

Proper 7B (Pentecost 3), 2009

Text: Mark 4:35-41 & Job 38:1-11

Title: "Don't You Care?"

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"Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing?"

Thus cried the frantic disciples as their boat filled with water and the waves threatened to break it apart.

"Don't you care that we are perishing?"

So have cried many other disciples in the face of death. When faced with war, disease and natural disasters, as the end draws near, many have cried out to a God who didn't seem to care.

"Don't you care that we are perishing?"

So have cried many of you in moments of despair. When sickness and death overtake you. When your life is falling apart. When all you see around you is evil, and God doesn't seem to care. Don't you care that we are perishing? Don't you care that my wife, my husband is perishing? Don't you care that I'm losing my job? Don't you care that my marriage is failing? Don't you care that my kids have wandered away from the church? Don't you care?

Job asked these questions, too.

Job certainly wondered if God really cared for him. Job was a good, God-fearing, family man. But in a matter of hours he lost everything- his possessions, his children and his health. He went from wealthy to poor. He went from being a father to being childless. He went from being strong and healthy to being in painful agony.

From Job's perspective, God didn't care about him any more. If God had cared, He would not have taken away all the wealth he had worked so hard for. If God had cared, God would not have allowed his children to die. If God had cared, God would heal him from his excruciating pain.

Job's friends are convinced that God is punishing him. They try to convince Job to confess whatever great sin he has committed. Certainly Job has committed some unspeakable sin, some dark misdeed, and now God is punishing him.

But Job maintains his innocence. He pleads his case and refuses to acknowledge any wrongdoing. If he could only see God face to face, he would prove that he did not deserve any of this. Job says: "I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger."

Job goes through all of his good deeds- he has been faithful to his wife, he has been generous to the poor, he has always done the right thing.

Finally, in desperation, Job says these words to God: "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm."

Does that sound familiar? Have you ever been this mad with God- when He doesn't seem to answer your prayers? When you feel as though He is treating you unfairly? When you feel tossed about like a ship in a storm?

God's response to Job begins in chapter 38, our Old Testament reading. It's not the response that Job was expecting. It's not the response we expect from God, either.

We expect God to explain himself and give some rational answer. We expect him to tell Job that he was just testing him and strengthening his faith. We expect God to tell Job not to worry and that everything would work out for the best.

But that doesn't happen. God doesn't explain Himself to Job. God doesn't answer any of Job's questions. Instead of answers, God only has questions for Job. The Lord says, "I will question you and you will answer me."

Who are you? Who are you to question me? Where were you when I was creating and forming this world?

Those same questions stare us in the face when we think God doesn't care, when we want God to explain His actions. When we accuse God of not caring for us, this is how God responds.

God doesn't have to answer to us for anything. God is not accountable to us for what He does. We are in no position to be judging God or demanding that He explain His actions.

Our tendency is to make ourselves the judge of God and determine if His actions are good or bad, right or wrong. Somehow we think that we're in a position to judge God. When something happens that seems evil or unfair, then we feel justified in blaming God and condemning him.

When we do this, we make ourselves into gods, just like Adam and Eve, who deemed that God was being unfair by keeping certain fruit out of their reach. We want a God that we can understand, who always acts in ways that are reasonable and fair according to our judgment.

Most people who reject God reject the whole concept of a God- the fact that there is someone who is outside our control and understanding, someone whose ways are beyond us, and someone who judges us, and not the other way around. We want to be the final judge and authority.

So when we start accusing God of being unfair or uncaring, we are faced with the same questions God posed to Job. Who are you to question God?

After all God's questions, Job has a simple reply: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. 'You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

God put Job in his place, as the defendant rather than the judge. Job is a creature, not the creator. That is the point of God's extended questions in Job 38-41. All the questions involve creation. God is the one who put the earth and sea and sky in their places. He cares and provides for every living thing. If God cares for the goats and the horses and the ravens and the ostriches, how much more will He love and care for you?

You are crown of creation, the only creature made in God's image. God set the earth's foundation for you. God put the sea in its place for you. God made the clouds and the sky and the rain for you. God loves you and will only give you what is best for you.

When you doubt God's love and care for you, repent. So often we act like little children, who don't get their way and then accuse their parents of not loving them. "If you really loved me, you'd give me what I want," we say to God all the time.

Instead of accusing and questioning God, faith trusts in Him, even when the seas are rough and threaten to overwhelm us.

Which brings us back to the boat and the disciples and their question, "Don't you care that we're perishing." A better translation would be, "You don't care that we're perishing, do you?"

In the midst of the storms and the waves and the winds, Jesus is asleep.

The disciples are seasoned fishermen. They've seen their fare share of storms and they're terrified. But here's a carpenter and teacher who's not concerned at all by this tempest.

Sometimes it seems to us that Jesus is sleeping. That He's not paying attention to us. That He doesn't realize just how bad our situation is.

But notice where Jesus is. Jesus is there in the boat with the disciples. He's in the same boat. We know that Jesus cares because He is there with them. Jesus is not waiting on the shore. Jesus does not abandon the disciples, walk across the water and save Himself. But He is with them in the boat. If the disciples perish, Jesus perishes, too.

This is how we know that Jesus cares for us. Jesus puts Himself in the same boat with us. Whatever happens to us happens to Him.

Jesus put on flesh and blood and became involved in our world, in our troubles, in our cares. Jesus could have stood from afar and watched. But He didn't. Jesus came down and joined us here in the boat.

Jesus experienced all the pain and suffering that we experience. He very easily could have cried out to His heavenly Father, “Don’t you care that I am perishing?” Instead, Jesus prayed, “Not my will, by your will be done.”

Jesus died. He dies a sinner’s death for all of us on the cross. But Jesus did not “perish.” The word used by the disciples for “perish” means to be destroyed, to be utterly and completely wiped out. Jesus died, but He did not perish. Death did not destroy him. After three days’ rest in the tomb, Jesus rose to life, victorious over death and the grave.

One day the winds and the waves will overtake you and you will die. But you will not perish. You will not be utterly destroyed. Your body will rest and sleep for awhile as you await Jesus’ return and the resurrection of the dead.

“Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing.” Jesus cares, and you will not perish. You will die, but you will not perish. Jesus is in the same boat with you, and what goes for Him goes for you. Death did not destroy Jesus, and it will not destroy you.

He comes now, once more to be with us in this boat, in this church, in this nave. The same flesh and blood that sat in the boat with the disciples will now sit on our altar. The same flesh and blood that were nailed to a cross and died, and that rose again on Easter morning is here for you today.

As you receive Jesus’ body and blood, know that Jesus loves and cares for you. He joins your flesh and blood with his. You are one, and whatever goes for you, goes for Him, too. In the midst of the storms, the winds and the waves, in the face of death itself, Jesus is with you, and He speaks those same words, “Peace, be still.”

Through the raging waters of death He brings the calm of paradise once more. Right here, right now.