

Life is Messy
July 8, 2020

“I am a man more sinned against, than sinning.”
King Lear Act 3, scene 2

“I am a man more sinned against, than sinning.”
Oedipus at Colonus, Sophocles

No, I did not make a mistake in the two quotes above. Both playwrights use the same phrase to describe the brokenness of their protagonist. Sophocles, more than a thousand years before Shakespeare, wrote these immortal words describing the misfortune that has come upon Oedipus. Oedipus, taken up to the mountains to die as a baby because of a prophecy stating that he would kill his mother and marry his mother. King Laius and Queen Jocasta, of Corinth, were his parents. But King Polybius and Queen Merope found the child and raised him as their own in Thebes. Oedipus finds out about the prophecy and leaves home for Corinth, so as to protect his parents. He is attacked by his real father King Laius, on the road to Corinth, and kills him. Thus, fulfilling the prophecy. Oedipus remains in Corinth and becomes an honored and courageous man. He eventually marries Queen Jocasta, completing the fulness of the prophecy.

In the intervening years the fates cry out to him, and the city, of his irreligious action and crime against the gods. Soon everyone knows of his actions and heritage, and desire his punishment. Upon hearing what he has done, he removed his eyes and began to wander through out Greece. It was in Colonus that he said before the heavens and the people, “I am a man more sinned against, than sinning.” The calamity that comes upon him, he believes, is not of his doing, but was a misfortune of life, that was unjustly punished by the gods.

Lear has a similar outlook to his life. What has happened to him was unjustified and cruel. His two daughters saw him as an arrogant fool, and threw him out of his own kingdom when they seized power. We can see links from these two characters to Job, and his fight for justice as well. Job could say, along with his two brothers in suffering, “I am a man more sinned against, than sinning.” Some might say that they were all arrogant, and should have just accepted their fate, given that life itself is not fair, and demands an appropriate response---prayer and the shaking of the fist. But there is something inside us that doesn't like injustice. So, we demand it from our divine powers, Oedipus from Zeus, Lear from God and Job from God, as well.

There is no better place in our Scripture to work this paradox out, than the Psalms. While many of the Psalms sing with praise and joy, most of them are working things out, in a messy world. There is the recurring cry of pain in the words, “How long, Lord, will you continually punish me, or forget me.” There is the constant shaking of the fist against God's inactivity and the cruelty of their enemies toward them. These are just a few recurring expressions of frustration and pain that arise from a life that seems to

have little justice. The Psalms are not, in themselves the resolution to this messy world. They are the road map to the only one who can provide a way to navigate this messy life-----Christ. After expunging our emotions, through the agonizing expression of anger and frustration, what is left for us to do is to fall on our knees and listen in silence, to the heavenly wisdom of Christ.

We may never come to a resolution about why certain things happen to us. Lear, Oedipus and Job couldn't find it on their own. Job found peace, after being exhausted through the theological conversations with his friends, in a whirlwind where God was residing. His only reasonable action was to watch and listen. He needed to experience his anger melt through the powerful presence of God. It is only here that the messiness and unfairness of life can have any resolution. But believe me it is not so much in words, than it is in an acceptance that there is still good in the world, good in me, but mostly in God.