

Sermon 20.07.12 Job 4: God responds...

This sermon was recorded with various readers and images used to augment the message.

Sermon Part 1 -

Here we are, in the final chapters of the book of Job. Throughout the book, we've seen Job holding fiercely to his innocence, longing for an encounter with God where he can plead his case and find justice. Job wants to know that God is still present, longs to see God. And finally, here we are. The Lord speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. The whirlwind -a terrifying, tumultuous place.

Scripture 1:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

Who is this whose ignorant words smear my design with darkness?

Stand up now like a man; I will question you: please, instruct me.

Where were you when I planned the earth?

Tell me, if you are so wise.

Do you know who took its dimensions, measuring its length with a cord?

What were its pillars built on?

Who laid down its cornerstone, while the morning stars burst out singing and the angels shouted for joy?

*Have you ever commanded morning or guided dawn to its place -
To hold the corners of the sky and shake off the last few stars?*

*Have you walked through the depths of the ocean
Or dived to the floor of the sea?*

*Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm and carves a road for the rain -
To water the desolate wasteland, the land where no man lives;
To make the wilderness blossom and cover the desert with grass?*

What we begin to see here is a view of creation that is not human-centric. God offers Job a completely different view of reality, a God's eye view of the world that takes no account of his own personal situation. This God's eye view of the world plays havoc with Job's notion of the way things ought to be - sensible, well-adapted to human purposes, and above all, predictable.

"God asks Job:

Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm and carves a road for the rain -
to water the desolate wasteland, the land where no man lives?"

- that one phrase says a lot about the way God runs things. In ancient Israel, life depended directly on the precarious, never-too-abundant rainfall. No one wastes water in the arid climate of the Middle East - no one except God.

We continue now, hearing of God's delight in the wildness of his creation. Notice with me, how all these creatures have one thing in common: they are completely untamable - fierce, wild, free.

Scripture 2:

'Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?

Do you observe the calving of the deer?

'Who has let the wild ass go free?

'Do you give the horse its strength?

Do you clothe its neck with mane?

*'Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,
and spreads its wings on the wind?*

Do you teach the vulture to soar and build her nest in the clouds?

She makes her home on the mountaintop, on the unapproachable crag.

She sits and scans for prey; from far off her eyes can spot it;

Her little ones drink its blood. Where the unburied are, she is.

Then the Almighty asked Job:

Has God's accuser resigned?

Has my critic swallowed his tongue?

Job answered:

I am speechless; what can I answer?

I put my hand on my mouth.

I have said too much already;

Now I will speak no more.

Can we love what we can't control?

Job has long clung onto his “integrity”, his belief that his moral innocence should have warded off disaster. Job saw his relationship to God as a contract. He has clung to the belief that the world is a manageable place run by a demanding but nonetheless predictable God who owes the righteous a good life. But when God finally speaks and shows Job what, from a divine perspective, is so fascinating about the created order, it turns out to have nothing at all to do with human moral standards and contracts.

Here, now, as God gives Job this guided tour of the creation, the whole project of human integrity looks different. It means fitting into a design vastly bigger and more complex than Job ever imagined. What God says, in effect, is this: “look away from yourself, Job; look around you. For a moment see the world with my eyes, in all its intricacy and wild beauty. (HAVE PICTURES HERE WHILE I’M SPEAKING) The beauty is in the wildness, Job; you cannot tame all that frightens you without losing the beauty.” God calls this man of integrity to take his place in

an extravagant but dangerous world where only those who relinquish their personal expectations can live in peace. **The price of peace is the surrender of our personal expectations**, which are always too small for the huge freedom of God's creating power.

A primary question that God's speech out of the whirlwind poses for Job and all of us: **Can you love what you do not control?**

Scripture 3:

Then the Lord again spoke to Job from the whirlwind:

*'Look at Behemoth, the beast,
which I made just as I made you;
it eats grass like a bull.*

*Look at the power in his thighs,
The pulsing sinews of his belly.*

*'It is the first of the great acts of God—
Created to be my plaything.*

This God's eye view of the world plays havoc with Job's notion of the way things ought to be - sensible, well-adapted to human purposes, and above all, predictable.

God's involvement with the world expresses itself in huge, unapologetic delight in a creation whose outstanding quality is quite simply magnificence: power and freedom on a scale that is bewildering and terrifying.

VOICES OF THE CONGREGATION - Micah S.

Sermon part 2

Transformation

We started out this series considering the idea that **suffering offers us the possibility of transformation**....and here we are. Job has seen God with his own eyes, coming into a fullness of understanding that God's world is not human-centric, that God delights in the wildness of all creation. God's creation is untamable, unpredictable: fierce, wild, destructive, free.

God is unsearchable, unknowable. **Can Job love what he cannot control?** All of his piety and good works mean nothing. Can he love this unsearchable, unknowable God?

Scripture 4:

Then Job answered the Lord:

'I know you can do all things,

and nothing you wish is impossible.

you asked, "Who is this whose ignorant words cover my design with darkness?"

But I have uttered what I did not understand,

things too wonderful for me to know.

You said: "Listen and I will speak;

I will question you, and you will answer me."

I had heard of you with my ears,

but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I will be quiet,

comforted that I am dust.

We've heard from God, now we've heard Job's response. It's curious, isn't it, that God never addresses Job's suffering, yet Job somehow seems satisfied, he seems to find a steady, quiet place within himself.

Job's suffering did not end, but it's transformed into something new, something like a quiet resilience.

Job learned he cannot control God, and found a steadiness in that surrender. Job sees God, his ultimate desire, and remains in relationship with this uncontrollable God.

Like trees that can weather a whirlwind, we, my friends, we are called, in this time where our country, our world is experiencing whirlwinds with so many names - COVID, racial injustice, immigrant intolerance, climate crisis. We are called to stay rooted in God, to stay steady in the midst of the whirlwind.

I invite you to receive Job's words one more time, with hands open, steady, not grasping, but receiving:

Job said:

'I know you can do all things,
and nothing you wish is impossible.

But I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.

I had heard of you with my ears,
but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I will be quiet,
comforted that I am dust.

Like trees planted by the water, may we find God's steadiness in the storm.

I've wrestled with how to tie this sermon up, offering something neat and tidy.

But I don't think that's possible.

God met Job in the whirlwind. That place of swirling dust, wind, chaos.

It feels like we are in the whirlwind - being whipped around by winds of fear, change, unpredictability, a virus we can't see or control.

God showed up IN the whirlwind.

You cannot tame this world; this life, God seemed to say.

You must Take your place in it.

Relinquish your personal expectations AND stay connected to creation.

Maybe then that we can find the Resilience Micah spoke of.

In our call to worship, Ben read Jesus' words - Don't worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink... might Jesus say today

Don't worry about where you will go, who you will see, what you will do with your life. Stay, just stay connected to life.

Job stayed with his Suffering. He let go off all his notions of what God should be or do for him.

The ocean depths, the rain in the desert, the behemoth, the mountain goats, the vultures caring for their young - they are all mine, God says.

You are mine.

Job, at the last, is able to claim his place -

'I know you can do all things,
and nothing you wish is impossible.

I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.

⁵ I had heard of you with my ears,
but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I will be quiet,

comforted that I am dust.

Stay connected, let God lead you through the whirlwind. Stay steady my friends.

God is here, with us, in the whirlwind with us.