

With Whom Do You Celebrate? Job 1:1-5

It is Maundy Thursday, and you would think I would choose anything but the epic poem about Job.

What is the correlation between the passion and resurrection stories about Jesus and this Old Testament character? In this introductory passage from Job, we get a picture of what a great person is like, then and now.

People tend to focus on attributes such as knowledge, reputation, education, wealth, athleticism, and a handsome or pretty appearance. From what we read about Job, he was apparently blessed with some of these characteristics. It could even be argued that he had all of them. Job possessed many traits that most of us admire and desire.

In conventional thinking, when a person has the right car, right house, right reputation, right investments, right spouse and children, she or he makes a significant impression. What was it that Job had? He had seven sons and three daughters, and in his fields were more sheep, camels, oxen, and female donkeys than are imaginable even in our time.

His home and holdings had more servants than we would dream anyone could need. In addition to that, Job was the greatest of all the individuals of the east. We measure people by dollars today, but in Job's day it was based on the number of animals and people under one's control.

The scriptural depictions of Jesus present a man without possessions, no young brides (the new authenticated piece of parchment notwithstanding) and multiple children, and as far as we can tell, the carpenter's son became the carpenter.

We know Jesus studied in the temple with people who would ultimately turn against him. He wandered throughout the land seeking shelter among friends and among people the religious leaders of the time considered repugnant.

We do know that Jesus possessed a direct relationship with God and that earthly riches were not part of his life. We know for sure that he owned a desire to love and care for all people regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or stage in life.

The New Testament story that leads to the upper room meal with the disciples came just four days after a triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We read that on the day we call Palm or Passion Sunday, Jesus had to borrow a donkey, and having no servants, he sent his students to bring it to him.

In each of these stories, the characters receive the equivalent of a ticker-tape parade, recognition for their accomplishments, positive relationships with others, and great public press. After the parade and recognition has ended, both are about to meet up with adversaries most people would not consider possible for either.

The poem about Job begins by introducing the characteristics of Job that one cannot easily see: "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (v. 1). A person's assessment of character is often slightly biased. But in this case we know that this was exactly what God said of Job (see 1:8; 2:3).

Who could argue the point that Jesus was also blameless, full of integrity, and wholeheartedly pure. Like Job, he was upright, righteous, and lived according to a strong moral code. Certainly the written evidence indicates that he acknowledged God's ways and lived according to them.

The stories about his constant outreach to the poor, sick, and undesirable are strong evidence of his resistance to the temptation to serve self first. The hand washing and sharing of the bread and wine on this day support the moral and ethical standards of Jesus.

The question I have to ask myself is: am I living up to the standards set by these two righteous men? Can I take the elements we will eat and drink tonight and receive them unearned through the sacrifice of Jesus?

Very few people could imitate Job in his wealth, possessions, or even family size, but we all can strive to be like him in heart. The rich and poor have equal access to a godly character. Job didn't have any advantage in this area. He faced a tough world even as we do.

Although Job's immense wealth was impressive, we know that these possessions did not make him special. Job's inner qualities distinguished him despite his immense wealth. With such position, he could have chosen to do many wrong things. He could have gone beyond the law and managed to get away with it. Yet Job limited his behavior because

of his love of God.

Job sets a wonderful example for us as he breaks through the cheap materialistic view of the world and dares to live right in God's presence. His character and godly commitments shape his decisions. Job does not strive to be wealthy but to be acceptable before God and live rightly before people. As we partake of this Lord's Supper may we find strength in the lessons from Job, and may we make an impact on the world in which we live. Alleluia.

Amen.