

Sermon for Sanctity of Life Weekend, 2008

Based on Job 12: 1-10 Then Job answered and said: 'No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know such things as these? I am a laughing stock to my friends; I, who called to God and He answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune; it is ready for those whose feet slip. The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, **who bring their god in their hand**. But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? **In His hand is the life of every living thing** and the breath of all mankind.

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Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

Intro.

Calamities in life happen so suddenly, so unexpectedly. One moment things are humming along just fine. And then 'boom' the rug is pulled out from under you.

Last August 1, at about 5 minutes after 6 in the evening, in the middle of the Twin Cities rush hour, traffic creeping along. The I 35 bridge over the Mississippi River collapsed, crushing cars and trucks, teetering school buses, injuring and drowning all kinds of people. One word occurred again and again as survivors were interviewed: terrified!

In our Old Testament lesson for this 'Life Sunday' weekend. Job felt like the victims of the I35 bridge collapse: terrified! Most of you know the story of Job. Everything is his life collapsed, also. Job chapter 1 describes Job: 'as the greatest of all people of the East ... he was upright and feared God, he shunned evil, he had 7 sons and 3 daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 50 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and a large number of servants'. And then all of a sudden Job's life was shaken to the core: terrified! Not only his wealth, that Job could have built up again, but his servants, his own sons and daughters, all perished. Even Job's health fails, he becomes seriously, seriously ill. All that seems to remain for Job is 4 people in his life. One of those was his wife. Who advises Job 'curse God and just die', in other words 'give up', 'throw in the towel', 'just end it all'. And the other 3, supposedly friends, put the cause of Job's calamities squarely on Job. 'The reason you suffer Job' they say 'is because you are covering up secret sins. Good people don't experience bad things. Fess up, Job, you've messed up'.

Have any of you ever felt that way, believed that? I have many times while experiencing life's calamities.

In the midst of all this Job's faith, however, remains intact. Faith in the fact, that God when everything collapses is still the One in control.

"IN HIS HAND IS THE LIFE OF EVERY LIVING THING" Job affirms.

And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this 'Life Sunday' weekend.

Are you in God's hand or is your god in your hand?

I.

That's the huge contrast we find in our Old Testament lesson from Job 12. There are those in life who try to carry their god in their hand. And there are those who are carried in the hand of God.

Before we piously pick the correct statement, however, let's look at those who carry their god in their hand. Actually, my human nature finds that concept very, very appealing. People who carry their god in their hand, Job 12, tells us 'are at ease'. They laugh at those of us who are weak 'whose feet are slipping'. They look down upon us who are suffering misfortune. Verse 6 says people who carry their god in their hand are undisturbed, they are secure. Sounds pretty good to me, at ease, undisturbed, secure. Think of that, think of the convenience of having your god in your hand. It implies you can manipulate your god. You can shape him or her any way you want. You can even exchange your god in your hand for one you like better.

With a god like that when calamities and suffering come you can pick a god who says 'suffering is bad', 'suffering is your enemy', 'no possible good can come from suffering'. So it's all right to end suffering by causing the death of the sufferer. With a god like that in your hand euthanasia is considered compassion. And now who doesn't want that?

With god in your hand, when your daughter or wife comes and announces she is pregnant and the pregnancy is unwanted. You're secure, you're undisturbed, you're at ease. You can shape your god into one who allows abortion. You have a god who grants you the freedom of choice. And now who doesn't want that?

With god in your hand, you don't have to speak up and reach out when it comes to life issues. You can find a god who says, 'these are political issues, they don't belong in church'.

So you see having a god in your hand is very, very convenient. You can be at ease, undisturbed, secure. And my human nature highly recommends to you such a god!

II.

How many of you, however, are truly undisturbed when your daughter or wife announces she is pregnant? And it's a pregnancy you didn't want or plan for.

How many of you are truly secure, when you receive a frightening diagnosis. And the prospect of suffering due to the disease and/or its treatment are very real?

How many of you are truly at ease in this earthly life with it's threat of trials and tribulations and calamities with your god in your hand? And even though that prospect sounds very, very appealing. Such a god would have to be very, very, very small. And such a god would never be able to hold you in His hand, when all of a sudden everything collapses, and it will!

