Sunday, October 4, 2015  
(Lectionary designation: Ordinary 27B)  

Job 2:1-10

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD.  
2 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."  
3 The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."  
4 Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives.  
5 But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."  
6 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life."  
7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.  
8 Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.  
9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die."  
10 But he said to her, "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Exegetical observations

1. The book of Job consists of two stories presented as one: a simplistic prose narrative that is comprised of chapters 1, 2 and the end of 42. The middle material from 3:1 through 42:6 consists of poetic dialogues. In the prose narrative, Job is the patient sufferer; the Job of the poetic dialogues is defiant.

2. In verse 1, the “heavenly beings” is literally “the sons of the gods” (בני אלים)

3. “Satan” is really not yet developed in Hebrew theology as the “devil.” Rather, “the satan” (הַסַּטָּן, ha-satan) is a title: “the adversary” or “the accuser.” The presence of the definite article (ha) indicates that this is not a proper noun (Hebrew never uses the article with proper nouns). “The satan” at this point in Hebrew theology is like a prosecutor; he is a nemesis of humans but acts on God’s behalf.
4. In verse 3, “for no reason” is literally “for nothing”, a play on words from the original dialogue in chapter 1 where the satan accuses Job of obeying only because he is prospering, saying: "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

5. In verse 4, “skin for skin” is probably an idiomatic phrase that was used in the marketplace. A better translation might be “skin up to skin”, that is, a trade can be made up to, but not exceeding, equivalent value (he’ll trade anything up to his life to save his life).

6. The “loathsome sores” of verse 7 are probably a particular form of leprosy.

7. In verse 8, to sit “among the ashes” symbolizes his isolation from the community.

8. In verse 9, Job’s wife speaks her one and only line of the entire book, which is interesting compared to the notoriety she achieves in commentaries on Job. Job’s “integrity” is an interesting concept. The Hebrew word for “integrity” implies a particular consistency; that of a person whose conduct is completely in accord with moral and religious norms and whose character is one of utter honesty, without guile. If Job holds on to integrity in the sense of conformity to religious norm and blesses God as he did before, she senses that he will be committing an act of deceit. If he holds on to integrity in the sense of honesty, then he must curse God and violate social integrity, which forbids such cursing. (NIB)

9. In verse 9, the phrase “curse God and die” actually appears in the Hebrew as “bless God and die”; it would appear that the scribes and/or the storytellers could not bring themselves to actually use the phrase “curse God.”

10. The specificity of the phrase in verse 10, that Job “did not sin with his lips” leaves open the question of what was going on within Job’s mind and whether he was thinking sinfully. But this is sufficient for Job to pass the satan’s test, and the satan is not mentioned again in the book.