

“Defiant Job”

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 10-21-2018
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Scripture Job 38: 1-7, 34-41

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

“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.

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

Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

“Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,

so that a flood of waters may cover you?

Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go

and say to you, ‘Here we are’?

Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,

or given understanding to the mind?

Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?

Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

when the dust runs into a mass

and the clods cling together?

“Can you hunt the prey for the lion,

or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

when they crouch in their dens,

or lie in wait in their covert?

Who provides for the raven its prey,

when its young ones cry to God,

and wander about for lack of food?

Today’s words by Job are spoken out of disaster. Job has lost his home, his business. All Job’s children are taken. Now he has lost his health, his body is filled with sores. “My days are without hope,” he says. He wishes he were dead.

I have good news for you! I don’t preach on the Book of Job very often. It is dangerous. Anytime a pastor (or any of you) tries to speak about God and human suffering, there’s always the risk that we’ll sound like one of Job’s so-called “friends” -- Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, Elihu. In the face of his sores, his pain, and his loss, what do these “friends” preach?

“Now, Job, let’s figure out what you’ve done to deserve this.”

“Job, are you suggesting God is unjust? If you were pure; if you were upright, God would answer you with prosperity.”

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“Job, how dare you ask such questions? Why would God take the trouble to explain himself to someone like you.”

But sometimes we “wiser,” modern people of the 21st century are not that far off from being like Job’s friends. Listen to some of us:

“It’s just God’s will. You’ll have to accept it.”

“God never puts more on us that we can bear.”

“Back for food again? Why not get a job?”

“Out of prison and can’t get a job? What’s your problem?”

People mean well ... but pause for a moment. Listen to what people say. In the face of such platitudes, no wonder some are driven, by such preaching, to even greater despair.

The great sociologist, Robert Coles, interviewed many young people for his book, *The Spiritual Life of Children*. One of the interviews is with little Maria. Her life is surrounded by the tough, hillside slums of Rio de Janeiro.

“When I look at Jesus up there [she points toward the famous ‘Christ of the Andes’ statue whose arms are outstretched over Rio], I wonder what He’s thinking. He can see all of us. I try to talk with Him ... He is all that I have. Mama still works as a maid, even though she coughs and bleeds. Mother used to tell us we’ll go to heaven, because we’re poor. I used to believe her: ...Now, when I hear her say it, I look up at Him, and I ask Him: ‘What do you say, Jesus?’”

“I shouldn’t blame Jesus! I do, though, sometimes. He’s right there – that statue keeps reminding me of Him ... and I’m either upset with Him or I’m praying for Him to tell me why the world is like it is.”

Maria, prepares us for Job’s change of heart, when he moves from resignation to defiance.

Hear these words of Job: “Have windy words no limit?” “Will God hear my cry?” “Oh, that God would hear me ... that the Almighty would answer me!”

This is when you appreciate Job, if you are a fellow sufferer, as when he rises off his ash heap, shakes his clinched fist at God, and wants to know, WHY?

Any pastor worth his or her salt knows that just about every human being has questions to ask God as well. Like Job, we want to know why. “Why did I get so sick?” “Why was my daughter the one to have to be the one in that car wreck?” “Why did I get stuck with a job in which, for a second time, my company was taken over by a bigger firm?”

No pastor is able to answer such questions, and no pastor should – especially one preaching his initial sermon at a new appointment. The honest questions that the people have of God are much more important than any answer.

Job has spent much of the previous 37 chapters asking “why”, in one way or another, and his friends gave their explanations as to why. None of their explanations were helpful to Job.

Now, God takes an enormous risk that Job will never want anything to do with God again, by responding, not about Job’s “why” but about the beauty and wonder of creation.

After all is said and done, can Job get caught up in the wonder of creation – as Jane and I did when we say the Badlands and the Black Hills for the first time?

Sometimes it is the images of mountain and ocean; for forests and deserts; of new discovered planets beyond our galaxy and the human genome within.

It is those very images of creation that can lift us from our usual ways of thinking and doing to realize how amazing God’s creation is and how that creation – including ourselves – are shaped by the freedom that God has woven into its very fabric.

It was the very image of the earthrise taken by Astronaut Frank Borman on Christmas Eve of 1968 that has been called the inspiration of the environmental movement.

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How we see things makes a difference. Whether through the images drawn by Job; or the experience of Maria, or the photo of the “earthrise,” How we picture our lives now and in the future effect the decisions they make today.

The outlook of a congregation – the outlook of Crossroads United Methodist Church – makes a huge difference in how it imagines what ministry and mission it can will undertake. And I am just now learning about that ministry and mission.

The image we have of God’s intentions for a world in which all creatures are fed and live, thrives in a place where justice can shape the choices we make about how to live right now. Amen.