



Fourth Week of Lent- 3/17- Lisa Kelly

“Growing with God” Meditation 4: Job & Evil

By Lisa Kelly

I do not have an answer to the question of why there is so much evil and pain in this world. All I can do is encourage you to speak directly to God if you have questions about God’s ways. Speak as one friend to another, even if anger is the only emotion you can voice. The book of Job, I believe, encourages such honest relating with friends and indicates that God is willing to respond, even if the response is not, at first hearing, as comforting as we might hope. Loving God, help me read the book of Job with an open heart and mind, that I might come to peace, if not understanding, about the question of evil in the world. —*William A. Barry, SJ, in Lenten Meditations: Growing in Friendship with God*

As we watched the evening news while preparing dinner, I muted the volume and distract my daughter as the story about the latest ISIS violence was broadcast. My initial response, I must confess, was disgust, horror, and a desire to use whatever means available to stop them. But nowhere in my heart did I find the desire to pray for them. That did not even cross my mind! Yes, I have heard Jesus’ teaching to “love your enemies and pray for those who curse you” thousands of times in my faith studies and in church, but even 40-some years of trying to live this faith was no match for my defensive and hostile human nature in the face of atrocities.

Only when I sat in prayer, my time of conversation with God as Job suggests, and looked back over my day to see what stirred my angst and negativity, did I recognize in myself the very hatred that they are spewing out on others. It was not pretty to admit. And then, as promised, in the still, small voice, the teaching finally came back to me: Love them. Pray for them.

Again, I resisted. You cannot be serious! Am I supposed to pray for ISIS? Must I pray for people who are perpetrating horrid violence on innocent others. What is there to pray for, for them? Again, the Voice in my gut came: Perhaps to will that they would be able to experience love. That they would see the beauty of creation, of Divinity, in each person around them regardless of their faith proclamations. They are missing so much beauty in this world by trying to control and conform it. Somehow in that time of prayer and conversation, my hostility and resistance turned to pity.

In the book of Job, the only evil God directly addresses is not that which rained down from Satan, but that which came from Job's supposed friends. They encourage him not to share his woes with God, to quit complaining and keep doing the prescribed rituals even if they feel empty, lest they all get in trouble. They encourage Job to accept that God is just going to do what God wants to do, and Job must somehow deserve it. God's response to them—like that of Jesus, who undoubtedly was raised knowing the story of Job—was for Job to pray for God to forgive this evil.

Perhaps the great question of our life is not, "Why is there evil in this world?" but instead, "How is my heart responding?" We cannot change the why, but we can change our response to evil and pain. Do we perpetuate it and spew it back into the world, or do we pray for the strength to love and will what might be truly good for the other? Can we at least begin our response to evil and pain by sitting with it in prayer?