There is a God, however, who does hold you in His hands. And all the created world knows that awesome good news! As Job says in our text, verses 7-10: 'ask the animals, talk to the birds or the fish, they will teach you. Speak to the earth itself. They all know'.

IN HIS HAND IS THE LIFE OF EVERY LIVING THING!

That's Job's main point with his 3 supposedly friends who came to comfort Job in his suffering but weren't much comfort at all. Job tries to get his friends to see that being good isn't the basis for suffering or not. Neither is being bad the basis for suffering. Whether the good suffer and the bad don't or the other way around. It doesn't matter, everything is in God's hand.

And that fact of faith is all that matters!

That sounds awfully great when we see the world on the evening news in the comfort of our living room reporting about the collapse of the I 35 bridge in Minneapolis or some other far away calamity. 'Everything's in God's hand. He can work it out' as you switch off the TV and go to bed.

But, when life's calamities and sufferings come down to my personal level, into my living room, into my life. Things aren't always that clear. I find myself asking: 'If everything is in God's hand, why is my life such a mess?'

That's why I need all of you, my friends in Christ, to frequently remind me 'if God is big enough to have everything on the evening news in His hand, then He has me and you in His hand, too!' In fact we have always been in God's hand. We just read in our Gradual, Isaiah 46: 'God has carried us from the womb ... to old age ... to gray hairs ... He has carried us ... He will save us!' And those invisible, hard to imagine at times, spiritual hands of God which carry us became very visible hands in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, God in flesh and blood, God incarnate had real hands. Hands that touched and healed, hands that blessed and prayed. And most awesome of all God's hands in Jesus were nailed to a cross, like that one over there, for you! And those hands of God with His thorn crowned head, and lacerated back, and nailed feet and speared side, bled, His holy, innocent and precious blood for you and me.

A god you carry in your hand can never bleed for you. But, Jesus' hands bled. And that blood of Jesus' hands has cleansed you from absolutely every sin in the sight of God. God's fist of damnation and justice came down 'full force' upon Jesus as His hands were extended upon the cross to be our substitute, to be our Savior.

The hand of our God which holds us, carries us, saves us are the hands of God who fully knows what suffering is, for you! And those hands of our suffering God pour upon you His grace and mercy in the waters of Holy Baptism, feed you the forgiveness of your sins in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, and invite you 'through your empty hand of faith' to take His guiding hand in the Word and the pages of His Holy Bible.

You are in God's hand through faith in Jesus Christ. Which doesn't mean you will always be at ease or undisturbed or even secure as the world defines security. You are in God's hands means: He is there to work in and through your suffering to accomplish His good and gracious will. To suffer is to become more and more like Jesus. To be in God's hands means when your daughter or wife comes to you and announces an unwanted pregnancy. She and her unborn baby are in God's hand, hands of forgiveness and love and support. And if she doesn't come to you but turns to her god in her hand and has an abortion, she and her aborted baby are still in God's hands, hands of love and support and forgiveness. Hands extended in invitation on the cross! And when you go for that Drs. appointment and you hear the diagnosis of an illness that will cause you much suffering or is terminal. You are in God's hand, hands of compassion and empathy and care and strength. You are in the hands of your God who knows suffering because He first suffered for you.

Conclusion

Calamities happen, just like that! Snap!. Bad things, horrible things happen to good people. Just ask Job, just ask many of the people sitting around you in church, right now. They know. That's why they're here in God's hand of His Word and Sacraments. Waiting for your hands to clasp theirs, your hands to be around their shoulders, your hands hug them, your hands to pray for them. Life isn't always going to be at ease, undisturbed or even secure. But that doesn't mean we're on our own with a false god in our hand. God's Word is true:

'IN HIS HAND IS THE LIFE OF EVERY LIVING THING'! That's you and me!

It can be very appealing to carry our god in our hand. To have him or her be whatever we want our god to be. But, such a god is very, very, very small. Such a god could never hold you in his hand.

BUT, JESUS DOES!

And His hands are extended out to you. Inviting you to come and follow Him = our suffering God.

'And no one is able to snatch you out of His hand'! (John 10: 22-30) Amen

And now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; who holds you in His hand. Amen

