

My remarks this morning will be brief, since we get to hear Nigel's story also in a few minutes. I've been more aware lately about something we could call the changing nature of God, and that's what I want to talk about. We often think of God as permanent, eternal, infinite. Unchanging. But the three stories this morning suggest something else.

First, there's Job cashing in. The guy had no idea that he was the puppet in a Fantasy Football wager between God and Satan. He didn't know that God had allowed Satan to give him every calamity possible, all to prove that even Job, the model citizen, the true believer, had a weak spot.

His wife begged him to curse God. She knew their sufferings couldn't be a coincidence. But the man was patient, and he stayed stoic, and when the bet was over, and God won, he paid Job back for all his suffering. There's something creepy about a God who rewards your patience with a set of replacement daughters to make up for the ones he watched Satan destroy.

God made Israel his chosen people. But the children of Israel were occupied and oppressed. Over and over. They lived in a very rough neighborhood. Everyone wants that little slice of green land between the desert and the sea. God had brought them out of Egypt and given them the choice real estate. Then God stopped being a superhero and backed off, like a parent handing the car keys to a sixteen year-old. The experiment in self-reliance didn't last long. Corrupt kings, dishonest business, low standards, no self-control.

And trouble with much stronger neighbors. The Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans. Israel needed a Messiah, but not the superhero kind. God had tried that. God decided to become a human being. So, one day, he heard a beggar calling him the Son of David, and he stopped. Bartimaeus, like Job, suffered terrible physical affliction. Something had blinded him. And he was now even poorer than Job ever got, and begging by the roadside. *What do you want me to do for you?* My teacher, let me see again. And God, in the human form of a teacher, made it so.

Then there's the letter to the Hebrews (sorry, 9 o'clockers, gotta go to one of the other services to hear all three). The unnamed author points out that in the old days people in trouble had to go to the temple and get one of the priests, maybe even the high priest, to talk to God for them. But that was before God took over the job. Jesus is now the new high priest. He doesn't have to offer a sheep on the altar. He was the sheep, and the shepherd. He never dies, like the old high priests did, never sins, never has to look anything up in the book of the law. His new religion doesn't need a building or a priest. Just our attention.

He's there for us. Here for us.

I wish I knew whether God changed or we did. It could be either. Or both. If we really are made in the image of God, that might mean we'll never know. Are we worshipping the Creator, or just our idea of Human Nature? Even at our best, St. Paul said, we're praying into a glass darkly, a soot-covered mirror.

We come here to catch glimpses. We read the Bible for clues. Jesus said God is like our father, so we strain to hear his voice. Like our mother, and we relax into her embrace.

Maybe it wasn't God who changed at all, from letting Satan destroy Job's life to letting a lynch mob destroy Jesus. Perhaps God knew right from the beginning that it would take a Cecil B. DeMille to get the slaves out of Egypt, and then a switch to unconditional love when humans kept on hating and oppressing. To see what being a human was really like, because right from the start, it wasn't working out as planned.

The truth is, it's really hard. Unless we pay attention, we don't see the image and likeness of God. Sure, we see something miraculous and hopeful in babies. And we admire the saints. But we get so caught up in our own chances and cares that the saintliness of everyone is just about invisible. That's why we're here, in part: to learn to see saintliness. The Godliness of the person a couple of rows back whose name you are too embarrassed to ask for again. To sing and pray and listen. To see, in a glass darkly, but to see that of God in every person, even ourselves.

That's not easy. It never has been. When God Incarnate walked around in Galilee, most people didn't recognize who they were dealing with.

But Bartimaeus did. A blind guy.