

Sermon about Job 19, 19-27 on Judica 2021 in BXL (III^N)

Blessing: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (Amen.)

Bible: (19) All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. (20) My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh, and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. (21) Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! (22) Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh? (23) “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! (24) Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! (25) For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. (26) And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, (27) whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

Prayer: Come, O long expected Jesus, / Born to set your people free; / From our fears and sins release us / By your death on Calvary. / Israel's strength and consolation, / Hope to all the earth impart, / Dear desire of ev'ry nation, / Joy of ev'ry longing heart. (Amen.) [LW 22, 1 by Charles Wesley]

Sermon: *Opener – Sunday of darkness:* “Judica”, “Vindicate me”, this means “defend me”! – The Sunday Judica is perhaps the darkest Sunday of the year next to Good Friday. It is the day of the broken ones, the suffering and dying, the ones who are lonely and in the dark. There is no joy left. No life which seems to be worthy to be rescued. It is a Sunday full of bitterness, against life, and against God. – But no joy, no will to live, but not hopeless. Deep in the darkness it glows. – Defend me! Where is the defender? Who is the defender? Who, against whom? This question I would like to trace with you today with Job.

Part 1 – Accusing God: Job, this man, this “suffering righteous” as the Bible presents him to us, was sorely afflicted. His story, a philosophical teaching, summarises almost every harm and disaster one could meet in life: even though he was a faithful, righteous man, he lost his wealth, he lost his livelihood, all his children died, and he was plagued with several diseases. He was left lonely, more dead than alive. In his affliction he started accusing God. In his eyes, God was not fair. From this moment on, his friends, who stayed with him in his calamity at first, rejected him accusing him, and called on him to confess his sins. But he was not aware of any sins. – In Job there is the culmination of all possible afflictions. But could there be a gradation for calamity? The people who lost their job in the pandemic and who stay in front of a pile of broken glass. The woman who lost her husband because of the virus – in the prime of life, fit, joyful, full of plans for the future. The man who longs for a partner, affection, and his own family, and there is no one. The couple who wanted to establish a family, but the new house remains empty and silent. The man who worked hard his entire life, but after retirement he must eat in a soup kitchen, not to mention not being able to afford a nice present for his grandchild. – The Christians in North Korea who are locked up and tortured in dark holes. – Where is God? Why? It is not fair! (What is fairness?) – Is this just? – In Jewish theology and also in Christian theology, at least in Germany since the War, there arises the question: “How do we speak of God after Auschwitz?” For some, God has died – that is, if he had existed at all – at least in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. – Job complains about this unfair, hidden God. In his mourning he even brings God to court! Who is the judge? It is also God. God has two faces: the Almighty, and the one who has not used His power to help, who did not rescue and preserve. The one who seems to be powerless. This is most annoying!¹ Is it ok to bring God to court? People *bring* God to court – God

¹ This + other: R. Stuhlmann. Predigtmed. über Hiob 19, 19-27. In: GPM #75/2. Göttingen 2021. Seite 232-239.

against God. The Psalms are full of it. “Job stands exemplary for all who suffer. [...] [Another righteous one Jesus:] A man, betrayed by his nearest friends and sold, being condemned by a military junta, tortured to death.” This Passion of Jesus preceded millions of people since Cain and Abel, and followed millions afterwards to Auschwitz and to the present day. “Jesus stands as an exemplar for all suffering humanity.” He is the Victim of life. God in court – the judge and the accused. – Yes, Job’s words, his accusation is impudent. But it is directed to God – “each accusation of God directed to Him is a prayer and reckons with a living counterpart.” This means there is a relationship. The Evangelist John calls this relationship “faith”. If necessary, accuse God! According to Saint Matthew and Saint Mark Jesus dies with an accusation of God on his lips (Matthew 27, 46b): “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – Sometimes, there is no other option than to pray and accuse God this way.

Part 2 – Longing for the redeemer: At the end of the book of Job, God takes sides with Job and against the friends who defended God. Job was right from the beginning. This end glows already between the lines of our passage for today. It is hidden in the small Hebrew particle “W^e”: but, for. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.” “It does not repeal that which was previously said. It is an argument, not less impudent than the accusation which it makes against God. A productive argument. That which Job can set against his own accusations is nothing that he could produce himself, nothing of his own, that is, from his knowledge or his defiance. It is a given insight. God, whom he accuses in front of God, gives him this certainty. Certainty can become weak and fade and can come back and increase. What remains, is longing.” The redeemer is already alive, but not yet here. He is still far, not available at the moment. Again, this is annoying. Where is he, the redeemer? Why does he not come now, when I need him? Nobody knows. – The Hebrew word for redeemer means originally “blood revenger”. It was an

instrument of justice: the balance of justice is restored by revenge. And to avoid that the damaged party revenged too much in the flow of rage, it was the duty of a third party to revenge (Ex 21, 23-25): “But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” Not two eyes for one! And already in the Biblical Law God says (Dtn 32, 35): “Vengeance is mine, and recompense.” Therefore, the revenger is also a redeemer, a liberator. He frees from the bounds of rage and revenge. “...at the last he will stand.” He *will* have the last word. Also with regard to my calamity and injustices from which I suffer. He will vindicate me.

Part 3 – In front of God with God against God: We have seen the diremption of God: the accused and the judge at the same time. Here it is even more evident: For the suffering man, God cuts Himself into three: God is the accused, and the Judge. God places himself behind Job and lays him gently on his shoulder, giving him this insight: My Redeemer lives. In front of God, with God, against God. It is complicated but there is no other option. That is life for so many. Job cannot see the one behind him yet, but God strengthens him already in return. God is a living God, he can be moved. Therefore, it is acceptable to accuse Him if necessary. God can stand this like parents can stand it when their children need something or someone against which/whom to let their rage and desperation go; when they box their fists full of tears against their parents’ bodies. This faith “is a sure hope, which abandons all self-reliance, and religiosity, only to throw itself into the arms of the unpredictable God.” Martin Luther said it this way: “We are beggars, this is true.” But with the experience of a triune God who does not forsake us, who himself falls into the arm after the Cross at Easter morning, may this certain knowledge help us to cling to this God against all the calamity of this world. **Blessing:** The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.