



October 3, 2021

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Job 1:1, 2:1-10

Becoming an Acts 2 Church: Part III

“As Any Had Need”



*There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*

On World Communion day, along with millions of other Christians, we partake of the bread and cup to give thanks for the sacrifice of our Lord and find hope in His resurrection. Perhaps more than any other Sunday, we are sure to remember that there is one Lord that binds all believers together from every time and place, no matter their dogma or denomination. Thank God this unity is not dependent upon us but upon Christ, so we have confidence that we can live into Jesus’ heartfelt prayer that all believers may be one, as He and the father are one.

It is by the Holy Spirit through the bread and wine that we drink in this worldwide fellowship, reminding us that our various ways of approaching the throne of grace enrich one another rather than drive us apart. In these deep connections, we find the power in a two billion-member fellowship, which gives us supreme

confidence to live into the Acts 2 challenge – to give as any had need!

Unlike Job’s friends, who are like those people who love to sit back and assess others’ actions but regularly fail to actually do something practically helpful – the quintessential armchair quarterback. The early church was not immobilized by analysis and process but was propelled by the Spirit of God.

But the more interesting foil from our Job passage is Satan himself (is Satan a “him”?). He presents a cynical view of humanity that some still struggle with today: “all that people have they will give to save their lives”. Satan believes that humanity is ultimately selfish and will not live for something other than their own personal needs. When push comes to shove, everyone is in it for themselves. But the early church presented a different

picture. Their goodwill spurred them into giving, sacrificially in some cases. And because the Spirit of God is still at work in this world, people of every stripe of Christian faith continue in this same sacrificial joy.

One of the great blessings of being a minister and experiencing diverse faiths from around the world is that I have seen with my eyes the power of God that is present in Acts 2! The worldwide church is profound, powerful, and providential in its manifestations and has filled, more than any other religion on the planet, the full breadth of the humanity. Not because of the “church” per se, but because of the Christ who commonly calls us all and the Spirit who binds us.

I was reading one commentary on this Job passage that began, “No. No. Nobody is like this [Job]...blameless and upright fearing god...” Absolutely wrong! Even pastors have been duped into failing to believe in the power of God to work through the human spirit!

The world wants us to think faith cannot truly change us; it cannot truly make us greater than our own selves. Seminary tried to drill this in my head and for a time I believed it. Do you know what changed my mind?! People. I have met people just like Job. No, not perfect, but that is not what the text teaches. Satan insists that when the rubber hits the road, “skin for skin,” people will curse God. But I know people that have lost children, lost their health, essentially have the very worst, and their

faith has kept the centered; hopeful. And when the nights were long and the tears were heavy, they did not overwhelm and lead to despair. That is what this faith does – keeps us from despair and cynicism. This faith is powerful, and it gave strength to Doctor King, to your great aunt, and more.

Satan believed that increased stress and trauma would reveal the lowliness of humanity. But I have seen the exact opposite! And yes this does happen. But for some, it is when things are at their most desperate, like Job, that the divine within the human spirit shines the most brightly!

The stole I wear this Sunday reminds me of that power. It is made from fabric in South Africa. My congregation in Buffalo had a sister church there and we took turns visiting one another’s congregation. Though materially their congregation was bereft of the goods of this world, they were far richer than us in the Spirit of hope, faith, and love they lived daily. When their pastor came to our congregation, he handed me a plaque and I can still hear his voice whenever I think of the words that still lift me up in awe, “Though we are an ocean apart we are but a prayer away.” Every time I wear this stole, I remember his faith and his friendship.

Sometimes, there is the deeply mistaken notion that American Christians have more to give because of the money in our bank accounts. For giving materially is only as powerful as the Spirit of love and goodwill that is behind it. The worldwide church has taught me this over and over

again, perhaps no more powerfully than a moment in Haiti.

Even little children around the world disprove Satan's accusation! Unlike me, who whined about not getting enough at Christmas as a child, a little girl in Haiti showed the way.

There is a Christian orphanage there that is run by a young woman named Nadege, the daughter of the founder of Haiti Outreach Ministries. Nadege told us a story about one girl in that orphanage.

Every year each orphan gets only one present at Christmas. And so that one present has to last all the way until the next year. They want a particular toy that is theirs, that they can play with and call their own. Now these orphans literally don't have anything in the world – they don't even have parents, of course. But there was a girl in the neighborhood who had parents, but they didn't have any money. And that little girl didn't get a single present for Christmas. When one of Nadege's girls found out about it, this one orphan girl, who gets one present a year, gave her doll to her. She didn't give out of her abundance; she gave out of her scarcity. She allowed the rules to be changed so that she wouldn't get a present that year, but that other girl would.

Give to all as any had need.

But giving as any had need often happens most powerfully beyond material possessions.

Finally, on this day of communion around the world, it is the sacred meal itself

that enables Christians, who are enemies on the world's terms, to give others what we need the most – love in Jesus' name.

While I was serving as Executive Presbyter in Birmingham, Alabama, we hosted a General Assembly for our denomination. One of our military chaplains, David Terrononi, was serving communion to a Christian from one of the countries behind the communist wall. Here is his story:

Tom, I was assigned to serve communion to the international representatives on the main floor. I was in uniform. After the service, a gentleman with a heavy accent told me that my serving him communion was very emotional for him because "our two countries are enemies." He said, "You are an US Air Force chaplain and you served me communion as a brother in Christ." And then he embraced me. It was very moving and humbling because he is the moderator of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Havana, Cuba. This powerful experience reinforces the strength of the Gospel to cross all boundaries. I saw him a couple days later and he immediately greeted me with, "There's my chaplain friend..."

Give to all as any had need. On that day, he needed welcomed the most.

All of us friends in Christ, have the power to give to all as any had need. The Spirit of Christ is alive in the hearts of believers reaching out sacrificially with their material goods but not only that – risking their lives, their only Christmas present, their national identity and more so that the deepest need of all might be met. The Love of God, The grace of our Lord, and the fellowship of the Spirit. Amen.