

Worship 20.07.26: SERMON

Deut 30: 19-20 *This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to her voice, holding fast.*

Job 42:7-17

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.' So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this Job lived for one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

Living the questions transcript:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/living-the-questions-its-really-settling-in-now-the-losses-large-and-small/#transcript>

Onbeing transcript:

<https://onbeing.org/programs/pauline-boss-navigating-loss-without-closure/#transcript>

SERMON

Pauline Boss grew up in a first-generation Swiss American immigrant family in Wisconsin, where “homesickness was an essential part of (her) family’s culture.”¹ It was out of living in that culture of loss and longing, that years later, as a psychologist, she coined the phrase ‘ambiguous loss’.

Dr. Boss’ early work was with families of MIA’s from the Vietnam war - those missing in action, where hope and despair were held side by side, now, decades later, she is thinking about ambiguous loss and how it’s part of our global living into the COVID pandemic.

We Americans have a deeply ingrained mentality of solving and fixing problems - We want to get over it, whatever “it” is. And this mentality has served us well in many aspects of life.

This is where she brings in the idea of paradox - holding two opposing notions side by side as a way of lessening the stress and opening the possibility of finding meaning in life.

Truth is found in that middle way of “maybe this and maybe that.” We must hold the both/and.

It’s the same with our time, isn’t it? COVID may be coming here and it may not, someone in my family may get sick, really sick, and maybe not. We just don’t know, and we live with that unknowing. In the early months of the pandemic we had this sense, at least I did, of ‘this will end, we can get through this’. Now, 4 ½ months in, the uncertainty is settling in in a different way.

And the stresses, losses, griefs that were with us before March haven’t magically disappeared. Most of us carry individual loss and communal loss. It can be a load that feels overwhelming at times. Naming our losses and making the space to hold them is important.

¹ <https://onbeing.org/programs/pauline-boss-navigating-loss-without-closure/#transcript>

Dr. Boss' work suggests we *can* live with these ambiguous losses. She says, over time, you may not embrace it and maybe not even accept it, but you can decide to live with it. You can decide to accept it. "Decide" is the main word there.

And then you can live well, nevertheless. We have to decide how to cope with it, have some things you can control, and that's one of the keys here - recognizing there are some things we can control in this sea of life which may feel out of our control, because right now, we certainly can't control the virus.²

Let's take some time to look at our friend, Job, and how he holds the ambiguity of his life and losses.

We've walked with Job through his grief, his anger; we followed him as God took him on a tour of the cosmos, where Job realizes this is a God he can love, but cannot control. When we last visited Job he was quiet, reconciling his loss and grief, letting his old understanding of God's ways die and being born anew. Job has stepped out of the furnace of transformation, changed. Transformed, yet bearing many scars.

Today our story of Job ends, and like the beginning, it has a fairytale, or parable like quality to it. If we were reading the book of Job as a story about God's action, somehow trying to justify God with these gifts of abundance, we might be lured into believing that if we just keep doing everything by the book, we will, sometime down the road, be rewarded. But the book of Job isn't about God's action, this book is about Job's transformation. That's where the treasure lies for us.

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<https://onbeing.org/programs/living-the-questions-its-really-settling-in-now-the-losses-large-and-small/#transcript>

And so while the ending of this story is tied up with a big, gold bow, Job still has a lot to teach us.

In order to learn from our Job today, I need Job to be real - not this 2 dimensional character who is suddenly restored, happy, living like he had no past, no suffering that follows him like a shadow. I need to remember the suffering of the past 41 chapters - how he has carried his suffering, his loss, his scars - that's what makes Job real. Job's realness allows me, allows us, to simply sit in our suffering, to name the losses, to rail, to be unsettled, to long for answers. Brothers and sisters, it's OK to take the time to do all of these things.

So, we walk with the complex Job, the one who carries his grief with him into this final scene.

Job has a choice. Will he decide to hold the paradox of death next to life?

Does he really want to risk loss again? Choosing life means risking losing everything again, everything that is, but God.

Writer Ellen Davis says that Job's willingness to have more children is his clearest expression of the renewal of Job's heart and mind - he makes himself vulnerable in his transformation.

Let's look closely at what the text says - there's a strange detail about the naming of his daughters: He called the name of the one Jemima, meaning Dove, the second Ketsia, which means Cinnamon and the third, Keren-happuch, translates to something like Horn of Eye Shadow. These names are sensuous names. These names are not the biblical norm - and there's more: our text says, "there were not to be found throughout the whole land women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father gave them an inheritance alongside their brothers". In the male-dominated societies of the ancient world, it was an outrage, unheard of, for a father blessed with many sons to leave

anything to daughters. So once cautious Job is now overturning all the rules, and for no apparent reason.

The two portraits of Father Job that stand at either end of this book are vastly different. Job, this man of integrity who was once so careful, fearful of God and of the possible sins of his children, becomes this open-hearted man, breaking with custom to honor daughters alongside sons, bestowing wealth and names that celebrate their being. The inspiration and model for this wild style of parenting is, of course, God the Creator. Job learns to love with abandon.

Job's transformation allows him to hold his losses - material losses and the loss of a faith that once gave shape and meaning to his life. And next to his losses, Job holds abundant life. New life, new ways of seeing God at work in the world.³

Early on Job was looking for an answer. Over time he learns he can't have it, won't find answers to his suffering, instead he learns he can choose life.

Let's come back to Pauline Boss and her work.

Symbolically, *what Job shows us is how to carry our scars and losses, and to be willing to risk bringing new things to life again.* The key is that we can control small aspects of our lives right now, and these seemingly little things really matter.

Boss says Choosing something, anything, really, that has a beginning, a middle, and an end and fully participating in the activity- *A beginning, a middle, an end.* it helps us to feel less helpless -things like cleaning a cupboard, learning to macrame, baking bread, taking care of chickens, getting out on the trail or in the kayak.

Early on Job was looking for an answer. Instead, Job learns to live a third way - making space for both loss and life.

³ Davis, Ellen. 2001. *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament.* Cowley Publications.

Somehow, as I sit with this Job - the one who both carries his losses and brings new things to life as a way of loving God the Creator -

Somehow it feels closely tied to Jesus' summons: 'take up your cross and follow me' ... as well as: 'I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly'. Christ is our model for living the third way. The way of paradox.

Might these, somehow, be some of the paradoxes we hold in these times? We take up the cross of our suffering, we hold the losses, large and small in our personal lives as well as our collective suffering, and we choose life - choose to live like Job, celebrating the new life we create.

The reality is we are living with a lot of loss right now. Symbolically, Job picked up his cross AND he chose to love abundantly. Job's following God's example of abundant living shows us what it means to hold loss as well as deciding to live as fully as we are able..

Yes, Early on Job was looking for an answer. God doesn't offer that, instead, through the hard work of living into his suffering, Job finds a new answer: he finds the courage to choose Life. Christ offers to that us well. What might that look like for us to live in the paradox, to hold our loss AND to live fully, abundantly?