

“Does Anyone Care?”

Some of us can remember a time before email and mobile phones. Back then, all of thirty years ago, we wrote letters and sent cards to keep in touch with friends and family. We looked forward to getting mail, especially from those we cared about. For me when there had been a particularly dry period for personal mail, I would open the mailbox and say, “Nobody loves me, nobody cares.” While I said the lament with a bit of ironic lightness, there was a tinge of loneliness and lament in it too. I wanted someone to realize I was feeling a little down or out of touch and would write with a little pick-me-up.

We might ask of the universe “Doesn’t anyone care?” when things are not going our way. When things get difficult, we might shake our fist at the sky wondering why “nobody up there likes me.” We might question God’s goodness and fairness when we see the faithless and deceitful being rewarded while those who follow the Lord endure difficulties and setbacks which should be given to the wicked.

That might well have been what was going through the heads of the disciples as they struggled with the sudden storm on the sea of Galilee. While some of the disciples were experienced fishermen who were used to storms and how to ride them out, in this instance they were overwhelmed. Everything was going wrong. The waves were so tremendous that the boat was being swamped. They did not know what to do.

Additionally, despite the threat of this tempest their teacher was taking a nap in the stern of the boat. It seemed that he was oblivious to the dire circumstances that they were facing. They were afraid and they could not understand why he was not. They finally woke up Jesus and asked him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” I imagine Jesus stretched and yawned nonchalantly while the disciples looked on in anxiety. Then he rebukes the wind and the sea saying, “Peace! Be Still.” The disciples are amazed at their change of fortune. Suddenly they are safe.

When we are struggling isn’t that exactly the kind of response we want from God? Perhaps we pray, petition, or even shout with desperation and anger. We do everything that we can to get God’s attention, but it seems God is asleep on the job. We wonder why God is ignoring our fears, concerns, pain, and anxiety.

As difficult as the situation was for the disciples, we have a disaster in the Book of Job. This man who was purported to be the most faithful of all people loses everything—children, livestock, wealth, property, privilege, and health. He is destitute and desperate. He has taken to sitting on an ash heap pondering why the good and great God would allow this to happen to him, when he has been so righteous. He is joined by three friends who for a while sit with him in silence and listen to his complaints. Eventually, they get tired of what they perceive as Job’s whining. They begin to judge Job and tell him that he must have deserved this turn of fate. They criticize him for being faithless

and undeserving of all the good fortune he previously had. Adding on to the criticism is a youngster who, being a know-it-all, piles on the criticism. He affirms God's goodness and Job's deserving of his misfortune. Job defends himself against all their accusations to no avail.

The Lord, having heard all of this decides to finally speak. Out of a whirlwind comes this voice commanding Job to put on his big-boy pants and take it like a man. Then God launches into two chapters of asking Job where was he when God was creating. All the way from the heavens and stars down to the minutiae of how baby eagles get fed. It is a terrific litany that extends over seventy-one verses. Job stands awestruck. When it is time for him to respond he demurs. God is not satisfied and goes on with the litany for another fifty-four verses reminding Job of the splendor of God and the magnitude of God's ability and power. I do not think this is to deny Job's need, but to remind Job that God's grandeur and majesty is not to be questioned nor is God's judgment to be doubted.

The Lord might ask the same question of Job that Jesus asked of the disciples. "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" The Lord and Jesus imply why don't you trust me? I have been with you in your prosperity, do you think that I will abandon you in your difficulties? Just because God is with us does not mean we will not have struggles. All humans have problems, and God does not abandon us. Because the Book of Job is a fable the story ends with him getting back two-fold all that he lost. In contrast, for the disciples the storm is a learning moment. The terrors of the sea are nothing compared to the trials they will experience spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Indeed, most of them will be martyred in hideous ways. Yet even in their martyrdom they will be accompanied by God.

We can be certain that God is with us just as our banner says: Emmanuel—God with us. At times it may not seem that way, especially when life gets particularly tough. I do not think that God's apparent absence is a test of our faith. Although, it may be a test of our communication with God. If we only call on God in times of distress our connection may not be open. We need to maintain our link through meditation and prayer when life is going well just as when we are challenged. "A friend in need may be a friend indeed," but when we only hear from that friend in times of distress we are not as in tune with them as if we had a continuous connection.

When we call on God in our distress, I don't think God will be grumpy as God appears to be with Job. I don't think God will challenge our faith as Jesus did with the disciples. Like a loving parent God is there. God may not give us the answer we want. But God will be there as our companion and our comforter. God is always beside us. Never fear for somebody loves you and somebody cares. That is God.