Job 7:7a 7Remember that my life is just a breath.

I think we are all going to have to admit that the text before us is really something. Honestly, I can maybe contemplate that there is a pastor or two out there who when they turn to this text and it is the next on their rotation for preaching, might just find a way to skip over this text. But when I was a vicar, I had a Bishop who would not hear of such a thing. For that matter, he would simply tell me that when you had a hard text, learning to preach on it just made you a better preacher, because every text is of and from God and every text has something to say that can help and be of help to every member before you. In that same line, I remember another preacher saying, “If you always preach what is easy, you can only be a simple preacher.” And I can tell you that when he said “simple preacher” it was not meant to be a compliment!

Fact of the matter is, there are just some difficult and hard lessons found in God’s Word. That is especially true because we live in a world of sin. Sin creates problems. If we aren’t careful we just might find that the problems of sin can be overwhelming for us. That’s when things get dangerous. Dangerous because oftentimes, without thinking, we have a tendency to blame God for our problems, to shake our fist at him because we are just not happy with the lot of our life. Yet God is not the cause of our problems! The Devil, the world and our own sinful flesh is the cause of our problems. God is there to help. God is there to guide. God is there with hope, joy, wonder and love. God is without a doubt our deliverer and our Savior. Let’s consider our text under the theme: **LIFE IS BUT A BREATH.**

If you don’t mind, this week again we will turn to our Catechism for direction. On page 312, question 368 asks: *“What is meant by evil?”* The answer given is: *“By evil is meant all the bad things that are a part of our life on earth as a result of Adman’s fall into sin.”* The very next question, 369 asks: *“How does the evil in the world affect our lives?”* The answer given is: *“The evil in the world brings many hardships into our lives because evil threatens our bodies and souls, property and reputation.”*

Just listen to those questions and answers of the Catechism and then contemplate the words of our text for today. Our words are spoken by Job that famed man of sorrows found in our Old Testaments. God had permitted Job to be tested by the Devil himself. At the beginning the Devil was told he could do what he wanted but that he had to leave Job himself alone. I think all of us here recall what happened. Job in one day lost everything. He lost his oxen, his donkeys, his flocks and his camels. But the real shocker was that he lost his seven sons and three daughters too. Do you remember the response of Job to all of this? Words of faith and words of courage. **”Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be blessed.”** Could we have been so full of faith and truth?

Then came the second round of testing. Now the Devil is allowed to plague Job himself, but he is not allowed to take Job’s life. If there is one thing the Devil does well it is misery. We are told that Job is covered from head to toe in painful sores. It is at this point that a group of friends come to visit Job. I don’t really have great fondness for these friends. Although we are told they have come to comfort Job, they are very lousy at it. The majority of the book of Job is the speeches between Job and his friends. Our text is from the second speech of Job that started in chapter 6. If there is one thing that can be said, Job is downtrodden. Job is languishing. Job is struggling mightily. Like I said, if there is one thing the Devil does well it is misery!

Again listen to the words before us, knowing Job’s misery. **“Isn’t man’s time on earth like being compelled to serve in the army? Aren’t his days like those of a hired man? 2Like a slave, he longs for shade, or like a day laborer, he waits for his pay. 3In the same way, I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of agony have been assigned to me. 4When I lie down, I think, “How long before I get up?” But the night drags on, and I am filled with restlessness until dawn. 5My flesh is clothed with maggots and caked with dirt. My skin scabs over and then oozes again. 6My days pass by more swiftly than the shuttle of a weaver’s loom. They come to an end without hope. 7Remember that my life is just a breath. My eyes will never again see good fortune.”**

There is no doubt that Job is suffering from the ills, the horrors of sin. The interesting thing to tell you is that though Job is clearly complaining, perhaps we could say, even whining, the fact of the matter is that at the end of the book the Lord says that Job does not sin in all that would happen to him. What we learn is that sometimes in our sinful world, the difficulties we face can push us down. They can cause us to feel the pressure of despair and the agony of our physical suffering. Just because we are whining, doesn’t necessarily mean that we are involved in sin. In this case, Job whines, but did you notice that Job does not blame the Lord? He doesn’t say that the Lord is responsible for this. If you would, in a way, Job’s words can be looked at as not just a speech he gave his friends but rather as a prayer to God, a plea to God to understand his situation and grant him compassion. I say that for this reason. Since God says that Job does not sin in all of this, therefore we must conclude that deep in his heart Job is clinging to the promises and grace of God. In other words, Job’s faith is still in the fact that God’s will is being done. Now would be a great time to explore those promises of God for our lives, found both in Old and New Testament. But what wonderful, what great promises to cling to as we face the trials of this life.

