

Would you join me in a moment of silence to center ourselves in God's Word for us today?

Our scripture comes from the book of Job. Satan has been given power over all the aspects of Job's life. As a piece of background- Job had seven sons and three daughters. He had several thousand livestock and a lot of servants. He was considered incredibly wealthy.

We pick up this story at Job chapter 1, verses 13-22 reading from the (NRSV)

Listen now for the Word of God:

13 One day when {Job's} sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, **14** *a messenger* came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, **15** and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; **I alone have escaped to tell you.**" **16** *While he was still speaking, another came* and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and **consumed** them; **I alone have escaped to tell you.**" **17** *While he was still speaking, another came* and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; **I alone have escaped to tell you.**" **18** *While he was still speaking, another came* and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, **19** and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; **I alone have escaped to tell you.**"

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. **21** He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

The Word of God, for the people of God. <Thanks be to God.>

Job's Worst Day

Job is having a **rough** day yall. Let's just address that now. In the span of what seems like a couple minutes, 4 different people have stumbled over each other to get to Job, and tell him that everything has been lost.

His oxen and donkeys are gone, they got snatched by the Sabeans.

His sheep and servants are gone. It seems like they all were struck by lightning.

The camels and some more servants were raided by the Chaldeans.

And finally, all of Job's children were hanging out and the house falls on them.

That seems to be quite a day.

Everything is going wrong. Four different times, someone says the worst thing Job can imagine.

No matter what the other messengers have said, every single one thinks they are delivering the worst news to Job. Take a moment to consider the job of the messenger in this passage. They each have survived a drastic trauma already. One of four things have happened: 1: a robbery, 2: a lightning strike, 3: a raid, or finally: a building collapses on 10 kids of the guy the messenger has to report to. All of these messengers have to deliver the news to Job. No one expects that he will receive 3 other pieces of terrible news in the same moment. When these messengers ran in to tell Job of the horrific things that had happened, they are fulfilling the role of telling Job the worst news of his day.

Being The Messenger

I never thought I would have to be that messenger.

Last summer, I got a text from one of my closest friends, Maria. My family and her family have known each other our whole lives, and grew up together. I would visit her parents while I was home even if she was still out of town. My brother, Thomas did the same even when her little brother, Steven wasn't there. They were quite the pair. Absolute best friends. **Constantly** wreaking havoc around church. Our parents were in the same Sunday School class, they are close friends. Growing up, there were countless pool parties and sleepovers. No matter what, I always knew I had a family in these people.

I was working in the kitchen at camp the day I got the text, it was a Saturday. It had been a while since I talked to her, so I called right away when I saw the text asking me to

call her. I was expecting a fun update on her life. She was living in Atlanta and I was hoping to hear something about plans when I got here as well.

Over the phone I heard a person who didn't sound like my Maria, she told me her younger brother, Steven, had died.

She was on her way to Clemson to meet her parents and start the process of cleaning up his apartment and trying to find closure. I remember being in shock. I couldn't process what she was telling me. I couldn't handle that news. In retrospect, as the worst news was being handed to me, I asked what happened. I was so confused and hurt and I asked all the questions I shouldn't have asked the sister that was grieving. I was one of Maria's first calls. Her parents had not told my parents. No one knew yet.

That single phone call was hard enough. I recognized that she would need pastoral care and that I was **wildly ill-equipped** to help her.

Then she asked the impossible.

She asked me to call my own brother. He needed to know before the church sent out an email and he needed to hear it from me.

That day I used all the strength I had. I called my mom. I tried to find some input on how to be the messenger to tell my brother that his best friend had died. Moms are supposed to know that type of thing. She had already been a messenger to us when my grandparents died, so she could help me. I was so wrong.

My parents lost it. Their own worlds crashed around them. Their own friends had lost a child, they had that to deal with. I was still **completely unprepared** to call my brother.

Thomas was in Greece, working on an archeological dig for school. He had two weeks left until he was coming home. I called him. I told him, in a shaking voice, that Steven, his best friend, the man that was practically his brother, had died. As he was sobbing, I told him what we all try to say, that "I didn't know what happened. I was so sorry." There was no right way to handle this. And I know nothing I said in that moment was going to change anything or help.

When he heard, he couldn't process it all. He said he was going to call my mom, that tends to be a common thread in our family. He didn't realize I had told her the same thing only ten minutes before. He was reaching for anyone to help him handle the worst news of his life. He was asking the messenger to have any other message for him.

Job receiving news

Job handled the worst day of his life in a different way than me or my brother did. When I hear this passage preached, everyone focuses on Job's response to this terrible news. He falls to the ground, rips his clothes, shaves his head and **doesn't** curse God. My brother and I have both cursed God a lot since the day that we got the news that Steven died. **Because "what the hell, God" became a slogan for the next couple of months.** Job doesn't handle it that way.

I imagine the messengers, as they are standing around watching this happen. Watching his grief. You've got 4 guys. Standing near Job, they have just run over each other to tell Job the worst news. After we hear their news, we don't hear about their own reactions. We don't know if they tried to help, we don't know if they were Job's pastoral care for this moment, we don't know if there are hugs, crying, or if they also fall to the ground. If they are like me, they fell to the ground. They may not be able to hold the emotional moment of telling Job the worst news.

Mission of Messengers

Even in the moment of telling Job the worst news, they have taken on the roll of being a messenger. Notice also, in this passage, the messengers have not escaped to survive. They have not escaped to tell their own families how much they love them. They have not escaped to praise God for saving them. They have escaped to tell Job. There is no other mission for them.

In the moments of tragedy, there are 4 people who have escaped for the sole reason of telling Job about the awful things that have happened. To tell Job that his worst day has been happening and he didn't even know it yet. To tell Job that he has lost everything.

I imagine the messengers being hurt, maybe one of the Sabeans or Chaldeans came at them with a sword, maybe they were *just* far enough from the lightning that it didn't hit

them, maybe they were at the edge of the house when it fell, so they could escape. No matter what, these messengers have escaped and now they have the purpose of telling Job their message. Maybe afterwards, they went home, and hugged their families a little tighter, or maybe they believed in God a little more. Because they escaped.

In this mission is also the realization that Job has gone from being incredibly wealthy, having something around 11,000 livestock, 10 kids and many servants to having 4 people around him. Messengers. These messengers, in this moment, are all that Job has left. They each clearly state, "I alone have escaped to tell you." There is no one else.

Messengers

I expect in ministry we will be the ones to tell someone the worst news they hear that day. Or, we will be the ones who help pick up the pieces when it all hits the fan. People will look to you to be a messenger simply because of the work of ministry. Because at school, we have **learned** these things.

Maybe that day has already happened for you. I hope, if that was the case, that you were able to find help and get care for yourself. These messengers need care after they have given this news. They may not be able to provide care to Job in this moment. They have been through their own trauma. They have their own emotions about the events of the day.

When the worst news is given to our congregations, to our communities, and to our families, people will look to us first. They will need our care and our level minds. We all know this moment will happen, it is the same reason my family asks me to pray before meals, they assume because I have some level of Theological Education that I somehow know exactly what to say in these moments.

When Maria called again a couple hours later, she had made it to Clemson with her parents. She called sobbing and asking for care. I babbled that I didn't know what to do. And to be honest, in this moment, I still don't know what I could have said to her to make it okay. To make it easier to deal with. Now we joke about how awkward I was on that second phone call. I think it helps her to see how terrible I was at it. That there is no good way to handle this.

When bad things happen, people will look to us, we must be the messengers. When things fall apart, and the worst days are handed to us, we must escape, to tell the people who **will** be devastated by our news. We alone, with God, can do this.

Amen.