no voice.

In Eliphaz’ and Bildad’s rule-bound world the good guys always win and the bad guys always fail.

If only it were this easy.

If only we had a set of rules to follow that would ensure that our lives would be blessed and only good things would happen to us.

This childish view of life can be compelling – we yearn for happy endings, success stories, examples of justice and fairness.

We want to believe that we have some control over outcomes in our lives.

We want to be certain that if we do all the right things, we will not get sick or lose our job or become estranged from our families.

We want to believe that the secret to a happy life is our own self-discipline.

But reality tells a different story.

This happens on two levels.

The first is simply events that happen over which we have no control – illness, tragedies, natural disasters – these things are a part of life.

Our control, of course, lies in how we choose to respond to such events.

A second level is when as human beings we seemingly conspire against ourselves.

As early as the year 58 – only twenty five years or so after Jesus, Paul laments to his followers in Rome:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate.

I say that we conspire against ourselves because we often buy into other people's ideas of what we ought to be.

I remember seeing a videotape of a group therapy session where the group was asked what name they would give themselves to describe their childhood.

One man in the group responded "not good enough."

My heart broke for this man as he talked about never feeling that he measured up to his father's expectations.

His perception of himself as a child, and carried into adulthood was being 'not good enough.'

In our passages from Job today, Job's friends continue to berate him for something he has not done.

They are certain that he has done something wrong – though he is equally certain that he has not sinned.

In his friend's eyes Job is 'not good enough.'

Somehow, whether he knows it or not, he has not measured up to the standard warranted to receive God's blessing.

I want to pause here and remind you that we are talking about the Old Testament God – the God of Abraham and Jacob.

In speaking of our Christian faith, Henri Nouwen reminds us that we have the blessing of Jesus - God's gift to us, as an example of how to live – even in the face of calamity.

Jesus is the Blessed One. When Jesus was baptised in the Jordan river a voice came from heaven saying: "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you".

This was the blessing that sustained Jesus during his life.

Whatever happened to him - praise or blame - he clung to his blessing; he always remembered that he was the beloved child of God.

Jesus came into the world to share that blessing with us.

He came to open our ears to the voice that also says to us, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, my favor rests on you ."

When we can hear that voice, trust in it, and always remember it, especially during dark times, we can live our lives as God's blessed children and find the strength to share that blessing with others.

Life certainly does not always work out as we planned.

However, as Christians we know that God offers us mercy, forgiveness and grace.

We are not meant to be perfect – only God is perfect.

We are meant to honor and glorify God with our lives and that includes admitting, as Paul did, when we fall short.

When we love God, truly love God with our whole heart, we are compelled to also love ourselves.

We are the ones created by God, in God's image – how could we do anything less than honor that.

Let's talk about the things in life that keep us from feeling beloved.

What are the forces in your life that tell you that you are 'not good enough'?

What can you do to counter those forces?