

“Fragile: Handle with Care”  
Job 1:1, 2:1-10  
October 7, 2018

During a flight between New York and Chicago, the captain made an announcement over the plane’s intercom: “Ladies and Gentlemen: Our number four engine has just been shut down because of mechanical trouble. There is nothing to worry about; we can still finish today’s flight with just three engines. Besides, you will be reassured to know that we have four bishops on board our flight this afternoon.” An 86-year-old woman called the flight attendant and told him with a bit of anxiety in her voice, “Would you mind telling the captain that I would rather have all four engines and only three bishops!”

Most people experience some sort of faith crisis during their lives. I am sure it has happened to some people worshipping here this morning, and may happen to the rest of you. Doubting or losing faith are nothing to be ashamed of – these events may lead ultimately to a stronger or deeper faith. But sometimes it takes a great deal of time and inner struggle to get there.

You see, faith is often fragile, because life is fragile. Life can be difficult at times and often the unexpected can happen. Sometimes, the happiness we think we have found can be fleeting. During the good times, when all four engines are running, when all is well with the world, it’s easy to have strong faith. If all around us is good, then God is good. Sometimes we even remember to thank God, and occasionally we even praise Him.

But, what happens to our lives and to our faith when there is a sudden and unexpected crisis, when someone we love dies, when we have to watch a family member suffer a long and torturous illness, when a long-awaited child is miscarried, or is stillborn, or born with a birth defect? Suddenly, our foundations feel not quite as firm, or may even shatter.

We may turn to God, but sense emptiness. We may search for God, but do not feel the divine presence. Even worse, we may lash out at those around us, both human and immortal, for the state we find ourselves in.

In the novel *To Serve Them All My Days*, the hero is a young school teacher, a victim of shellshock during the war, who slowly puts his life back together. As an instructor he falls in love and marries. A year later, twin girls are born. All was wonderful in their world, till one morning a runaway truck smashes into a car driven by the school-teacher's spouse carrying their children, dumping tons of debris on the little family. One minute there was life, happiness, hope – the next moment, there is death. On hearing the news of the accident, after trying to console the young school teacher, the Chaplain's wife turns to her clergy husband and says, "Your God has a lot to answer for today."

Has your God ever had a lot to answer for?

The accident, in the mind of the Chaplain's wife, was God's fault. But was that so? Perhaps blaming God made her feel better. After all, as we are reminded in the Book of Job, we are a people born to complain, and complaining seemingly shifts the responsibility off our shoulders. Besides, it seems easy to strike out at a God who does not defend Himself, or so it would appear.

But God did not make the brakes fail on the truck. God does not point a finger down from Heaven to say, "You will die," nor did God put a crack in the truck's brake line. Instead, our God is a God of healing, of love, and of peace. Blaming God for deaths, accidents, or major catastrophes might feel good, but solves nothing.

I have heard people say that a faith that only believes in God during the good times is shallow and easily shattered. But those are not the only kinds of faith that can break. Even Jesus in his darkest hour of despair cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When we hurt, we hurt – and sometimes we understandably give in to our instincts, lashing out against an Almighty God who seems very sparing in the use of His

divine powers. We think that an all-loving God should not have let things happen, and therefore is at fault.

If only we would, or could, open up in our despair, instead of closing in and locking in the pain and the anger. God's hand is there – in our families, our friends, our church – and in the act of Communion. That is what the Apostle tells us – or rather, what Paul told the Corinthian church. In almost the same breath as Paul uses to assure the church that they will be able to endure difficulties, he mentions the fellowship of Communion: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one.” God has given us a built-in support system in the fellowship of the church which becomes visible during the act of sharing the bread and the cup, especially in those times when we are physically few enough to gather around the Table set before us.

It is only through this fellowship that the promise of God to provide as much strength as necessary to bear any burden and defeat any temptation becomes real. We cannot do it alone. That is what the body of believers is here for. Because if pushed far enough, every individual has a breaking point; but if we band together in the face of adversity, then we will find that Jesus' promise that God is found wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name is indeed NOT an idle promise or an empty phrase, but a living reality.

How strong can your faith be? Can it face any difficulty? If you are in doubt, maybe it would be a good idea to be reminded about what faith really is. As a wise person once put it, “Faith is not ‘feeling good about God.’ Faith is a conscious choice to obey God when He says, ‘Trust me.’”

In other words, faith is an act, not a mood. Real faith holds on to the character of God and rests in the assurance that even as we are buffeted, circumstances cannot change God. The love of God is not something we deduce from the evidence around us. Things are a mess. People do suffer. Life isn't fair. The really tough question is not ‘Why do bad things happen?’ The tougher question is, ‘What is our response in the face of almost inevitable adversity?’

Some, like Job's wife, want to curl up, and in a final fit, seek to curse God, and die. That is one alternative. But where does that get us? Others, like the New England Yankees among us, seek to soldier onwards alone, until we can bear it no longer. Their motto, which I recently saw on a bumper sticker, reads "Life is hard, and then you die."

But for others, and we do indeed seem to be very, very few, there is a third alternative: to band together, to ask probing questions, to find strength in each other, and to face the world knowing that none other than the Spirit of Jesus of Nazareth is on our side.

Let us pray: