Sometimes the, the hardest part of suffering isn't the suffering itself, it's the silence. You pray and nothing seems to happen. You ask God why, seems to be no answer. We desperately want to know what God is doing, but he seems silent, and sometimes that silence can be deafening and beyond discouraging.

And maybe that's why this time of the year we do unusual things. Have you put up your Christmas tree? Have you started playing Christmas music? You know, some people say, yeah, you're not supposed to do that till after Thursday. But I know a bunch of you have been doing it for quite a while, which is okay with me.

I don't care, like it would really matter what I think. But why do we do that? Why do we put in Christmas trees in our house and decorate and get all festive? I did a little research and it just confirmed what I thought. We are trying to latch on to a longing that we have.

We're longing for things to be different. We're longing for peace. We're longing for joy. We're longing for hope. Just want things to be different, better.

And so a lot of us are kind of like Clark Griswold in Christmas Vacation, maybe hopefully not quite that bad, but we just want everything to be good. We want everything to be right. We want to have a good family gathering where everything is just so nice and it's creating perfect memories.

As followers of Christ, we believe that Christmas is, or should be at least, about the arrival of Jesus. And you know, we, we love those stories, don't we? We love the nativity scenes. We love the beautiful, touching stories of Mary and Joseph, the, the manger, the the shepherds, the animals, the angels. We love all that stuff.

But can I tell you that we've really distorted that story?

We've made it real sweet. We've made it real safe. The actual Christmas story is anything but safe. Yes, truly it is a story of peace, joy, and hope. But it unfolds against the backdrop of unimaginable suffering.

Matthew, in his gospel, tells us about something that we have called the slaughter of the innocents.

We don't like to talk about this, but King Herod heard that there had been a birth of another king, and in his insecurity and jealousy, he issued an order that every boy 2 years old and younger in Bethlehem and around Bethlehem should be destroyed. Now, I have 2 grandsons that are 2 and under.

I can't imagine that.

Can you imagine the grief and the devastation of those families?

Matthew describes the suffering by kind of poetically quoting the prophet Jeremiah. He says, a voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation. Rachel weeping for her children.

She refused to be comforted because they are no more.

She refused to be comforted. Sometimes comfort cannot be found.

And sometimes comfort just can't be received.

A few times I've stood with grieving parents as we buried a baby or a child.

Those are the worst times.

And while I don't want to go into that too deeply, uh, I don't want to go into the darkness too deeply. I wish somebody'd turn the lights off and on right now. Just— I do want us to acknowledge something that we all know, and that is that there's a lot of suffering in the world. And thank you. Sometimes it makes no sense.

It just doesn't. It just doesn't make any sense. You can turn the lights back on if you want.

Some of us carry grief that just never goes away, and it may be related to death, it may be related to disease or divorce or disappointment with other people, even disappointment with God.

We pray and nothing seems to happen. We ask God why and We don't get an answer, we just get silence.

And that raises some really difficult questions.

Where is God in all this?

Why is he silent?

What do you do when your world falls apart and God seems silent and nothing makes sense?

And that leads to the hard but honest question: Can you trust God when you don't understand him? Can you trust God when your life falls apart and he seems silent?

Long before Jesus was born, a man named Job wrestled with many questions. Job was a good man. He was, he was a faithful man who just loved God with all he had. And then, and then it doesn't make any

sense, but then in a series of devastating events, his life was just turned upside down. He lost his possessions, he lost his children, he lost his health, and Job couldn't understand why.

It just made no sense. And he cries out to God. Silence.

He questions God. Silence. He accuses God. Silence. He desperately wants answers, but the answers he wants never come.

God does show up, but it's with questions for Job. And not answers for Job's questions.

Job discovers something about God that was greater than the answers he desired, and that's where we're going to go this morning because the book of Job isn't simply about suffering and, and why good people suffer. The book of Job is about whether we can trust God when we don't understand it. The book of Job opens like this: There was a man, there was once a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless, a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.

And then the text goes on to just describe how blessed and rich and good Job was in so many ways. But then in verse 6, there's a dramatic turn in the story. One day, the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the Lord, and the accuser Satan came with them.

Where have you come from? The Lord asked Satan. Satan answered, Lord, I've been patrolling the earth, watching over, watching everything that's going on.

Then the Lord asked Satan, have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless, a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. So the scene shifts from earth to heaven.

Hear this, we're allowed to witness something that Job never sees and never knows about. It's a gathering of heavenly beings before God. It's sometimes called the Divine Council. If you want a fascinating study, Google it. It's a picture of God's heavenly court where spiritual beings, angels, come before the Lord.

