

Ordinary 30B: Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Hebrews 7:23-28

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by [Lee Canipe](#) in the [October 17, 2012](#) issue

It's been almost 20 years, but I can still recall the uneasy flutter in my gut as the sun went down and my first night as on-call chaplain began. A chaplain who was on her way home, and familiar with the look of panic that identifies a rookie, patted me on the shoulder. "You'll be fine," she said.

I wasn't worried about myself. I was worried about the poor people who were going to arrive at the hospital that night in some moment of supreme crisis—and get me as their chaplain. And that's what happened. My beeper went off in the wee hours: a car accident, a large family in the waiting room, the doctors wanting a chaplain present when they broke the news that a mother was dead.

Other details of that long night have mercifully faded. What I remember is how helpless I felt—how utterly mute I was—in the face of this devastating loss. The next day I described both the experience and my shamefully inadequate response to the chaplain who had encouraged me the night before.

"Here's the deal," she said. "You can't say anything to 'fix' the problem. That woman is dead, and nothing you say is going to bring her back. Your job is to make sure these people know they're not going through this alone."

I am grateful for this wisdom, and remember it every time I call on a church member who's lost a loved one or arrive at the hospital just in time to witness someone's last breath. There are some problems that even the most eloquent words can't resolve—problems that simply must be endured with as much hope as we can muster at the moment because, when it comes to matters of life and death, there is no such thing as a quick fix.

This is precisely why I find the end of Job unsettling: it feels like a quick fix.

It's not that I don't appreciate a happy ending. I am in favor of happy endings. I like leaving a movie or finishing a book with a smile on my face. What makes me squirm, though, is arriving at a happy ending by way of a shortcut, a denouement in which all the loose ends get tied up too neatly, quickly and painlessly to be redemptive in any recognizable way.

That's what seems to happen at the end of Job. After slogging through 41 chapters of misery and god-awful suffering, Job's world was suddenly put right again in just six verses. "The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning," we're told in 42:12, followed by an inventory of the livestock and children that God gave Job to enjoy in his latter days. Did Job lose thousands of animals—in other words, his entire fortune—in chapter one? No problem! God not only restored his herds but doubled their numbers. Did Job lose seven sons and three daughters? Well, by the end of the story he had seven new sons and three new daughters, and—get this—his girls were the fairest maidens in all the land! Job's wealth increased, he lived 140 more years, saw four generations of descendants and then, "Job died, old and full of days." Boom. The end. Roll the credits.

I'm not suggesting that such an ending isn't possible. We believe, after all, in a God for whom nothing is impossible. I am saying, however, that even the happiest of endings can't make 41 chapters of hurt disappear. What did Job think about in bed at night in those wandering moments before sleep? Did he dream about his first ten children? Did he wonder what they would have looked like as adults, how they would have laughed or what they would have done? Even as the great-great-grandkids scurried around the tent and 14,000 sheep baaed out in the field, Job sometimes mourned the past. A six-verse quick fix is no match for a shattered heart painstakingly glued back together. Our lives are stubborn that way.

Yes, life goes on—and Job's life went on and his latter days were richly blessed by God. Some stories have happier endings than others, but there are no quick fixes. On this side of heaven, if we're fortunate, we learn to live with loose ends, unresolved questions and painful answers. Job himself acknowledged that such burdens are beyond our understanding. Our hope lies instead in the good news that, whatever those burdens are, we don't carry them alone. As the book of Hebrews assures us, we have a high priest who lives to make intercession for us before the throne of God's great mercy. It's from there that the slow, patient, healing grace of Jesus Christ begins to flow—as much as we need, as long as it takes, as sure as our

God lives and reigns in this world and the next.