

June 23, 2024 – Job 38:1-11

The Bible has a lot of tragic stories. Cain killing Abel. God flooding the earth in the days of Noah. The Israelites suffering under the hand of Pharaoh. Judah taken into Babylonian captivity. The martyrdom of men like Stephen and James.

But among them all, there is one story that stands head and shoulders above the rest as by far the most tragic: The story of Job. I think most of you know it already, but I'll give you a short recap. Job had been rickly blessed by the Lord. We're told that at one time Job had ten children and that "he possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants," and that he was "the greatest of all the people of the east."

But in one day, he lost it all. His flocks and servants were destroyed by raiding parties from the surrounding nations. His children were killed in their home by a sudden storm. Job himself was struck with a terrible disease and ended up with painful sores over every inch of his body. To say that Job suffered would be an understatement.

We are also told that through all his suffering, Job never lost his faith in the Lord. But he was certainly tempted to. Time and again, Job complained to God and questioned God's motives. He says at one point, "*I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me.*"

If he didn't outright accuse God of being unfair to him, he certainly got close. Job even insists that he be given the chance to defend himself before God: "*But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God.*"

You may know how that feels. Maybe you haven't suffered to quite the same extent that Job did, but plenty of us gathered here know what it means to suffer. Some of you have had to bury your children, your husbands, your wives. Some of you have struggled to keep your head above water in the midst of financial ruin. Some of you have had to deal with painful illnesses or debilitating injuries.

Job may have had to suffer an awful lot, all at once. But the trials he endured are common sources of suffering in our world and they always have been. We are sinners in a broken world. And we all face suffering.

And when we suffer like Job, we have the same questions as Job did. Why has God allowed these terrible things to happen. Why do children get cancer? Why do floods wipe out crops? Why would God make me suffer for years with this disease? Why am I left here to grieve while my loved one is in heaven?

Just as Job was tempted to curse God and abandon his faith, our faith is tested whenever we experience suffering as well. It shakes us and makes us wonder if God is really good, and if he really cares about us at all. It makes us wish that we could stand toe to toe with God and ask him straight to his face what he's doing and why he's doing it.

And that brings us to today's text. Because, surprisingly, in this text, God gives Job the chance he's looking for. "*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.*" Job wanted to stand toe to toe with God. And so God shows up and stands toe to toe with him.

But Job doesn't get the answers he's looking for. In fact, instead of Job doing the questioning, it's God who asks the questions. "*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.*" The Almighty doesn't have to answer to us. We answer to him.

Of course, Job had no answers for God's questions. He didn't know any of these answers. "*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.*" Job wasn't there when God did these things. Obviously had no understanding of them. "*Who determined its measurements – surely you know!*" Of course he doesn't know the measurements of the universe.

The only thing Job knew for sure was that God alone had done all these things. But he had no idea how. How did God lay the foundations of the earth? How did God create the seas and set their limits? None of us know this! Science has done wonderful things, made amazing discoveries about God's universe, but the truth is we'll never understand how God made the universe. Or how he continues to uphold it and rule over it. God's wisdom is so much greater than ours.

And if we can't understand how God does those things in creation, why would we think we could understand the deeper mysteries of God, like how God can make *"all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose"*? We can't. And that will finally be Job's only reply. After several more chapters of questions from God just like these, Job finally says with absolute humility. *"I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*

Job repented. He gave up on his foolish thoughts and his self-pity, and he turned with renewed faith back to the Lord. And that, in the end, was God's goal. That is always God's goal, both for Job and for all of us. God desires that we repent of our foolish sins and turn back to him in faith and trust.

Which is what we need to remember as we consider all those things that Job had to endure and God's reply to Job here in this text. God was not Job's enemy. God was not yelling at Job. God was treating Job as a believer. As a beloved child. By asking these questions, God reminded Job of these wonderful things, which were meant to strengthen his faith in God, not destroy it.

It was arrogant of Job to think that God should have to justify himself. It's arrogant of us to think that God should have to justify himself. And it's even more arrogant of us to think that if God did answer us, we'd be able to understand his wisdom and deeds.

We, too, need to repent in dust and ashes. We, too, need to quit uttering things that are too deep for us. We don't know the specifics of why God allows the things that he allows. And even if he told us, we wouldn't be able to understand it.

Luther reminds us in the explanation of the First Commandment that we are to "fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Above even our own wisdom. We are to believe that he who made the heavens and the earth knows what he is doing in all things, whether they seem good or bad to us.

But we do have one unique advantage over Job. You see, in many ways, Job only barely knew his Lord. Job lived at around the time of Abraham. The books of Moses weren't even written, let alone the psalms, prophets, or the New Testament. He knew the Lord only through the message of men like Adam and Seth and Noah, passed down from generation to generation.

We have an advantage. We not only have the entirety of God's written Word, but we have Jesus himself. We know that the very same God who laid the cornerstone of the earth became the Cornerstone of our faith. Unlike Job, we can see both the wisdom of God and the love of God at work in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord for our salvation – events that God had planned before he laid the foundation of the world.

So we can actually answer some of God's questions in ways that Job couldn't. *"Who determined its measurements... Or who stretched the line upon it... Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?"*

Jesus did! The Word who was with God and who was God, through whom all things were made. He determined the measurements of the earth and shut in the seas. And when he told those same seas, *"Peace! Be still,"* like he did in our Gospel lesson, they obeyed him as their maker.

He determined the measurement of this earth and he determined that one day that same earth would entomb his dead, crucified body and then quake when he rose victoriously from the grave. The Lord God, who created and upholds the universe by his divine power and wisdom, has also reconciled you to himself through the blood of Jesus. Therefore, you know you are beloved by God. For he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all has indeed graciously given us all things.

I know it's sometimes hard for us to see and even hard for us to believe, but God is indeed working all things for your eternal good. This world is not good. And many things happen to us in this world that are not good. And yet, God works it to a good end. He worked the death of his own Son to a good and life-giving end for us. And he works our own suffering and death to a good and life-giving end in the resurrection of the dead on the last day.

Trust him. He knows what he's doing. Trust him. He loves you and he wants what is good for you. He loves you and he died for you. Cling to that truth.

Cling to it even when you can't understand the inner workings of God. Cling to it even when his wisdom and his ways are just too deep for you. Cling to the God who holds the universe together even as he holds you in the palm of his hand. Amen.