It's so mysterious, and I think it still goes on. And among this divine council is someone called— in Hebrew, it's the Satan. In Hebrew, it just means the adversary or the accuser. And as they're talking, God says, have you noticed Job?

And the accuser says, oh yeah, I've seen him, but you know what? He's only good because you've blessed him. You've made his life easy. You put a hedge of protection around him. You've done everything just to

make his life so good.

Take away that stuff and then you'll find out what Job is really like.

Mystery. God allows Job to be tested. With some limitations. Now we have an advantage Job doesn't have. We've been allowed to, to look behind the curtain, so we kind of know what's going on.

We know about the heavenly council. We know about the conversation. We know about the accuser. Job doesn't know any of it and never finds out about it. Never.

All Job knows is his world's falling apart. He's trying to make sense of it with just a limited amount of the story. So in a matter of moments, messengers start showing up at Job's house with devastating news. His livestock are gone. His servants have been killed.

All these horrible things are happening, and then comes the worst news of all. All of his children, all of his children have died. And if that weren't enough, Job eventually loses his health. His body is covered with painful sores. And so he sits in the ashes.

Again, the symbols of deep sorrow and the recognition of human frailty – dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

He's sitting there scraping his sores on his skin with a piece of broken pottery.

The man who had everything now almost has nothing, and he has no idea why. It doesn't make any sense. But Job says this in Job 1:21, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Job is grieving, he's suffering, and yet in the middle of it he humbly worships. I think as questions are starting to bubble up in his mind. Now Job has some friends and they come and see him, and when they see him all they can do is weep. They're dumbfounded and they sit in silence with him for 7 days and 7 nights, and that's the right response.

But then they open their mouths and that's when things start to go south because they articulate an argument that a lot of people still believe, I think.

God rewards good people. God punishes bad people. So, they're looking at Job saying, well, there's a lot going on over here. You must have done something pretty bad, Job.

That's their argument. Job is suffering terribly and all they're doing is misrepresenting God and hurting their friend, adding insult to injury. Job pushes back. He says, listen, I am not perfect. I know

that, but I also know that I have done nothing that deserves this.

He wants an audience with God. He wants God to explain himself. And chapter after chapter, he cries out. Sometimes he sounds faithful. Other times he sounds angry, confused, and accusatory toward God.

Job 13:24, why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy?

Behold, I go forward, but he's not there, and backward, and I do not see him. I go to my left and my right. I can't find you. Where are you?

Have you ever felt that way?

You ever felt like God is against you?

You look for God, you can't find him. You pray and nothing seems to change. You ask questions and The silence is deafening.

Here's the question: can you trust God when you don't understand him? Will Job trust God? Will I? Will you? Chapter after chapter, Job speaks.

He questions, accuses. He waits. And his friends have offered their explanations. Then a younger friend shows up and and he has some things to say as well, which are wrong.

But Job still hasn't heard from God. But then finally in chapter 38, God shows up. Job 38:1 says, then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. And you can almost imagine Job saying, well, finally I'm going to get some answers to what's going on.

That's not what happens.

Hear me, God never explains any of it.

He doesn't reveal the conversation in heaven. He never tells Job about the accuser. He never reveals why his children died. He doesn't tell him why his world fell apart. Instead, God speaks and he asks Job questions.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? And then the questions just keep coming. Who set the boundaries of the sea? Can you command the morning? Can you direct the stars?

Do you understand the mysteries of all the wild and scary creatures land and in sea.

So, from the heights of the heavens to the depths of the animal kingdom, God takes Job on this breathtaking tour of creation,

revealing forces beyond human power, revealing mysteries beyond human understanding. And with every question, Job is reminded that he's standing before for a God whose wisdom governs the universe far too vast, far too wild, and too complex for any human being to map out.

And Job realizes that he cannot grasp the mysteries of creation, and if he can't grasp those, he will not be able to grasp the mysteries of God's providence. And suffering. Job wanted an explanation. God gave him a revelation. Will Job, will Job trust God when he doesn't understand him?

You know, with all the questions that God fires at Job, I don't think he's trying to humiliate Job. Rather, I think God is showing Job that the world is far bigger more complex and complicated than Job can possibly comprehend. Same for us. There's just so much mystery in life. There's just so much that we don't understand, and I think God is saying, listen, listen, even if I explained it all to you, you wouldn't be able to understand.

In essence, I think God is ultimately asking us a question: Will you trust me when you don't understand me?

We want an explanation that will make the pain make sense, but some pain is just too deep for an explanation, and that's what Job discovers. His deepest need is not to know why he suffers. It's to know that God is still there.

