

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 27B, Oct 4, 2015
Job 1:1, 2:1-10**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

One of my most memorable Sunday mornings happened when some dance friends from my Decidedly Jazz dance class, along with our teacher, came to dance with me during a church service. It came about because I was intrigued by a piece of music we'd been dancing to in class and after tracking the music down... one thing led to another and a few of my fellow students and my teacher agreed to make it into a dance for church. It was a risk, to say the least, because while the song had a Gospel feel to it, it also had a fairly serious urban beat and our dance was a kind of West African inspired funk. Oh... and the song was about "satan"! It's what intrigued me... when we first danced to it in class, all I could hear in the lyrics was "satan" but it didn't feel evil. It felt like Gospel.

Needless to say, before I asked about bringing the music and the dance to church, I checked the lyrics carefully... both of that particular song and of the album in general. It was completely intriguing and surprisingly, the whole thing had remarkably solid theology and a Gospel message, even if it was done in a way that was backwards to how we would typically express Gospel hope. It turned out, the main lyrics of the song were a plea: "Satan your kingdom must come down; Satan your kingdom must come down; you've been feeding your kingdom, all over this land; Satan your kingdom must come down." The verses go on to call people to the battle against evil: "You know the mothers they gonna break your kingdom down;" and "You know the preachers they gonna preach your kingdom down;" and finally to everyone: "We gonna pray hard until we tear your kingdom down... Satan, your kingdom must come down."

In our lovely, safe and comfortable Anglican church in suburban Calgary, we rarely speak of Satan... and why would we? We rarely come face-to-face to anything we even *might* consider evil and even then, usually only theoretically or mediated by TV news or something else. We know suffering, of course, we have troubles and heartaches but for the most part, we live in an environment that is basically safe and comfortable. We have beds in warm places to sleep, we aren't hungry, there is no civil war, we can go to the doctor or the hospital when we're sick and receive good care. We know this comfort, safety and security is not something we can totally rely on... drug houses are busted in the suburbs, gang hits can happen anywhere, we could lose our jobs in a shaky economy, random shootings by people who have no hope can happen in any school, shopping mall or work place. We know our lives are less secure than they perhaps appear, but mostly it's pretty easy to pretend that the evil in the world doesn't touch us too much.

There are, however, many people who have a much different perspective. If you were trapped in the life of a gang; or if you lived with grinding poverty created by corporations or drugs, from which there was no escape; if your kids died of preventable and treatable diseases because the simple medical treatment was too costly or just unavailable; or if your sister or daughter was among the thousands of missing or murdered Aboriginal women in this country... or if we lived a thousand other circumstances... life and faith would look different and with

different perspectives come different expressions of the Gospel... like threatening Satan in song: "Satan your kingdom must come down..." The surprise of the song raises an interesting question, however... what might we do... how might we react... if our lives took a turn for the worse? What do we do when we are thrown curve balls or when our lives fall apart? How do we continue to believe in a good and loving God? These are some of the questions also addressed in the Book of Job.

The premise of the folktale or better - the didactic story of Job, is relatively simple. We heard part 2 of its 2-part introduction just a few minutes ago. This introductory plot revolves around 2 main characters: God and Satan, with the utterly faithful Job in the middle. The scene we witness today begins by repeating a scene found in chapter 1, with a gathering of heavenly beings before Yahweh, the God of Israel. Among the heavenly beings is one often translated with the proper name "Satan." In Hebrew, this name is actually the common noun "satan," which means "accuser" or "adversary" and in this case, it includes a definite article, so it is "the accuser" or "the adversary." One commentator writes about how unfortunate it is that "ha-satan" is so often turned into a proper name in translation, particularly a proper name laden with much later notions of Satan-the-devil, for it is seriously misleading. Rather than a force of evil as we might think of "the devil", Ha-satan is a kind of defender of God's honour by exposing those who pose a threat to it. By accusing seemingly faithful people, like Job, "The Accuser" roots out pretenders who might just curse God should their life fall apart.

The Accuser's view of Job, however, opposes that of God. Yahweh says that Job is "blameless and upright... [a man who] fears God and turns away from evil." But the Accuser isn't so convinced, even though Job has already proven himself by maintaining his integrity through the destruction of his livelihood and much of his family. The Accuser becomes God's adversary as he accuses one who God favours. Yahweh is, however, confident in Job. Yahweh believes in Job's integrity much, much more than in the Accuser's belief that if Job's own body was attacked with disease, he would turn away from God. The Accuser is determined to be proven right and so Job endures a second test - this time to his physical health. And still Job does not curse God.

The story of Job is one of, if not THE most difficult of the Bible. I have been in a bible study when a participant finally burst out: "why is this even in the bible!?!". If God just lets bad things happen to good people, to the best people... why bother? Do we really want to believe in a God who tests, or allows for tests, of even the most faithful of followers? It's pretty mean, so why include a story in the bible of a mean God? The only answer I can offer is that I think it's real to the point of brutal honesty about life. It points to the reality that life isn't necessarily fair... good things happen to bad people, bad things happen to good people. It's not what we want to hear, but it is true. And that such a challenging and, frankly, awful story as Job is in the Bible at all means to me that the bible can be trusted as being true, even when that truth is not very comfortable.

The question remains of how we respond when life doesn't go our way... when the economy crashes, when cancer strikes, when relationships fall apart, when loved ones die, when dreams crumble? I think it's a particular spiritual challenge for us because of the relative ease of our lives, as I mentioned earlier. But it is not so everywhere and it is people who have experienced the most suffering, the deepest pain and the greatest oppression that I believe can

teach us something about faith in hard times. The people who sing in protest: “Satan, your kingdom must come down!” are those who can show us the way when life is not so easy or comfortable or good.

“Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony” is a documentary movie about how music and dance were integral parts, even playing a critical role, in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. From the very beginning of the apartheid system in 1948, songs were composed by political leaders to teach and empower the populace to protest. The songs of protest were often upbeat, sounding fun and lively, but they had strong political messages. The music shifted with the times, with interviewees in the film arguing that “what saved us was the music... it was part of liberating ourselves.” Even songs that were prayers or laments for so many who died could become signs of protest against a system that should not be. Those in power recognized, at least to some extent, just how important the music was, for, as one person commented: “You couldn’t just sing anything in the streets... you might get arrested.” Imagine the threat of arrest just for singing. As the situation and the resistance became more and more radical, the songs too became more militant. In the 80’s a song and dance combination called Toyi-Toyi rose in importance, described in the movie as a weapon of war. How do you get people to march in protest against a powerful government, and in the face of tear gas and bullets? You sing dynamic songs and dance with the energy of youth.

Our lives are not so threatened but we live in an interconnected global village where plenty of people suffer in circumstances far beyond their control. Through the media that surrounds us, we hear daily of tragedies that need not be so. Apartheid was one such ‘tragedy’... some called it evil. Some might even have said that it belonged to the kingdom of Satan, if such a kingdom exists, and that it had to come down. The problems of homelessness, family violence, refugees risking their lives to gain life, the thousands of missing and murdered Aboriginal women... these are all things that belong to a realm of darkness, and as people of light, we need to find within ourselves and in our communities, the spiritual power to protest against them. That is how we stare down every Accuser who strives to diminish our faith, saying it matters only in good times. May we instead demonstrate a more robust integrity by declaring confidence in God in all times and by protesting all that leads to death, that all creation may know abundance of life.