

## A BIGGER BOX

Well, today's the day. As we just heard, after seemingly endless chapters of Job and his friends arguing about God, justice, and the way the world works, God shows up and speaks to Job. Great, problem solved. Or is it?

Before we get to God's words, however, a quick review of the story thus far: (for those of you who have yet to sit down and read Job in one sitting). You will recall that the book of Job opens with a prose narrative in which God and The Satan (or as I've previously suggested is a better term: the District Attorney) engage in a bit of a contest (at Job's expense). The challenge the Satan puts before God is this: Do human beings revere God simply because God is good to them (Job being a case in point). In other words: if Job's fortunes change, will he continue to bless and not curse God? By the end of the opening two chapters of Job, the challenge is on. In but a few verses Job goes from being the guy who has everything to the man who's lost it all: possession, home, children, health. Yet, Job does not curse God. Rather, Job's final words in the first chapter are:

*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there;  
the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*

For those keeping score, it's: God: 1; District Attorney: 0; Job: out for the season due to injuries. Then Job's three friends show up and we embark on many, many chapters of poetry, including when God shows up.

And what an entrance God makes, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me." I don't know about you, but after what, 36 chapters, of Job and friends, I'm ready for God to show up. As Union Seminary Professor of Homiletics Timothy Adkins-Jones puts it:

By the time we get to the 38th chapter of Job, I've nearly lost my patience with all the talking. There has been a whole lot of talk about, well, not much.

So 37 chapters of this kind of conversation is more than enough for me; now I need answers. I'm ready for God to come and prove Job right by offering some rationale for all his afflictions—or to come and prove Job's friends correct and provide a pathway for Job's repentance.

But that's not what we get. For me, it's always one of those "What the 'bleep' moments in the Bible. At first blush, God's response doesn't seem to make much sense and is extremely unsatisfactory. Instead providing answers, God just provides more questions, many of which begin with "Where?" and "Who?"

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4).

"Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness?" (38:19).

“What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?” (38:24).

“Who determined its [the earth’s] measurements... Or who stretched the line upon it... Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? (38:5, 8).

“Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt” (38:25).

“Uh, um” Job replies, “not me.”

God’s answer to Job is, as William Safire notes in his take on Job entitled, *The First Dissident* “... as if God appears in a tie-dyed T-shirt emblazoned with the words ‘Because I’m God, That’s Why.’” But is God really just trying to bully Job into submission? Perhaps there is another way for us to hear God’s voice in the whirlwind. Both of God’s speeches in Job open with “Gird up your loins like a man.” And while some have suggested that this is an invitation to prepare for battle, others it’s simply God’s way of signaling that it’s time for a serious conversation. Time to put on your big boy pants or, as Lutheran pastor Karl Jacobson suggests, “Hike up your diaper.” And then God takes Job on the most amazing whirlwind tour of creation ever imagined. Can we imagine God not bullying Job, but inviting him to truly and fully behold the full awe and wonder of God’s creation – a tour that spans the foundations of the earth to the heights of the heavens and everything in between, rain snow, lions, bears, even ostriches! And the really remarkable thing about all this is that humankind is mentioned at all. Presbyterian Minister, Henry T.C. Sun notes:

As such, it provides a counterpoint to the first creation story, when humankind is the pinnacle of God’s creation, or to Psalm 8, which proclaims that God has made humankind “a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:4-8). There is no sense in our passage that humankind has any kind of dominion over “the works of [God’s] hands”

Humans, as it turns out, are not the center of the universe.

God takes Job well beyond a view from 10,000 feet. It’s a bit like looking at this “blue marble” from outer space Perhaps somewhat like what Captain Kirk – I mean William Shatner experienced on his recent space voyage except without the cost and carbon footprint. God responds to Job’s questions by offering him a whole other perspective and thus breaks Job free from the paradigm – the reality – in which he and his friends have been trapped. A paradigm in which good people get rewarded with good things and if you’re suffering it must be because you did something wrong – you must have sinned. God, says, “Look again, as through my eyes.”

Recently, a couple of parishioners shared an illustration about grief with me. In this analogy, grief is like a balloon in a box that represents your world. When you first enter into grief, the balloon fills the entire box, touching all sides. Most folks assume that over time the balloon of your grief will get smaller but what actually happens is that your grief remains but the box, your world, expands. Coming out of the whirlwind, God radically expands Job’s world.

Perhaps God’s intent is not to silence Job, but to be in conversation with him. For God is not silent. Job doesn’t get the answers he initially sought not because he asked the wrong questions,

but because he imagined the answers to be bounded within his limited understanding. God responds to Job by bursting his box – his world – wide open, revealing all the wonder, majesty, terror, and beauty of creation and by reassuring Job, and all of us, that while from our perspective the world in all its beauty and splendor may also appear to be chaotic, tragic, and unjust, there is more at work that meets our eyes and understanding. At the end of the day, even the great Leviathan is but domesticated pet for God, and the arc of the universe – moral and otherwise – God continues to bend. For us, from our limited perspective, attempting to see this arc is like trying to see the curvature of the earth while standing on it. But each day, as the sun rises and sets, as the stars above subtly track across the night sky, we are reminded of that larger world. And each day, if we look at the world through God's eyes - God's lens of love – we catch glimpse of surprising graces, and a world expanded – the amazing world of God's good creation.

AMEN.