

Season after Pentecost - Job (Week 5)

July 30 & 31, 2016

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Matthew 7: 7-8; Job 38: 25-27; 41:1-8;; 42: 1-6

Let this written and spoken word lead us to the living, Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.

If you were asked to choose something in creation which confirms for you that there is a God who created this universe, what would it be? Would you mention the beauty of flowers, a sunset or autumn trees? Would you recall your awe at a rainbow, at the edge of the Grand Canyon or a night of shooting stars? If asked how you know the world was created and not just a random occurrence, would you talk about the interdependence of all the elements of an ecosystem or the complexities of the human bodies down to the minute cells, genes, and DNA that are being isolated, cataloged and even harnessed to cure or control specific illnesses? For those of us who believe God is the Creator, we can't imagine how anyone could think otherwise as you look at a newborn's tiny hands and feet, or the ocean waves that never cease or watch a plant grow from a seed to a vegetable-bearing plant.

In the book of Job, God takes Job on just such a tour of creation. If you didn't go home last week and read chapters 38- 41, do it this week. There's the forming of the earth and the containment of the seas; night and day and the cycle of seasons; there's snow, hail and winds, thunderbolts, clouds and channels cut by rain. Then it's a trip into the animal world — lions, ravens, goats and deer, wild asses and oxen, horses, hawks and eagles. It's wild and messy but not random. Some are fiercely independent and others are tameable. Some seem aggressive and others, like the ostrich, are fast enough to out run a predator but not smart enough to avoid stepping on the eggs they just laid. While God cares and provides for all the animals, some die to be the food for others. With all it's beauty and design, there is a "tension between order and conflicts . . . woven into the very fabric of creation."¹

What is Job's response to God's creation? In the sixties we would say Job's mind had been blown. He confesses that he has neither God's power nor wisdom. "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."² The world is bigger and more complex than he had ever considered. God has made creation with an order but also freedom and beauty which means it is not "entirely predictable, as his friends had claimed."³ "God's concern for the world (including humanity) is far more expansive than Job had imagined."⁴ God does not function like a machine dispensing rewards and punishment according to human behavior. God loves

and cares about all of creation. “Job’s universe has just explored! He has been challenged to think differently about everything in his life and see anew what is around him.”⁵

Job’s response to God’s presence and revelation is his own transformation. Job has seen God and a sliver of the way God sees. He has moved from what he “heard” about God to knowing God himself. “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I repent and relent, being out of dust.” “Repent” in Hebrew is about “changing one’s mind and setting out on a new path.”⁶ Job has changed his mind about God and begins moving from despair back into life. God has accepted Job’s speeches of complaint, accusation and doubts but does not allow it to be the last word, nor allow Job to “stay where he is.”⁷ Trust in God now trumps that which cannot be explained for Job. Will Job still grieve the loss of his children, property and health? Surely. But he is finding peace in God’s presence and in the wonder of a God too wonderful to fully know.

I often hear people facing adverse circumstances say, “It is what it is.” Sometimes there will be a deep sigh after it and other times an almost energetic, “Oh, well.” I’ve often wondered if the person is expressing despair or acceptance. “It is what it is.” Is it an expression of resignation or acceptance? There is a difference. Resignation is about defeat and dead-ends. Acceptance is about facing the truth, shedding tears, swallowing hard and moving toward whatever is life-giving. Resignation is about giving up and insisting you can’t be happy until you lose 30 pounds . . . get a new job, car, house . . . your spouse changes or whatever qualifier you may have. Acceptance is moving in hope and trust toward a peace that allows happiness, in whatever the situation. You still may not like the circumstances — the cancer, the death of a love one, the heat, the elections, the loss of mobility — but accepting what is permits you to see beyond the suffering, reach out for what is still good and to find joy and contentment where you can.

Job is turning back toward life even though he has lost so much. He is changed by his encounter with God — who heard his sorrow and his accusations but did not turn away from him. He has been changed by a whirlwind glimmer into the wonders, intricacies and freedom of all creation. Job has again found his place the world ---- he is not the center of the universe but he, like all of God’s creatures, has a place and a role to play. Job has seen God and it is enough for him to pray, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”⁸

We have seen God, too, in Jesus. Is it enough for us? Will we let ourselves be transformed by the tour of God’s heart Jesus has given us? Job saw there was order *and*

mystery in all of creation and a Creator he could trust. Has the grace, passion, compassion, and love of God we've seen in Jesus lead us to trust God even when we cannot understand? That's a question Job asks us this week. Amen

Linda M Alessandri 7/29/16

ENDNOTES

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1. Robert Chisholm, "God, Job, and the Animal Kingdom" in Bible Study Magazine
 2. Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, "Commentary on Job 42:1-6, 10-17 as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 3. Robert Chisholm, "God, Job, and the Animal Kingdom" in Bible Study Magazine
 4. Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, "Notes for a six-week Preaching Series on Job: Week 5" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org.
 5. Karla Suomala, "Commentary on Job 43: 1-6, 10-17" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 6. Karla Suomala, "Commentary on Job 43: 1-6, 10-17" as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 7. Karl Jacobson, "Commentary on Job 42: 1-6, 10-17 as posted on www.workingpreacher.org
 8. Reinhold Niebuhr