Promise 1: God promises to always be with us. In Isaiah 41:10 we hear, **“Do not fear, for I am with you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** Jesus extends that very same promise to us when he says in Matthew (and remember Jesus is the “right hand!”) **“And surely I am with you always until the end of the age.”** Do understand that God promises to be with us? He does not leave us alone or abandoned. He does not stop caring about us or have no concern for us. God is there. God is always there for us. Just because we his children of faith, sometimes forget that truth doesn’t make if falsehood. I have learned to have great comfort and hope in the wonder of knowing that God is there, right beside me, sharing his divine hug and compassion.

Promise number 2: God keeps evil away from us. Contemplate what the Lord says in Psalm 91:10. **“If you make the Most High your shelter, evil will not overtake you. Disaster will not come near your tent.”** Here is Galatians 1:4 **“He gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”** Think of Ephesians 6:10-17. There we are told of the armor of God that very thing that helps us stand against evil and extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One! In other words, God works to keep evil away from us in so many different ways.

In this regard I like to tell those who are being taught this lesson that all too often we are completely unaware of how many times God protects us by keeping evil away from us. The examples of such things can be numerous but rather than examples I encourage to simply trust what God has promised. We are indeed delivered from evil in so many ways and don’t even grasp the total goodness of God in that regard.

Promise number 3. When God permits evil to come into our lives, he makes it work for our good.” Again here are a few passages for you. In Genesis, think of Joseph and how his brothers sold him into slavery because of their hatred of him. And yet God caused this for the saving of their lives. Joseph himself would tell his brothers, **“God sent me ahead of you to preserve you as survivors on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great act of deliverance.”** Of course, for us, the best words are those of the Lord given in two places. First of all, listen to Romans 8:28. **“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** God always works for our good. We may not grasp it or completely understand it, but it is for the great purpose of God, the salvation of our souls that God is working in our lives for the saving of our souls!.

But maybe you need to hear what Hebrews 12:7-11 says. **“Endure suffering as discipline. God is dealing with you as sons. Is there a son whose father does not discipline him? If you are not disciplined (and all of us have received it), then you are illegitimate children and not sons. In addition, we have earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them. Should we not submit even more to the Father of the spirits and live? They disciplined us for a little while, according to what seemed best to them, but God disciplines us for our good, so that we may have a share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.”**

I have found great joy in those words. They tell us that God, the all-knowing, perfect and holy God, who grasps our needs, who understands our weaknesses, who cares for our soul, may bring hardship into our lives for our eternal good. He is teaching you to rely on Him. His is teaching you the hear Him and believe Him, to trust His total love for you and to understand that God is working in your life for the sake of righteousness and the peace of eternal salvation. Seriously, if you grasp the wonder of that promise of God, just what is there that we need to fear? God is there. God is directing you. God is literally pulling you to His salvation, maybe causing you some discomfort and pain, but He is pulling you to His salvation. My encouragement is to stop pulling against Him and walk His way. He is doing things for our good!

Promise number 4. “When God permits evil to come into our lives, he strengthens and supports us so that we are able to bear it.” Here are a few passages to comprehend in this regard. Psalm 94:17-19 **“Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul would soon have dwelt in silence. When I said, ‘My foot has slipped,’ your mercy, Lord, upheld me. When my worries within me were many, your comfort brought joy to my soul.”** How about just the wonder of what is found in Psalm 23:4 **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”**

Let’s turn our attention to our New Testament and this promise of God. First consider 2 Corinthians 12:9. This section is Paul speaking about the “thorn in his flesh,” some sort of trouble that just plagued him time and time again. He tells us he prayed three times, pleaded with the Lord, to have this thorn taken away. Here is God’s answer: **“And he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.”** Paul concludes in verse 10 **“Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weakness, so that the power of Christ may shelter me.”** And yes, let’s consider 1 Peter 5:10 **“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you.”**

The importance of considering all of this is in this. Each and every one of us somewhere, at some time, and somehow is going to face difficulties and problems in this world of ours. Maybe it will be an extended illness, life threatening cancer, heart disease, loss of a loved one…the list is vast. Maybe it will be work stress or family problems related to finances, emotions, or any number of things we could speak of. What I do know is that you will have problems. It is not for me to say if your problem is big or not, because each of us is just different in that. What I might weather and breeze through you consider the storm of a lifetime. What you consider as just something to close to the fire, I might think of as being thrown into the blazing furnace. No, it is not our job to tell others what is hard and what isn’t. But it is my job to share God’s truth. And God says He is with you. God says he will deliver you and help you. God says He will make all serve for your eternal good and God says He will never give you more than you can bear because He will be your strength and encouragement in all! In other words, you, you, need to know and rejoice in these sure and certain promises of our Savior. These are His promises to you!

And then we can make the confession of Job ours. “**The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be blessed.”** Even better you can say with Job **“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust. Then, even after my skin has been destroyed, nevertheless, in my own flesh, I will see God. I myself will see him. My own eyes will see him, and not as a stranger.”** Dear people our Redeemer does live. And He will deliver! He will help and comfort, strengthen and settle us. Because of this, we can with eyes to the Lord grasp, life is but a breath, but it is a breath with the Lord by our side. Amen.