Stop. God is still good and that he's worthy of trust in the unexplained and the confusing storms of life.

Job learns that God's silence was never his absence. And sometimes the greatest comfort is not finding answers in the darkness, but discovering that God has been with us in the darkness. And when Job finally speaks after God is finished, he humbly says, Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things far too wonderful for me to know. So here's what Job does. He chooses to bow before the mystery of God and before the mystery of suffering.

He chooses to trust God even when he doesn't understand him. He still doesn't have answers, and his suffering still makes no sense. But he trusts God. One of my favorite lines to live by, and I live by it a lot, is the essence of faith is just trusting God with the unanswered questions.

The book of Job ends by telling us that Job's fortunes were restored. He had more children, life moved on, and he experienced blessing again. But be careful with that ending.

Be careful with that ending. Job's restoration does not erase the suffering.

More children do not replace the ones that were lost. Some losses are never recovered. Some wounds are never fully healed. And some prayers are not answered the way we hope. And some questions will remain.

They'll just remain.

Unanswered. The message of Job is not that everything will work out the way we want. The message of Job is this: you can trust God even when you don't understand him. Let's go back to Christmas. You know, we love the sweet parts of the story, but remember in Bethlehem there were myriads of grieving mothers weeping for the babies they had lost.

And here's the striking truth: Jesus had already been born.

Emmanuel, God with us.

Yet babies died. They still died. Families were grieving. Suffering was unfolding and remaining.

The coming of Jesus did not remove all the pain from the world. His coming meant something greater. At Christmas, God did not send an explanation.

He sent himself.

And that's where the story of Job ultimately points. At one point in the book, he says, I know my Redeemer lives.

Centuries later, we know that Redeemer is Jesus. We know that he came. And Jesus, he knew grief. He knew rejection. He knew disappointment, betrayal, unimaginable suffering.

And he experienced death. He stood at Lazarus' tomb and wept, and on the cross he cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Yet the cross was not the end. The resurrection declares that the suffering and death that we experience do not have the final word.

Our hope is not that we will understand everything, Our hope is that the God who spoke to Job from the whirlwind is the God who came to us in Jesus Christ. And because Jesus lives, we know pain will not last forever. One day, one sweet day, all things will be made new, every tear will be wiped away, and everything that's wrong will be made right. Until that day, We hold on to him trusting that our Redeemer is holding on to us. So let me ask you, what burden are you carrying today?

A loss of some kind?

Diagnosis?

Broken relationship?

Prodigal child, unanswered prayer, deep disappointment that you carried for years. I can't, I can't tell you why a lot of things happen, and Job never received He never received all the answers either, but he discovered something better than an explanation. He encountered God.

And that's the invitation this morning.

God invites you to bring your questions.

Bring your grief, bring your doubts, bring your disappointments.

Stop waiting until you have answers to trust him.

Go ahead and trust him with all the unanswered questions. So here's the challenge for you this week. Maybe focus on one question that you have that's unanswered, maybe one disappointment or one burden you've been asking God to explain. And sometime before next Sunday, maybe when you're looking at your Christmas lights or driving in your car, drinking your coffee, whatever, just get quiet and ask God, tell God how much it hurts Don't sanitize it. Just say, this is— this really— I don't understand this.

But then if you can, pray this prayer: God, I don't understand, but I choose to trust you. And I'll tell you, you may have to pray that prayer over and over again.

Because trusting God isn't always a single decision. It's often a daily surrender. But look at the cross and remember that God loves you. Look at the resurrection and remember that he has overcome it all.

Look at Christmas and remember that he is with you. And if the book of Job teaches us anything, it's this: you can trust God even when you don't understand him.

As we think about communion this morning, we've talked about unanswered questions and the heavy, heavy weight of God's silence. At the cross, Jesus didn't stand at a distance from pain. He stepped right into it.

And his response, quoting Psalm 22, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As you hold the bread and drink the cup, let them be tangible reminders that you never suffer alone. In the bruised body and the

poured-out blood of Jesus, we see the heart of the Savior. God did not send an explanation for suffering. He sent himself. Let's pray.

God, we thank you that you are a trustworthy God.

We know that faith requires releasing a lot, and often it's in the context of deep doubt. Help us to trust you with all that we don't understand. And as we take this communion this morning and receive this communion, we, we think about how you entered into our suffering and you experienced it. And you overcame it, and you promise a bright and beautiful future. So we thank you for this bread.

We thank you for this cup that remind us of all that you have done. In Jesus' name, amen.

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