

Job: Syllabus and Book List

St. David's Rector's Forum, Fall, 2020

Book List

Required Reading:

The Book of Job, any translation: Chapters to be assigned each week

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Harold Kushner

God Of Our Silent Tears, by Dan Edwards

(Music) *Sire of Sorrow* by Joni Mitchell, from CD *Turbulent Indigo*

(Movie) *Shadowlands*, starring Anthony Hopkins as C.S. Lewis

Suggested Reading:

Why, God? By Burton Cooper (Chapter 4)

Evil and the Justice of God, by N.T. Wright

The Problem of Pain, and *A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis

Job, A New Translation, by Edward L. Greenstein

JB, a play by Archibald MacLeish

Syllabus

September 13: Overview: three goals of the course; "Theodicy" defined
Question for reflection: Why do you suppose God might have drawn you to this particular book of the Bible at this particular time in your life?

September 20: Job as "Legend"; (**Chap 1, 2, 42:7-17**), the ancient prose "folklore" that frames the later poetry: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust him."
Questions for reflection: Is the stoic, silent, "faithful Job" found in the legendary prologue a realistic model? Deeper: Is our love of God dependent on the Good Things that happen to us?

September 27: The Angry Job: (**Chap 3-7**; also, see **Joni Mitchell**, *Sire of Sorrow*, from *Turbulent Indigo* CD) The Poetry of Job; The spiritual importance of Lament, and the issue of anger in our spiritual lives:
Question for reflection: Should I fear being angry with God?

October 4: Job's friends try to help: (**Chap 8-14**) What *not* to say to someone who is suffering; the inadequacy of "too easy" answers. The tragic legacy of the Deuteronomy "Theology of Blame": Readings from *JB*, by Archibald MacLeish

Questions for reflection: How do we best help others who are in great pain? What do we say when others ask, “Why did this happen to me?”

October 11: Job demands a “referee”: (Chap 15-31) Does Job have the right to “Judge” God?” Jesus as “referee” between humanity and God. The afterlife as source of comfort and relief.

Questions for reflection: When you are in great pain, what is spiritually the most helpful to you? What does *not* help?

October 18: The curious answer of young Elihu: Suffering as “Discipline”; (Chap 32-37, also C.S. Lewis, excerpts from *The Problem of Pain, A Grief Observed*, and movie, *Shadowlands*)

Questions for reflection: C.S. Lewis says that, in the face of real pain, his “sound theology” came tumbling down “like a house of cards.” Has this ever happened to you? What did you do?

October 25: God explodes: the enigma of the Whirlwind (Chap 38-40:2; also **When Bad Things Happen to Good People** by Rabbi Harold Kushner)

Questions for reflection: Is the Whirlwind this really an “answer” to theodicy? If not, then what is it? What do you think of Kushner’s interpretation of God’s response from the Whirlwind? What about it “works” as an answer to Theodicy? What doesn’t work?

Nov. 1: God as the answer: “Modern people are utterly at a loss in the face of suffering because our modern concept of God is inadequate to the task.” (Dan Edwards) God as the “Impossible possibility” of Karl Barth; the “Numinous” of Whitehead; the “God of our Silent Tears” of Bishop Dan Edwards.

Questions for reflection: What is *your* answer to the “unanswerable” question of theodicy? What role does Jesus play in that answer?

November 1: Why do bad epidemics happen to Good Parishes? A Community Discussion.