

Proper 24 B 2018  
October 21, 2018 :: Job 38: 1-7, 34-41  
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## *“Talk to me, God.”*

Our first reading begins with these words: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). Poor Job! I imagine that he’s had enough. Enough of the disasters. Enough of advice from his so-called friends. Enough of questions that don’t seem to have answers. And he certainly doesn’t need this: a whirlwind; a tornado spinning out of the sky, which will likely wipe away what’s left of his life. And so, I imagine him cowering against a rock when, out of that whirlwind, out of that tornado, he hears a voice:

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.”

Yeah, it’s God. And he’s finally showed up. And apparently he is going to respond to Job’s demands and pleas. But before we consider what God may have to say, let’s pause for a moment, and remember what’s been happening to Job.

The book of Job begins with God describing Job as a singular man; that no one else on earth is as faithful, true, and just as Job. But God is persuaded to enter into a wager with *ha-satan* — which is Hebrew for “the accuser”; *ha-satan*, from which we get the name Satan — God wagers that no loss will cause Job to turn away from him.

That was in chapter one, and now we’re in chapter thirty-eight, and Job’s life has fallen apart. He’s lost everything that he worked so hard to build up. His farms are destroyed. His livestock is gone. His children have died. And his wife thinks he would be better off dead. Even his closest friends have abandoned him, but not before suggesting that it’s all his fault; that somehow he has offended God, and brought all this disaster upon himself.

And so, for a while, Job wonders if it is all his fault. He searches back through his life, trying to recall if there is *anything* he has done, or anything he has *failed* to do, that would have brought God’s judgement down upon him. But he can’t think of anything at all.

And so he pleads with God to just let him know why this has all happened to him; what it is that he is being punished for. Because then, at least, then he'll understand. Then he'll be free from this lurking fear that he could have done something to avoid it. Then at least, he can make amends, offer a sacrifice, anything, rather than just sit there and accept it all.

“Why,” Job cries out to God, “why?” Obviously, Job doesn't know about the wager between God and “*ha-satan*.” All he knows is that his life has fallen apart. But he still remembers the God whom he has trusted since his childhood. And so he prays to God to help him understand why all this is happening.

That's the background to our reading today. Job is crying out, and God has finally decided to answer; and God speaks to Job out of the whirl wind:

“Where were you when I molded the earth,  
when I confined the sea, when I stretched the  
clouds, when I hung the sun? Can you create  
water and light, snow and hail, dew and ice,  
stars and rain? Did you call forth lions and

ravens, goat and deer, wild donkeys and oxen,  
ostriches and horses, hawks and eagles?”

Wow! God’s response is absolutely beautiful as poetry. But as a response to what Job’s been going through, it’s hardly a satisfying answer. It’s almost callous. Even sarcastic. Because what it boils down to, is this: God is saying to Job,

“Job, I’ve heard you. But what right have you to demand an answer of me? What right have you to even ask?”

Well, when you put it like that, the answer is, “None.” Job has no right to demand an answer from God. Job wasn’t there at creation. He has no idea of where the rain comes from. He wasn’t the one who created lions and ostriches. Job has no right to demand an answer from God. Except. Except for the right of one who was created *by* God. And who trusted *in* God. And, let’s be frank, as someone who has no one else to ask.

Now, what we’ve heard this morning, is just the first part of a conversation that will go on for the better part of five chapters in

the book of Job. God questioning and Job answering; Job questioning and God answering.

And, together, they will struggle to make sense of what has happened to Job's life. And what that sense is, we will hear in next Sunday's reading from Job. (And I'll be preaching on that as well.) But for now we are in the middle of the struggle, in the middle of the conversation — Job and his God simply talking together — because, in the midst of disaster, *that may be all that we can do*.

In September of 2009, an earthquake and tsunami struck the Samoan Islands region, resulting in substantial damage and loss of life. A few weeks later, a priest in the United States received this message from a friend who survived the event:

“We are all well and sound ... There is nothing left [in our village of Lalomanu] ... We lost nine members of our extended family ... We went back yesterday to the village with them, and I saw the force of nature there ... But as usual, they are picking up and going forward quietly and surely ... I am learning from them,

and getting strength from their profound faith in God.”

I think that last statement is interesting, that they are getting “strength from their profound faith in God.” The Samoans, that is, and now, apparently, Job too.

At this point in our reading of Job, it’s not clear if there will be an answer that will satisfy Job’s need and desire for justice. But isn’t that true for us, too? We don’t always know why certain things happen to us, or to those we love. And perhaps we think that it would help if we just knew why. But the fact of the matter is that, sometimes, there are no answers to that question; at least none that will address our pain.

Sometimes, all we can do is *to continue to trust in God*. Because the only other option is to deny the One who has been at the very core of our lives, and in so doing to deny a part of ourselves.

Therefore, perhaps the only alternative, is for us to keep talking. To keep talking to God. To keep on questioning, and

maybe even shouting, at God. But, at the same time, trusting — with the trust that has been built over a lifetime — that God is still with us. That's He's with us no matter what happens. Because we won't always know the why. But we will always know — even when it's hard to believe — we will always know that God is here.

And that is basically the message of our reading from the book of Job. That God is here. Sometimes as One who comforts us. Sometimes even as One who challenges us. But always as One who is willing to talk with us. Because God loves us. Because God really does care about what we're going through.

So, if you take away nothing else from this sermon, let it be this: no matter what you're going through, God is here. And God does love you. And God wants to help you find a way through whatever it is you're going through.

That has always been the case. That is the case right now. And that will always be the case.

Amen.