

You know the story of Job. Of how Job was blessed by God with a smart head on his shoulder, cattle in the field, food on the table, a loving wife and many good children of whom he was VERY proud.

And then, just like that, POOF, the most important things in his life were gone. Destroyed by a whirlwind. Now, his livestock - stolen – and he could have probably dealt with that. His sheep – struck by lightning – he could have handled that too. But his children. Oh his children.

And then to top it all off he is covered in boils...likely a psychosomatic response.

His wife grieves bitterly. His friends come...and then ultimately blame Job for all has gone wrong and they're impatient with his grieving process.

There's a good teaching here...How to and how not to walk alongside with those who are experiencing trauma. I am learning every day that what is most important is not impatience nor is it frustration with the individual's "process or progress." But patience and silence and a prayerful presence. Criticism doesn't help trauma.

So Job grieves. He laments that he couldn't hold it together. He cries, "Why was I even born!" He constantly pleads for an answer from God – all the while writhing in both physical pain and grief and fear of what is to come.

There are some questions for which there are no real answers. At the end of the book of Job, we hear God's response to Job's pleading and perhaps unasked question, "What did I do to deserve this pain." When God finally speaks. God doesn't answer his questions. But asks questions in return.

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

²“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone

⁷when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

³⁴“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?

³⁵Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’?

³⁶Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?

³⁷Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?

Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, ³⁸when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?

³⁹“Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

⁴⁰when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?

⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?

God goes on for 4 more chapters to explain to Job the things that Job will never know. God is in control. Even the elements bear God's signature. God holds the birthing cosmos with the same hand that provides food for young ravens. God has a creating hand in everything – every process, every creature, every weather on earth...and certainly the whirlwind out of which God spoke – a whirlwind like the same wind that smote the home with his children.

And what does Job do? He doesn't complain that God didn't answer him. In fact, I'm sure a little part of him felt honoured that God did respond in the first place.

Anyway, he did not grumble, instead, he humbled himself even more and God honoured him and blessed him.

Now here is something I need to make clear. We are not Job and Job is not us – nor is he Johnny Cash. It is unlikely – but wouldn't it be wonderful/scary if God spoke to us in a whirlwind? One thing that Job's story does do very well - among many things – is that it reminds us of our place.

Job's story reminds us that bad things happen – often not as horrible and sometimes even more horrible than Job experienced.

Job's story reminds us that bad things happen – accidents happen – death happens, sickness happens, abandonment, abuse, neglect, crime, fraud happens and while we have some control in how we respond, we cannot control other people, nor do we have control of the elements.

Let me say that again. There are some things that we cannot control. These things are not ours to control – they are God's. The God of the universe is just that. The God of the universe – of creation - is so far far more than we could ever imagine.

Let me say it again. God is great and God is good, and we are not God.

Job's story reminds us of our place before God.

But Job's isn't the only story in our Bible that reminds us of our place. In fact, the whole Bible is full of stories of which people try to wrest power from God.

Starting with Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, the people building the tower of Babel, Eli and his sons, king Saul, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jonah and the list in the Hebrew Bible goes on. In the New Testament we have false teachers, the Pharisees that were more concerned with how they looked than how their heart was before God, the kings and the rulers of the age – the powers and the principalities.

Adam and Eve's greatest sin was eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because they wanted to be like God.

God mixed up the languages to confuse the people who were building a tower to the heavens to be like God.

Eli and his sons defiled the temple and thought they wouldn't be seen – But God saw and prophesied to Samuel of their destruction.

Solomon decided he was wiser than God, Jonah thought he could run away from God.

Many of the Religious Rulers of Jesus' day thought they could control the status of people based on sickness or gender or who their family was. But Jesus came to teach and to remind people that God so loved the world – the whole world – including the widows and orphans and immigrants, rich rulers, centurions, eunuchs, prostitutes, hemorrhaging women, people with leprosy, jailors, CHILDREN, people with mental illness, tax collectors and even people that would betray him.

Job's story – and so many other stories in our biblical texts remind us of our place. God doesn't desire us to be perfect. Only God is perfect and we are not God. But God does desire for us to be genuine.

