

## “Alone”

Based on Job 23:1-9, 16-17

First delivered Oct. 14, 2018

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Do you all remember the repeated scenario in Peanuts where Charlie Brown and Lucy are outside with a football? Lucy always promises Charlie Brown, “I won’t pull the ball away.” And Charlie Brown trusts her. He runs up to kick the ball and, at the last second, Lucy pulls the ball away anyhow, and Charlie Brown spins through the air and lands on his back side. Every time. And we all know what will happen. We almost want to yell at the newspaper or the screen for Lucy to cut it out. Don’t you wish that just once someone would see what was going on and tell Lucy to stop doing that? But there’s never anyone else around. It’s just Charlie Brown and Lucy. There is no one to intervene. Lucy goes off laughing and Charlie Brown says, “Rats!” Poor Charlie Brown is alone in his experience of injustice. It’s not fair, what Lucy does to Charlie Brown. And there’s no one around to make sure that Charlie Brown gets his fair shot at kicking that ball. Charlie Brown is alone.

In a few days, the Westerville Police Department will host a community forum, led by The Center for Family Safety and Healing. They will address the topic of domestic violence, a reality that is too common. It is found across the board, regardless of race or class. And cases of domestic violence are underreported. How many people suffer in an abusive relationship and are afraid to speak out or do not know who to reach out to? They are afraid to speak out because of what their abusive partner might do to them. Or there is fear about what others might think. The one being abused doesn’t know who to talk to. If they tell someone who knows them, what if it gets back to their partner? The thought of airing one’s personal life to a stranger also doesn’t feel right. The abused is trapped and alone.

By the way, there is help. On the door of my office you will find some information about how to respond to domestic violence, if you need help or you know someone who does. You can also go to

[www.familyandsafetyandhealing.org](http://www.familyandsafetyandhealing.org). No one who is abused has to suffer alone.

But they do anyway. They feel trapped and don't know where to turn. They may even cry out to God for help. They may cry out for justice, or deliverance. But the cries go unheard. There is no discernable response from God. The abuse continues. To be alone in your suffering and not able to turn to anyone who can make things right, or not knowing who you can turn to, that's a recipe for despair. For too many people in our community, this is their reality.

Job was alone in his suffering. At least, that's how he perceived it. Sure, he had his three friends. But they were no consolation. They kept arguing with him that he must have done something very sinful to get the suffering he has. They question Job's honesty. They are not supportive and understanding. Surely God is with him. God is everywhere, right? But God was nowhere to be found. Job says he looks in every direction but can't find God. He can't sense God's presence. His friends are no support. God is silent. Job is alone.

There's no doubt that Job believed in God. Job was incredibly righteous and pious. He knew that God was a just judge. And he made every effort to assure that neither he nor anyone in his family would receive God's wrath. As Faith pointed out last week; when Job's kids had drinking parties, Job would offer burnt offerings for each of his kids on the oft chance in their partying they may have done something that would have prompted God to punish them. Central to Job's belief in God is that God is a righteous judge. God is just. Job is convinced that if he could just state his case before God that God would immediately acquit him from whatever was causing his great suffering. He just wants his day in court, if you will. But he can't have his day in court because the judge is absent. The One who can easily fix this situation, clear up the misunderstanding, make things right, give Job justice, is missing, hiding, unreachable. And there is nothing Job can do about it. The One who can give him justice is nowhere to be seen.

What do you do when you experience injustice but the one who can give you remedy is absent? Such a tough position to be in. You just

feel impotent. It hurts. You want to cry out, "It's not fair!" Whether on the school playground, in a street protest, or an argument between a parent and child, we hear the cry, "It's not fair!" How many of us have told a child who said, "It's not fair", and said back, "Life's not fair." That's a true statement. Life isn't always fair. Justice is not always served. Yes, we have a justice system that strives to be impartial. But the system is made up of people. And we all have blind spots, unperceived prejudices, that skew judgment. All the necessary information to make the right judgment is not always received. It is a tough situation to try to make a right judgment when not all the facts are known, or can be known. When there is no corroborating evidence, judgments have to be made and they may not always be the right one. Sometimes our justice system produces a miscarriage of justice. What do you do when the justice system has failed you? Where do you turn?

You can say to yourself that God knows what happened and someday you will get your justice. You can have faith that God will make things right. But when will God make things right? Will it be the Judgment Day or will it be while you are still alive? Nobody knows. You can become bitter when you don't get justice. You can despair about ever getting justice. You may wish to tear the justice system down. You may lose your faith in God. Or you can choose to remain hopeful. You can choose to be resilient, to say to yourself that yes, you have suffered an injustice, and it hurts. But your value is so much greater than any injustice or indignity you must endure. You are still a beloved child of God, no matter what. You are loved. By God's grace you can endure.

Job wanted to disappear into the darkness. He just wants to fade away. But since he isn't fading away, he chooses to keep arguing with his friends and with God. He would not let God off the hook. He knew he was innocent. He knew he didn't deserve this unjust suffering. He knew that God was just. He would not allow God to just blow him off. He would persist, demand, that God give him a hearing. Job eventually gets to the place where he wants to put God on trial for what he sees as a travesty of justice.

Like the persistent widow, Job was not going to give up. You remember the story? Jesus told the story of an old woman who demanded justice from the judge. But he would not listen to her plea. So she kept coming, and kept coming, and kept coming, until the judge said to himself, “I can’t take it anymore! I’m going to give this woman justice before she wears me out with her constantly coming to me.” It took a lot of persistence for her to receive her justice. Sometimes persistence is required to get justice. Job has the same mindset. He will persist, demanding justice from God, even if it seemed like he was shouting into the wind. Job refused to give up on God, even though God seemed absent, missing, perhaps hiding. Job may feel alone, but he was not going to give up proclaiming his innocence.

How little Job knew that it was God who allowed this suffering to happen to Job. God allowed the suffering to happen just to prove Satan wrong. The God Job looked to as the just judge is the one who gave permission to suffer so much, so harshly, so unjustly. God, the righteous and just God, is complicit in Job’s unjust suffering. Surely it is unjust. Surely Job did nothing to deserve this suffering. Surely God could have handled Satan’s accusations in a different way so that Job didn’t have to suffer so much.

Let me go out on a limb and suggest that it appears that God is complicit in Job’s unjust suffering. I call it unjust because it was allowed by God in order to prove Satan wrong. What are we to do with this? If it happened to Job, could God sometimes be complicit in your own experiences of unjust suffering? Such a question goes against the grain. It’s a question that I don’t want to consider. I don’t know about you, but it is hard for me to contemplate the possibility that God would be complicit in unjust suffering as God appears to be in Job’s situation.

What kind of God is this? How can a righteous judge, who God is, be complicit in unjust suffering? I wonder how Job would answer that question. I wonder how Job would respond if he found out that all this suffering that Satan afflicted on him was allowed by God just to show Satan how pious Job is, just to win an argument, to prove a point. Knowing Job, I doubt if he would just shrug his shoulders. He would demand an answer to that question. He would want to know why God

that that was ok. Job would want to ask, “Is that fair?” But the one who could answer that question...is silent.