

Job 38:1-21, 40:1-2

38 And now, finally, GOD answered Job from the eye of a violent storm. He said:

<sup>2-11</sup> “Why do you confuse the issue?

Why do you talk without knowing what you’re talking about?

Pull yourself together, Job!

Up on your feet! Stand tall!

I have some questions for you,

and I want some straight answers.

Where were you when I created the earth?

Tell me, since you know so much!

Who decided on its size? Certainly you’ll know that!

Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?

How was its foundation poured,

and who set the cornerstone,

While the morning stars sang in chorus

and all the angels shouted praise?

And who took charge of the ocean

when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb?

That was me! I wrapped it in soft clouds,

and tucked it in safely at night.

Then I made a playpen for it,

a strong playpen so it couldn’t run loose,

And said, ‘Stay here, this is your place.

Your wild tantrums are confined to this place.’

<sup>12-15</sup> “And have you ever ordered Morning, ‘Get up!’

told Dawn, ‘Get to work!’

So you could seize Earth like a blanket

and shake out the wicked like cockroaches?

As the sun brings everything to light,

brings out all the colors and shapes,

The cover of darkness is snatched from the wicked—

they’re caught in the very act!

<sup>16-18</sup> “Have you ever gotten to the true bottom of things,

explored the labyrinthine caves of deep ocean?

Do you know the first thing about death?

Do you have one clue regarding death’s dark mysteries?

And do you have any idea how large this earth is?

Speak up if you have even the beginning of an answer.

<sup>19-21</sup> “Do you know where Light comes from

and where Darkness lives

So you can take them by the hand

and lead them home when they get lost?

Why, of *course* you know that.

You’ve known them all your life,

grown up in the same neighborhood with them!

40 <sup>1-2</sup> GOD then confronted Job directly:

“Now what do you have to say for yourself?

Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?”

The first time I read this chapter I imagined God speaking to Job like some kind of Wizard of Oz, loud with flames shooting out from both sides of his image. But the more I thought about it, prayed about it, and read about it, the more I began to see God’s response not so much as a put-down (“Job, who are you to question *me*?) but as God shattering any false impression Job may have of him and instilling in Job an understanding that we can all benefit from today.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to recognize that people have a hard time recognizing the one true God. In scripture God in fact warns people in the Old Testament that we can never see him face to face and live; that’s why all those people who encounter God in the Bible declare, “Oy vay” or “Woe is me” whenever they have an encounter with the divine. Either that or they don’t recognize God. And when Moses asks to see God face to face, God says “You can’t.” This is why anyone should be highly suspicious of anyone claiming to have God all figured out. My best recommendation to you has always been to *seek God for yourself*. Don’t just go on what others tell you, because you need to relate to God directly. Remember our vision: to ignite and sustain a passionate spiritual relationship with Christ among all people starting with yourself. And one need look no further than newspapers and history books to see all sorts of cases where spiritual leaders like pastors and priests, rabbis and imams have led their flocks down the wrong path. And one only need look into the recesses of one’s own heart to see our own propensity to commit idolatry by shaping God into whatever suits our purposes and our needs. This is a core truth that Christians recognize, that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and best chance of knowing God is to seek him with all our heart, strength, mind and spirit.

Last week I mentioned one of the main ways we misunderstand God is the same way that Job and his friends misunderstand God. It was and still is a commonly held belief that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. In a way, this is true. But the problem is that we define reward and punishment in worldly terms – in terms of wealth and health and power. Job’s friends insist on this theology declaring that Job must have done something terrible for God to take away his children and his property and his health. And Job’s friends, like us, can certainly find scripture to support this belief; like I said, it was and still is a commonly held belief. *But it’s wrong*. Jesus said, “The sun rises on the good and the evil alike...” (Matthew 5:45). Job clearly holds the same theology as his friends, but Job knows that they are wrong with regard to his righteousness; Job hasn’t been pulling the wool over anyone’s eyes; he’s been a good dude and he knows it, which is why he is so upset with God. And for Job’s own good he needed to recognize that just as the sun rises on the good and the evil, so too does it rain on the just and the unjust. Job doesn’t doubt his own integrity, and he shouldn’t; what he needs to come to grips with is that all those “blessings” like livestock and children and good health are not so important compared to knowing and relating to God.

We live in a world full of messes. We only need to look at the newspaper to see that horrible things happen all around us. Actually we don’t even need to look at the newspapers because we can see enough mess in our own lives. *We* deal with health issues. *We* experience loss of loved ones. *We* are often treated unjustly by others, and if we believe like Job’s friends that our

misfortunes are the results of our sins we may be able to live with the messes, but we will also be living with a false impression of God. When we strive for righteousness and discover that the messes are still there we may grow just as angry and frustrated as Job and demand a hearing with God. And guess what? We'll get that hearing; I guarantee you, just as God speaks to Job for three chapters he'll speak to you, and he will tell you exactly what he told Job.

And what was it he told Job? God points out to Job just how magnificent creation is. God is not boasting, and he's not trying to change the subject. What God is doing is giving Job perspective. For so long I thought that God's reply was a cop out, just a way of telling Job to quit his whining and stop questioning God. But there is a greater wisdom in God's response to Job; just as Job is pleading with God to look at the world and bear witness to its suffering and pain, *God is pleading with Job to look at the world and bear witness to its beauty and glory.* God is responding to Job's experience of suffering with an invitation to see beauty around him, to allow beauty to interrupt his despair and grief. As I've said before, whatever struggles you're going through you can still give God praise for the fact that you are alive and perceptive enough to recognize the struggle. And if you can take your eyes off of the struggle to recognize that you are breathing and thinking and hearing and seeing and able to feel the cool autumn air and appreciate the beautiful sunset from your back yard, perhaps you are drawing closer to God than you ever have before, and you can offer him sincere thanksgiving for this life, whatever messes may be distracting you.

And this is why I say that it is true that God does reward the righteous and punish the wicked – not in worldly terms (wealth, health, power) but in divine terms, in one's relationship with the divine, and the closer we dwell to the divine the greater our joy; the further we dwell the greater our despair. There are plenty of rich, healthy people who are spiritually suffering, and plenty of poor, sick people who are spiritually healthy. It has to do with getting to know God.

David R. Henson, in a homily titled “What Job and God Learn From Each Other: Prophetic Grief Meets Prophetic Beauty” discerns a message for us in this sacred dialogue between God and Job:

And so that is my challenge to you today, to cultivate an awareness of human suffering *and* to cultivate an awareness of beauty in the world. Because I think in the place where those two meet is the place where we just might find Jesus — the fullness of God's glory experiencing the depth of human suffering — hard at work in the world.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/davidhenson/2015/10/what-job-and-god-learn-from-each-other-prophetic-grief-meets-prophetic-beauty-a-homily/>