

October 25, 2009

Job 38:1-7, 42:1-10
Mark 10:46-52

“And we think WE’VE got hard times”

Hard Times. Hard Times. My second-grade grandson and I are listening to an audio book by Mary Pope Osborne in which two children travel back in time to the New York City of the Great Depression. It has been very interesting to be a part of helping him understand a time like that—so different from anything he’s ever experienced.

Hard Times. What do we think of when we hear those words? Some of us may think of today—our immediate time. Even though I have been glad to see my pension fund back growing again, after its mighty tumble a year ago, I know that unemployment is still very high. There are still members of this church without a job and looking for a position- just this past week another lost a job. The very real fears about finding something new—while keeping up with rent or mortgage payments, keeping the car running, the utilities paid, can seem overwhelming.

Hard Times. So far in my life, however, I haven’t faced the kind of hard times my mother did. I grew up listening to her stories about the death of her mom when she was seven and the oldest of four little girls. I heard about their life with maternal grandparents who were tenant ranchers in eastern Washington state. There were nine aunts and uncles along with the four little girls living in an unpainted shack. They went barefoot to school because they had no shoes. There were black widow spiders and rattlesnakes to watch for.

Hard Times. Today is Reformation Sunday—the day we remember and celebrate the birth of the Protestant Church. We remember Martin Luther and his courage as he tried to reform his church, the Roman Catholic Church. Luther proclaimed that people have direct access to Jesus Christ—they do not require any intermediary provided by the church. He preached that it is our faith that saves us, not our good works. He denounced practices of SELLING forgiveness for various sins—more money being required for greater sins. He refused to recant any of his message and ended up with a price on his head. He had to run away and seek protection of a noble of his time—and remained in hiding for a long period.

Hard Times. Our first Scripture today tells us about Job. Job was a happy and wealthy man. He had seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and many servants. He loved, thanked and glorified God regularly. Then, in one day, he lost them all. Job did not lose his wife, but that may not have been a blessing, she was not very supportive. Later, Job contracted some horrible disfiguring illness that produced itchy sores all over his body. So--- we might say that Job knew some very hard times.

Hard Times. When I was in seminary, my husband lost his job. We ended up deeding our house back to the bank in lieu of foreclosure and rented a small town home for my final year of study. After my graduation we moved into our first parsonage, Gilles found work again, and everything turned out ok. It was, however, a challenge at the time.

But our hard times weren't bad at all compared to those of Martin Luther or Job. But, in the end, pain is still pain, anxiety is anxiety, uncertainty is uncertainty, misfortune is misfortune. We don't really need to put it in a hierarchy of intensity or rank it as to how "bad" it is. We all face **HARD TIMES!**

The good news this morning is that God is with us in all our hard times. God love us—and is willing to be interrupted by our need. The Gospel story about the healing of blind Bartimaeus shows us this. Jesus was walking down the road when the blind man called out to him, asking for help and healing. Jesus stopped in his tracks and told the man to come to him. After receiving Jesus' healing touch, the man was healed and devotedly followed Jesus and the other disciples as they resumed their interrupted trip.

What's remarkable about this story is that it is the last healing miracle Jesus performs in Mark's gospel. Jesus and his followers were already "on the way" to Jerusalem and the cross, when Bartimaeus crossed their path.

Jesus is always "on call". He will not leave us alone in our personal pain and darkness. The blind beggar was healed, even though the healing intruded into the flow of the journey to Jerusalem.

God is present to us in the ordinary moments of life. We struggle to believe this truth—and we probably struggle the most in hard times. The thing is this: God may seem to be hidden from our eyes. But God is hidden in the

ordinary. In the words of Cynthia Heimel ***“God is always to be found at the back of the refrigerator, behind the moldy tuna fish casserole, or sometimes he is found in the way the tailor at your corner lovingly stitches up the hem of your party dress, other times in the way a child sings along with a toothpaste commercial. Do not look for him in the heavens; he only keeps a small locker there, only goes there to change.”***

In our hard times, we are called to take the leap of faith--- to TRUST GOD even though he may seem to be hidden from our eyes. We are called to WATCH FOR HIM, even in the small and ordinary pieces of each day. We are promised that when we trust God, we are in touch with One who has power and love beyond anything we can imagine. When we trust God there is never again any experience in life, or death, that we must face alone.

But God also wants us to know that we cannot completely understand him. A God we can fully comprehend is no god at all. God is hidden in the ordinary, but God is also hidden in mystery. God eventually appears to Job as he struggles in his suffering. And when God comes, God proclaims that he is beyond complete human knowing. He asks Job, ***“Where were you when I created the universe? Who put the earth together? Who made the morning stars shine?”*** God’s words here underscore something Carl Sagan once said, ***“If you wish to make apple pie truly from scratch, you must first invent the universe.”***

Friends, God is not calling us to understand him. God is calling us to believe he is present with us, hidden- but present--- hidden in the ordinary and hidden in majesty. He is calling us to TRUST him, even in the hard times that come our way along the road of life and faith. God is calling us to live as his servants: Loving God, Serving Others, Growing Together. God is calling us to BELIEVE he has power and love beyond anything we can imagine.

I’d like to close with the words of a song by Scott Krippayne:

***I’ve prayed but still don’t have answers
At least none I’m able to see
I’ve tried to rest in not knowing
But not knowing is a hard place to be
But as I return to your pages
The words breathe new life to my soul***

*I see you at work through the ages
And know that you're still in control.*

*You are still God
You have created the land and the sea
May we applaud
And sing to the wonder of your Majesty
The wind will still blow
We won't always know
Why seasons of life are so hard
But you are still God.*

*Help me have faith in the knowledge
That you're greater than what we go through
And when I reside in the valleys
Help me keep trusting in you
The how and the when you are moving
Were not meant for me to decide
Again and again you are proving
You're there at just the right time.*

Lord, when we reside in the valleys, help us keep trusting in you.

In OUR valleys as individuals, families and as a church, God calls us to keep trusting in him. AMEN!