

### Job 1:1, 2:1-10

There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before God, and Satan also came among them to present himself before God. The Lord said to Satan, "where have you come from?" Satan answered God, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." God said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason." The Satan answered God, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." God said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of God, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die," But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

### Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees came and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "what did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." But Jesus said to them, "because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, "whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. 'People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid hands on them, and blessed them.'

### "Knowing Who We Are"

It's in our families of origin that we first learn to cultivate the spirit of love that leads to harmony and good will towards others. Unfortunately, it's also the social unit in which our egos are fed with prejudices and hate. Years ago while I was attending a party in a "Christian" home, one of elders told a family favorite. *"Remember when uncle Ned talked six of us into chasing after that thirteen year old boy who was stealing women's underwear off clothes lines and wearing them? Wasn't it awesome when we finally cornered him under the bar in the tavern on the hill and shouted and banged on the top of the counter with our pipe clubs to scare him? Wasn't it funny when we peeked over it and found him all curled up in a ball hugging himself?" Horrified by the story and the family laughter, I said: "That's not funny, it's terrible!"*

Relatives, relatives, relatives. Can't live with them. Can't live without them because it is from the love matrix of loving relationships that we internalize core values, realize empathy and compassion, learn social behaviors, form our unique character and sense of self, and color in our picture of God. Later, friends and mates help us in all these developmental tasks of becoming human. In her book, "Spiritual Activist," Claudia Horowitz unpacks a role that relationships play in our growth. 'Relationships give us an opportunity to BE whatever change we are seeking in the world. It is in relationship with other people that we begin to notice how present we are, how well we listen, how we judge people, how well we see what IS as opposed to how WE'D LIKE IT TO BE. Relationships expose our limitations and our possibilities; our most significant life lessons, however, painful, come through our relationships. Sometimes it is not until years later that we see why we needed to be in a relationship with or meet a certain person at a certain time. Since some of our own search for consciousness involves others, we need to think well about who exactly these others are, and who we want them to be. It's good to ask questions now and then: What is the purpose of this union? What are we supposed to be learning? Ultimately we must decide what kind of relationships we are going to have. Will they be based on ego or compassion, on our need to protect our own power, or our desire to love people more fully? We may treat people well when things are running

smoothly, but the minute our life goes out the window, suddenly we're acting from a different place. Whether a relationship seems easy or hard, enriching or draining, or all of the above, spirit is always present. With attention, we can become more aware of how we cultivate the presence of harmony and goodwill' (The Spiritual Activist, p. 102),

Intimate relationships of love. Can't grow into the best of our humanity with them, can't blossom into our uniqueness without them. Back in the day when the children of Yahweh saw that they were acting from an unholy place, they told the story of Job. It's a test of faith story for every generation that gets us wondering whether or not wrestling with our relationship with God helps to keep our mind sound when our body is not. It's a once upon a time story that starts out by describing Job as blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 1:1). Many in Job's religious tradition believed 'that obedience and covenantal faithfulness to God's laws would bring prosperity, health, and safety. Disobedience would bring a curse' (New Proclamation Year B). One day, the curse of great suffering fell upon Job. His children died. He lost his wealth. His body was struck down with disease and loathsome sores. His situation was so bad that his wife said to him "do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." But Job answered her, "you speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?" Then Job sat among the ashes, picked up a potsherd and began to scrape himself. Before long he started wrestling with his friends about religious ideas on why people suffer. Although the conversation with his friends was long and difficult, Job refused to break off his relationship with YHWH. He refused to end his relationship with Israel's God of steadfast love and faithfulness, by cursing the Holy One and letting go of his status as beloved child of God. So instead of blaming and speculating on the causes of his suffering, he held fast to his innocence and held fast to the belief that God is giver of both the good and bad. 'Sitting in the ash heap, separated from community and cleanliness, unclean, surrounded by loss, Job spoke to the Mystery of Life which holds countless undeserved blessings as well as immeasurable, indescribable loss' (ibid, adapted). Then after

longsuffering days of theological wrestling with his friends and complaining to YHWH that God needed to show up and say something, Unseen Mystery finally showed up and spoke. By the time the curtain closed on the drama, Job knew beyond a shadow of doubt. . . who and whose he was. As a beloved child of YHWH he was 'safe and secure from all alarms' just as the 'leaning on the everlasting arms' gospel tune now assures us.

Another life experience in which it is difficult to keep a sound sense of self as a beloved child of God is in the covenantal bond of marriage. In our best efforts to stay united as one through crisis times of joys and sorrows, wealth and poverty, sickness and health, we often let loose of the dynamics of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity. The relationship becomes an unjust one-way affair: one always giving and never receiving; one always doing what it takes to please or not upset the other; one always obeying what the other says. Injustices of this kind happen little by little and, if not corrected, over time the partner on the underside forms a negative sense of self. Our forefathers and mothers in Biblical faith called this spiritual condition, 'Hard Heartedness,' a name which suggests the absence of Holy Love in a marital relationship. In our gospel story, Jesus wraps up a short teaching on the complicated, heartbreaking topic of divorce---with a show and tell for souls longsuffering in unjust, life diminishing marital relationships. 'People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid hands on them, and blessed them.' While safely securing a little one in his arms, Jesus blessed them with the assurance of being loved and precious in God's eyes. It was an 'AH-HA' moment of faith in which the child's negative sense of self turned positive. It was a moment of grace in which that beloved child of God was gifted with the spirit of self esteem, self worth, self love, and the desire for well being. It was a life changing moment then, as it is for us now, as we gather at Christ's table to remember Jesus and be touched by him.