

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

November 9, 2025

Vindicator of the Living

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Has anyone ever kicked you while you were down? I'm guessing it has happened to most of us at one point or another. Someone sees that we're going through a tough time, and rather than comfort or help, they just...pile on; or even worse, try to take advantage of the situation.

Now, if you have experienced this, I sincerely hope it was not to the extent that Job is experiencing it in our reading today. As a quick recap:

- the book opens in the heavenly court with Satan challenging God to allow him to test Job to see if he remains faithful
- in a series of swift disasters Job loses his wealth, property, and children
- Job responds to this piously, saying "...the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."¹
- Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) come to comfort him, at first listening to his misery
- there are then three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends, known as the Dialogue
- his friends ultimately argue that Job must have done **something** to deserve everything he is experiencing, culminating in Bildad's condemnation of Job in chapter 18

¹ Job 1:21c

Then we arrive at our reading for today, which is from the opening of Job's response to this Deuteronomic theology (God is just therefore suffering is always a punishment for sin) in which Job rejects that theology. Rather than taking his suffering as some sort of divine punishment, Job responds by calling upon God to be the just God that God claims to be.

One of the particularly devastating realities of Job's situation can be found in his call for a **vindicator**, or *ga'al* in the Hebrew. This was a particular title for a particular role in Hebrew society. A *ga'al* was usually a family member or close friends who would buy back family property, protect children and widows of family members, and otherwise seek justice or vengeance as necessary on behalf of someone who cannot do it themselves.²

What's devastating here is that Job has lost all his family, he is alone at this point. And remember, Job has no idea why any of this is happening to him, as far as he knows he has always lived faithfully and righteously. He desperately wants someone to be on his side, someone who will seek justice on his behalf, he is desperate for a *ga'al* but he has no one left...except for a few friends...and look they have arrived! But rather than commiserating with him and advocating for him, they tell him everything is his fault! What friends!

Job's last hope for allies...his last hope for justice and vindication has abandoned him, even blaming him for his plight. He has no family left to be his *ga'al* and his friends have made it clear that they have no interest in helping him either. And so, at his lowest point, utterly bereft of anything resembling hope, Job turns to God and audaciously calls upon God to be his *ga'al*, he is calling upon God to be who God has said God is: a God of justice and mercy, a God of liberation and life, a God of healing and comfort. It is a demand for a *living* Vindicator from a *living* God.

² cf Lev. 25; 27; Num. 5; 35; Josh. 20

But the story of abandonment doesn't end there. At least Job's friends aren't trying to wring some advantage out of his situation. We move forward several centuries from Job to find some Sadducees inventing a bizarre scenario to make Jesus appear foolish. Their entire argument being premised on God being a God of technicalities and judgement. "Whose wife will the woman be?" they ask, completely uninterested in her agency or will, utterly uncurious as to their own assumptions about God revealed in their question.

Their question, like the friends' arguments to Job, tries to trap God's justice within the confines of human technicalities and oppressive social structures (like the Levirate law designed primarily to protect property and lineage). It's a way of saying, "Your God of Justice must be bound by *our* rules."

Jesus responds by answering the deeper, more important question that both Job and the Sadducees (however unwittingly) are asking. Namely, what is God's nature? Is God just? What does that justice look like? Is God's justice the sort that can be tripped up by technicalities? Is God's justice the sort that will vindicate those unjustly oppressed? What does God's justice mean for God's mercy? What about God's judgement?

God is "God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive." For God, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living. Three men, three patriarchs, in whose lives God was very active. Calling and covenanting with Abraham; blessing and multiplying Isaac; founding a people through Jacob's sons. The living God is active in people's lives.

It can be hard to feel God's presence and activity at times though, especially when we're getting kicked while we're down like Job or when we get confused about God's nature and focus on the wrong things like the Sadducees. But Jesus is relentless on this: God is an active God, a God of the living, a God of justice and mercy. God will be our vindicator, our refuge and our strength. This is why we are commanded in 2 Thessalonians 2 to "stand

firm" and be strengthened for "every good work," because God is not finished with this world.

God will be our vindicator, our refuge and our strength. The God of the Living is here, and this means we have a mandate: to become the instruments of God's active care in the present age.

May God use us to be vindicators. When the Sadducees' systems of exploitation and injustice seem too strong, may God use us in a to dismantle institutions that keep the living in bondage. May God use us and our resources to provide safety and peace, to be the "shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17) and offer fierce love and protection to the targeted.

May the God of the living, use us who are living, to stand with the oppressed, to comfort the suffering, to ease the burdens of the poor, and to proclaim a new kingdom. A just kingdom where there is no longer any need for vindication. A living kingdom, made up of all who turn to God for justice, healing, and mercy. Amen.