Job's grief and his questioning come from a genuine place within him. And "Job's fundamental question was finally and graciously answered. "Yes, Job, I hear you. I heard your first cry. I heard the voice that spoke creation into being. And, in fact, it was my voice. So, yes, Job, I can hear you now.

After a long season of waiting, of silence, of doubt amidst everyone else's certainty, Job, like Tom Petty's song, refused to back down. This resulted in a most profound encounter with God...something reminiscent of so many who have struggled with God throughout the history of God's people." We hear God loving God's people.

Now, when I say that, what I don't mean is that the God of the universe mocks or punishes or even condemns us for asking questions or having doubts, or for wondering why things are going the way we are.

Consider elsewhere in our Bible when people questioned or argued, or railed against God.

Think of Jacob, the one who tricked his brother and his father, who loved one son more than the other 11, who set his jaw and held on and wrestled with God all night – emerging in the morning with a dislocated hip and a new name and blessing.

Think of the psalms – "Oh that you would destroy my enemies (we don't usually like looking at those parts of psalms and yet they're still beloved psalms)."

Or Jonah – I love how Jonah's indignation at God's mercy for the people of Nineveh made him so mad – and God responded – a bit like God did for Job, "well, why shouldn't I look compassionately at the people of Nineveh and their livestock?"

Or what about the poor disciples in their boat. In Matthew 8 we read, ²⁴ A windstorm arose on the sea, (there's a windstorm again) so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.

Think of Mary and Martha, Oh I just love what they both say when they see Jesus after their brother, Lazarus, dies. "Lord, if you had been here, he would not have died!" How often do we say that even today! And what did Jesus do upon hearing Mary say these words? He wept.

Think of Thomas – poor Thomas always gets the bad rap.

He must have gone out for food the first time the disciples saw the risen Jesus in the locked room. “We have seen the Lord!” they insisted. But, like Job, Jonah, the Psalmists, the disciples in the boat, even Mary and Martha, Thomas wouldn’t back down. He asked his questions. He challenged God, “unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

In her commentary on these verses in Job, Rev. Meg Jenista Kuykendall writes, “We like to call this man “Doubting Thomas.” But, if we are honest, we recognize ourselves in his prayer. We recognize the faith and doubt that do not cancel each other out. The faith and doubt that live together in the human heart. Thomas dared God to show up. And God took him up on that dare.

In that locked upper room, “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be unto you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’” God, in Christ, graciously enabled Thomas to profess: “My Lord and my God!”

We today stand in a long line of lamenters, doubters, questioners and wrestlers like Job and Jacob and Jonah, Mary, Martha the Psalmist, the disciples and Thomas.

Our grief or fear or doubt or “all of the above all at once” – whatever it is and however it is felt – is just as valid as these. And like these, when we finally hear from God – in whatever way God speaks to us, there may be some conversation, and maybe some rebuke, and you likely will be put back in your place, but it is a place of love, not disgrace...where what you say and who you are is valued and honoured.

And, to us, God replies: Yes, I can hear you now. I hear you because I am this world’s Creator and, like Job, you are my creation. I hear you because you are my people, I created you to have a head on your shoulders and wonder in your brain. I hear when you come to me, like the Psalmists, with all the emotions of your burdened hearts. I join with you in nights of relentless wrestling for the truth. I bring hope in places of doubt and I weep with you in your grief.¹

We are faith descendants of these great characters who have taught us that there will be storms and whirlwinds. There will be times when we get it all horribly wrong or when life seems to give us all the most awful stuff. But always we are enough. Always we can come to God and lay it all down and say, “Here it is – God.”

We can do that again and again and again and never back down. Don’t give in to the fear and the doubt because that place we are when we bring this to God – that is the place where God can begin to make things new. God is good and God is great and makes amazing things out of the chaos of our lives.

¹ Janista, Meg. “Job 38:1-7, 34-41.” Center for Excellence in Preaching, October 9, 2024. <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2024-10-14/job-381-7-34-41-2/>.