

Job 14:1-6 (ESV)  
2023

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro: Blessings to all of you, dear ones, on this third to last Sunday of the church year. It's hard to believe but we're now just a few weeks away from the beginning of the season of Advent and with that, of course, a new church year altogether. And as the liturgical calendar comes to an end, the careful observer will notice that the appointed texts in the lectionary shift to a focus on the end of the age and perhaps to a lesser extent, the end of our lives individually. And I, for one, hope that you see or will soon come to see the great wisdom of the church in appointing such texts like that of our Old Testament lesson for this specific part of the church year.

Like a very bitter but effective medicine, the words of the prophet Job are unpleasant to our spiritual palate when we first taste them; they may very well make many of us wince and want to spit them out, as it were, and exchange them for something which is sweeter and lighter and more enjoyable to ingest, but which ultimately doesn't do what we need it to. But if instead we drink deeply of Job's words, potent and well-mixed as they are with the Holy Spirit Himself, if we avail ourselves of their medicinal effect in us, dear ones, by the grace of God, we will find ourselves being cured of our spiritual apathy; we'll find ourselves more zealous for and devoted to the things of God, and for our common life together as His people in the Lord Jesus.

I. Our text picks up in the middle of Job's bitter affliction and lament to God in chapter 14. Job here is lamenting the sad, overarching plight of fallen man in a fallen world. "Man," Job says, "who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not"--literally, he does not stand, and yet God still sees fit to bring feeble and fleeting human beings like Job and all of us into judgment. This is what Job had been made painfully aware of, dear ones. And it may well be that many of us who've suffered terrible loss like Job, or who have suffered from depression, or maybe from a crippling sense of meaninglessness in life--for us, these things Job speaks of may be all too familiar.

Whatever kind of spiritual stupor he may have been in, whatever distractions may have altogether clouded his mind and scattered his thoughts, all these had been completely cut through by Job's acute suffering and his recognition of the coming judgment. These had given him a certain piercing sobriety, and Job came to know what life really amounts to without God's gracious intervention--the terrible futility of life, the transient nature of it all. Things that are here one moment are gone the next; things that are lively and beautiful now soon wither and decay.

It's going to happen. And Job sees it. And the question for us today is whether we're willing to see it and act accordingly as well.

Are we willing to acknowledge as Job does in verses 5-6 that God Himself has determined the exact length of a man's days upon the earth and the precise number of his months? This too is part of the bitter medicine I spoke of earlier, dear ones, that there's a very specific number of breaths that you and I will take in this life before we breathe no more; there's a finite number of people and places we'll visit, and a limited number of times our hearts will beat before they stop, and while the timing of these things may be hidden from us, it's most certainly not hidden from God, not in the slightest. All our days and all our deeds are seen and known by God down to the finest detail. And with every single passing moment, we move that much closer to the hour of our own death and judgment. And generally, in our culture today, these are all things the devil and the world and our sinful flesh try very hard to help us forget in two broad, overlapping ways.

II. In the first place, we have readily available to us 24-hour news stations and supposedly expert analysis on just about anything you can think of; TV channels numbering in the tens of thousands, all the movies, books, and podcasts you could ever want; targeted advertisements and algorithms specifically tailored to serve up content they think you'll like next and an endless feed on social media ready for your consumption. One more post, one more video, one more reason to look away from what lies at the end of the road for us in this life. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh are very pleased to flood us with an endless stream of distractions, with things to help us self-medicate against any serious reflection on the end of our days. How quickly such thoughts are labeled too depressing and morbid and cast aside, people choosing instead to apply their own self-prescribed anesthesia until they become completely numb.

III. And in the second place, people are also led to believe or are taught outright that there is no God and that life therefore has no inherent meaning other than that which you give it. Many have come to believe that whenever death comes for them and whatever comes afterwards, they can go out knowing they were pursuing their own interests, overcoming their own personal challenges, and that this pursuit of a self-fulfilling life lived on their own terms is what gives their life meaning. But you know as well as I do that this is nothing less than a false gospel--it's one that has crushed so many of our young people today who are so hungry and yearn for transcendent meaning and purpose for their lives. But the world doesn't know what medicine to give them for this ailment because the world doesn't know the Savior, Jesus Christ.

IV. And surely now you've tasted the bitter medicine of our text in Job, you see much more clearly why on our own, having been born of woman, being few of days and full of trouble,

we must cling by faith to the incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin, in Whose hands are time and eternity, and Whose cup we shall drink today is full of grace and blessing. He is our life and length of days. He gives eternal life with God and every day He gives you, every passing moment with your family and your friends, and especially here at church is a gift; by our Baptism into Christ, we've been freed from enslavement to ourselves and our sinful passions and the fleeting pleasures of sin, and we've been called to be the redeemed, and to lay down our lives in service to God and one another in thanksgiving for our Lord did for us. This is the service we've been called to embrace, dear ones, and this service is perfect freedom. And because of Christ's bloody Passion and death on the cross, He has made full satisfaction for our sins so that we need not fear death or the judgment, and in fact, Christ Himself says in John chapter three that whoever believes in the Son is not condemned; there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, and Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead gives ultimate, transcendent meaning to an otherwise meaningless world. And so, repenting of your sins and discerning His true body and blood, the same gracious Lord you will soon meet here at the communion rail is the same gracious Lord you'll meet at the end of your days and in the final judgment. Come then and meet your Lord with joy and peace.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.