

5th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
June 24, 2018

Text: Job 38:1-11

Theme: The Lord Answered

For me it is a sunset. Absolutely everything could be going wrong on any given day and all I have to do is look up at the sky (right before the night begins to fall) and see one of the works of art that God has painted in the sky and the world is right again (at least until my thoughts overtake me once more). I pause and think about how majestic and glorious and all-powerful God is and that gives me a sense of peace and the courage to keep moving forward.

One of the Scripture passages that I have put to memory comes from Psalm 8:3-4: *I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established and I ask – Who are we that you are so mindful of us? Who are we that you care so much for us?*

With humility we experience God today through the eyes of Job. Job is the one who suffered the unimaginable. He lost his possessions and his family and his health and even his will to live. We often applaud his patience although if you read the entire book of Job he is rather cantankerous at times. But when we hear the lesson that we read this morning it has less to do with Job and more to do with God.

Today we find Job sitting on a heap of ash scraping the boils off of his body as he cries out to God for some answers. So far the only ones who attempt to respond to his questions are his friends and all they do is make it worse for Job. They tell him that there is a reason for everything and this is all part of God's plan for him. And then they have the audacity to tell Job that the reason for all of his suffering is because he must have committed some terrible sin either knowingly or unknowingly. Although they seem to be well meaning, my advice to Job would have been to find some new friends. The last thing any of us want to hear in our moment of despair is that we are to blame for whatever happened to us when there is no indication that we did any wrong-going (at least that would cause so much tragedy).

But today we are at the tail-end of the story and the good news is that the matter does get settled for Job. Was he vindicated as a perfect and righteous man after all? Well, not exactly. Did God step in and counter the arguments of his friends? Well, not really. So did God clearly answer all of Job's questions? No!

So here is what happened: After thirty some chapters of doubts and questions and complaints lodged against God, God finally speaks and let me tell you – God has a lot to say. For four chapters God does almost all of the talking and he directs Job's attention to the most bizarre things that have absolutely nothing to do with his suffering. God talks about the dimension of outer space, the power of thunderstorms, the beauty of the stars, the unlikely speed of the ostrich, the soaring wonder of eagles and hawks, and even the muscle structure of the hippo.

In his infinite wisdom God does not answer Job's questions directly but God does reframe them. God puts all of those questions into the larger arena of the whole of creation and he goes on and on until Job is reduced to silence. Lesson #1: God is telling us that when we are faced with the uncertainties of life we need to trust him without a detailed explanation of why everything happened to us the way it did. Lesson #2: We need to view our situation in a much larger context. Lesson #3: We need to trust that God is ultimately in charge of all aspects of our lives and when we find ourselves in a challenging spot we need to believe that God is with us. It is what we like to call faith.

It should come as no surprise that God used such an unconventional way to deal with Job. Remember that we are Easter people. We know how God deals with such things as sin, evil, suffering and death. At the time of Christ the Jewish community thought they were going to see the armies of God march down from heaven to slay the beasts of evil. But instead God sent his Son as an innocent little baby and had him lie in a smelly manger. If in Job we find it a bit unusual to be taken through every minute step of creation with all of its intricacies then it should be more outlandish to remember that God dealt with death by dying himself.

This lesson might be less than satisfying for all of us who want more concrete answers to our complex questions about the suffering of good people but it does reflect the way that God operates.

When we put what we just heard and place it next to Psalm 8 we learn today that all of creation matters to God. Our world is important to God – all of its creatures, the stars, the oceans, the birds and fish. It helps me understand better why a sunset sets my world right when everything around me is so wrong. It answers the questions of Psalm 8 because we too are part of God’s creation and we too matter in the eyes of God and God does care so much for us.

But we still have not answered the question of what finally settled the matter for Job. So far God has so overwhelmed him that he no longer has anything more to say. We have to continue to read to the end of the book to discover the *ah-ha moment*. God is still talking about creation and God is still firing away his own questions and then God reveals himself to Job. Job actually *sees* God and it is this that brings about a resolution for Job.

We studied Job this past year in our *Overview of the Bible* class and it continues to be amazing how beautifully and intricately woven we find Scripture to be. In Job the name used for God is not always the same. In the central portion of the book – in the conversation Job has with his friends – the word for God is *Elohim* or *El Shaddai*. But when God is speaking to Job the word for God is *Yahweh*. God uses that name when he enters into a personal relationship with us. The name is specifically tied to the God who redeems a people in trouble, sustains them through the wilderness, and brings them into the Promised Land.

The God who talked to Job (and who talks to us) is not only the God of the universe but he is the God who enters our history and fully invests his time and energy with us. Creation and redemption are linked. The God who magnificently created the world and those beautiful sunsets and who is all-powerful and wise, is the same God who enters into a lasting relationship with us. Like Job it is the One to whom we cry out to when something is wrong.

Our God hears the cry of the oppressed and it is when we *see* him that our hearts are calmed. His creation is immeasurable, his judgment is final, and his presence is awesome.

Just look at the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars that God established and then we ask these questions with a sense of awe in our voices –

Who are we that you are so mindful of us?

Who are we that you care so much for us?