It is Memorial Day weekend. And the weather is great. I’m sure people are enjoying the long weekend camping, having picnics, getting in an extra bike ride or hikes. Memorial Day weekend has become the unofficial beginning of summer – many kids around the country have already had their last day of school for the year. People look forward to Memorial Day for all sorts of fun and social reasons. And yet, that is not what Memorial Day is all about. Memorial Day is the day that we remember. Remember and honor every soldier who has died fighting, died in service to our country. If we think about them all it becomes overwhelming, it is easier to remember the people we know who have died in service. But the beautiful roots of Memorial Day remind us the importance of remembering and honoring the people we didn’t know. Did you know that it was the women who started Memorial Day, the women in the south who in 1866 came to the cemeteries to decorate the tombstones of their fallen soldiers, their beloved family and friends who had died in the Civil War. They noticed the neglected gravesites of the Union soldiers and placed flowers there as well. Remembering and honoring the men they didn’t know. Beginning the healing of a nation.

Thank you for allowing me to sidebar my sermon a bit to talk about Memorial Day. The more I look at Moral Injury the more I am convinced we need to look at and remember our past so that we can heal our future. We are still a nation at war, men and women are still dying. And so, this Memorial Day, I invite you, to take a moment and remember, not just the names of friends and family, the soldiers you know and love, who have died while serving our county. But also, those whose names and faces we do not know. Maybe in the remembering we too can be part of the healing.

And now let us return to Job. This morning we are going to look at a tiny but important piece of Job. We are going to talk about Job’s wife. I’d love to tell you her name; however, she is one of the many unnamed women in the Bible. And for that reason there are people who would argue that she, and her story are irrelevant. That we should not waste our time talking about her or thinking about her. The story is about Job right? How important can she be when she only appears twice in the story. The first time in Chapter 2.
Job 2:8-9 (CEV)

Then Job sat on the ash-heap to show his sorrow. And while he was scraping his sores with a broken piece of pottery, his wife asked, “Why do you still trust God? Why don’t you curse him and die?”

Not the nicest of words. And so, many of those who do talk about Job’s wife would like to use her words against her. To point out how unhelpful her words are, what an unsupportive wife she was. But I agree with Feminist Theologians. There is much more going on here, if we are willing to look.

We know that what is happening to Job is because of some weird argument between God and the Devil. It has nothing to do with anything that Job had done. Larry has covered all of that. But I wonder, how many of us have thought about the other people in Job’s life who are being impacted by what is happening to Job. How many of us realize the collateral damage of Job’s life when God tells the Devil to do his best. When Job loses it all who else’s life is impacted?

Job 1:13-19 (CEV)

Job’s sons and daughters were having a feast in the home of his oldest son, when someone rushed up to Job and said, “While your servants were plowing with your oxen, and your donkeys were nearby eating grass, a gang of Sabeans attacked and stole the oxen and donkeys! Your other servants were killed, and I was the only one who escaped to tell you.”

That servant was still speaking, when a second one came running up and saying, “God sent down a fire that killed your sheep and your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

Before that servant finished speaking, a third one raced up and said, “Three gangs of Chaldeans attacked and stole your camels! All of your other servants were killed, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

That servant was still speaking, when a fourth one dashed up and said, “Your children were having a feast and drinking wine at the home of your oldest son, when suddenly a windstorm from the desert blew the house down, crushing all of your children. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”

None of us would disagree that this is one crappy day. For more than just Job. In this one really bad day, Job’s wife also loses everything; her home, her way of life, and her children. All
because of Job. Because of who her husband was and how he chose to live his life, her life has now been turned upside down. She is now childless, bankrupt, homeless. And because all Job is doing about it is sitting in an ash heap, she is the one responsible for somehow taking care of them.

Yet, she is simply collateral damage. Neither God nor the Devil seem to care about the people surrounding Job while they have their little game – to see what kind of faith Job really has. What is important is Job and how he lives out his faith. Personally, I find this a bit disturbing.

As many of you know I have started by Doctoral Program. And I just came back from two weeks of classes in Fort Worth Texas. One of those weeks was dealing with Action and Advocacy – about how and why we do Mission/Outreach work and how we speak out about injustices in our communities and in the world. So there I sat thinking about this sermon on Job’s wife while we were talking about an important concept we need to always remember as we both do the work of the Church and live out our Christian lives – the concept of “Do No Harm” and I found myself more disturbed than I usually am by the story of Job.

Job is a good faithful servant of God, and yet; because of his faith, harm comes to those around him; his children, his servants and his wife – the one who loses everything along with him. Yet, somehow over the years very few of us have paused and wondered if Job’s wife’s questions “Why do you still trust God? Why don’t you curse him and die?” are spoken out of the frustration of having her life seriously impacted by someone else’s life choices? Of wanting her life to be back to what it was before, or at least having some control over her own life?

How many of us sitting here can relate to Job’s wife’s? How many of us have had their life changed drastically because of a decision – a choice – or an action made by someone else? Something we had no say in, no control over?

These questions made me stop and reflect on my own life. Reflect on whose lives are being impacted by the choices I make – especially those choices I make because I want to be a faithful servant of God. What are the things that I am doing where I feel like I am living out of my faith that have collateral damage? Who is the collateral damage?

Sometimes collateral damage is easy to see. My Mennonite friends moved to South Africa to do peace work. Their teenage sons didn’t want to go, they still don’t want to be there. They are the collateral damage of their parents calling to be peace workers in other less safe parts of the world.
Talk to any minister’s family and they can tell you all the ways that their lives have been dictated by the ministry expectations put on them because of their minister parent or spouse. I always try and keep this in mind with my own daughter, to minimize the negative impact my life as a minister has on her. But I know on some level she is collateral damage of my own calling to ministry.

Those are the easy ones, the obvious ones. But what about the less obvious collateral damage of our good intentioned Christian lives. Here is where I send this sermon off the rails again, because I don’t have those answers – but maybe you do.

So I am going to invite you to turn to someone in the pews around you – if possible turn to someone you didn’t already chat with today.

Take a few minutes together and think about your life as a Christian, our life as a church. Who are we impacting as Christians? As Church? Who is suffering as possible collateral damage of our good intended Christian life? Can we avoid these pitfalls? I give you about 5 minutes to see what you come up with.

Who did you come up with? We are great people of faith! We live Good Christian lives. We want our impact on our families, our communities, and our world to be as positive as possible, we don’t want to do any hard. May we continue to reflect on how we are living our lives as faithful servants of God, as followers of Christ so that we minimize the collateral damage. So that Christ’s light can shine throughout the world.

I fear that, eventually, we are all going to become collateral damage in the war on drugs, or terrorism, or whatever war is in vogue at the moment.

(James C. Nelson)