

August 7, 2011
Sermon The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 14:13-21 (ESV)

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Job 38:1-18 (ESV)

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ² “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁴ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? ⁸ “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, ⁹ when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰ and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’? ¹² “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, ¹³ that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? ¹⁴ It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. ¹⁵ From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken. ¹⁶ “Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? ¹⁷ Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? ¹⁸ Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

One of the most asked questions from Christian people going through struggles in their lives is a short one, but very hard to answer, the question:

“Why?”

“Why, Pastor, am I struggling with this illness? Is God trying to teach me something?”

“Why? Why did I lose my job? I have a family to support. Why?”

“Why did my mother have an aneurysm?”

“Why, Why, was my child hit by a drunk driver? Why?”

“Why is God doing this to me?” Is He punishing me?

These are the questions of the faithful in the face of suffering.

In our Text this morning, we read the account of Job, who lost his wealth, his livelihood, his children, his health. Job’s friends tried to answer Job’s question, “Why? Why this suffering?”

His good friend Eliphaz suggests that his suffering might just be that God is teaching Job a lesson.

Job’s friend Bildad tells Job that if he were pure and upright God would reward him with prosperity. And then there is Job’s friend, good friend, Zophar, who tells Job he’s lucky that he hasn’t gotten all that God could have given him.

Ultimately the friends’ answers to the “why” of Job’s suffering fall short, but then again, they were trying to answer the wrong question.

When it seems like Job and his “friends” have exhausted their knowledge, is when God finally speaks. Maybe it was because He was waiting until they were ready to listen, either way, God changes the subject.

God does not answer the question, “Why?”

Hope is not found in the answer to the question “Why?” Because sometimes there simply is no answer to “Why?” Life happens, that’s why. We live in a sinful world and we are affected by that sin. The rain falls on the righteous and unrighteous alike and the sun shines on the righteous and unrighteous alike.

God’s Word is a word of hope to Job, a word that brought healing and eventually restoration. God’s response gave Job hope, because God was answering the right question. God did not answer the question “Why?” God answered the question, “Who?” Listen to God’s response to Job.

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

Who determined its measurements?

Who stretched the line upon it?

Who laid its cornerstone?...

Who shut in the sea? ... Have you commanded the morning since your days began?

So often we hear people interpret this response of God to Job as an angry response, that God is scolding Job. Sort of like, “boy, you better get yourself straight. But is He? Biblical scholar, Frederick Buechner once made the observation,

“If you take three facts, God is good, God is great, and the innocent suffer, you can only reconcile two of those. You can never, ever reconcile all three.”

The Bible never gives an answer. After Job complains, God says to Him, *Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?*

God further speaks to us in Isaiah, that we have turned things upside down, going on to tell us: “... *Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me”; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?*” Isaiah 29:16 (ESV)

The answer to the question “Who?” offers to Job & us, hope and healing and eventually restoration. God offers to Job in this response both the reminder and the promise of God’s power and works in this world.

God’s answer is a powerful reminder that God not only created the earth, laid its cornerstone and determined its measurements, but also cares for all of creation. He asked Job if he had commanded the morning since his days began. Later, in verse 37, God asks *“Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens”?*

Do we need to worry about the sun rising every morning? How about tilting the waterskins of heaven, letting rain fall upon the thirsty ground. How much more will God care for and provide for you? Read on in ch 38, God covers all of our needs! Food, drink; the entire creation!

Job was in need of the reminder of God’s power in creating and God’s care for the created, and so do we.

Job could see that his present circumstances were not the end of all things. Ultimately there was God, the life-giving life-sustaining power of God that is unconditional through faith in Jesus Christ.

God didn't answer why. He doesn't tell us why, anywhere in His Word. But He gives us hope. Through that hope, through the reminder of God's power and care, Job was able to move forward in his life and eventually be healed and restored. God is so much bigger than any problem, trial or tragedy that we might face on this earth.

I want to share a short story with you. It is a true story of a little girl name Mariah. Mariah's father was an alcoholic; her mother battled depression with pills and alcohol. Angry words, judgment and abuse were constant in her life. When she was 5 her parents finally gave in to pressure from their parents about baptizing her and her two younger siblings. She listened intensely to the pastor as he told her about God, about how she was precious to God, about God's love for her. The pastor talked about Jesus and His love and tenderness for children. He told her there was nothing she could do that would ever make God stop loving her. Then came the sign of the cross on her forehead and her heart. The water and the gentle touch on her forehead. She had been given new life as God's child. Her baptism, the pastor's words about Jesus and about God gave her hope for a future. It gave her a story that was radically different from her current circumstances. The true story of God's love and God's presence gave her hope.

Learning that God loved her did not answer why she endured such abuse, it did not change the hours of therapy as an adult healing the trauma of her childhood and did not enlighten her to “God’s purpose” from her childhood experience.

The story of God’s love told her who walked with her in her suffering, who had the power to heal her wounds, and who could and did grant her new life. The words of God’s grace and the vision of a new reality, God’s reality in her life, filled her with hope and promise. Did God ever tell her why? No.

But in &by His Word, and through His Holy Spirit, God showed Mariah His Son.

Evil exists, but God is greater. Sin haunts us, the effects of sin in this world plague us in so many ways...and God does not tell us why...but He does tell us of His Son, His sacrifice and our forgiveness.

We can ignore His message of grace, life and forgiveness and immerse ourselves in the sin and depravity of this world, calling out that God doesn’t care, because He won’t help, but be still for a moment and look to the cross!

God’s grace comes to you this day to fill you with hope and promise. I know, we want our whys answered, but God wants to give us something that makes a difference in our lives eternally. God is the Who, who comes to us in the cross, who comes to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s answer to us in our lives. Jesus comes to us, as the Crucified and as the Risen, with the power to make a difference.

Through Christ we have God’s answer, the promise of new life through the power of the resurrection.

I often quote John 3:16, but this is followed with these wonderful words of life: *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

My friends; God may not give you direct words to explain why you face trials and tragedies in this world, but He assures us of His power and majesty to take care of all creation. And to make it ever more personal, He sent His only begotten Son into the world, not to condemn, but to save.

Wonderful, life giving news, and it's even better than you might realize. Jesus died for you...you personally on the cross. Not a nameless, faceless world; but you personally. Rest assured in your forgiveness. Rest assured that through faith in Him as your Savior, you have the promise of life eternal, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen

The peace of God passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds unto Christ Jesus.

Amen.