

*Out of the Whirlwind – Job 38:1-7, 34-41*

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In the book of Job, we hear of Job's exhaustion and dismay toward God after not being able to find God amid his great suffering. Today, in this passage from Job 38, God finally addresses Job and all his concerns. However, the response is probably not the one that Job had envisioned when he made his cries for help.

Like we've all had experiences where we don't feel anybody is listening to our complaints and understanding the difficulty we are experiencing, I think we've all had times when we've been disappointed in the response we do finally get from a higher authority.

When I was in college, my parents had purchased a car for me to drive. However, it wasn't brand new right off the dealer's lot by any means. No, I was given cars to drive that had seen their better days. And frankly, with a teen-age driver in my house now, I now admit that that was the way to go.

I was very appreciative of the car I had been given, thankful that it wasn't costing me anything out of my pocket. I just had one simple request for my parents. The car was old enough that it only had AM radio in it. And for a high school or college kid, AM radio just didn't cut it.

"So, Mom and Dad, could I please have an inexpensive new radio with FM capabilities put into it? I will pay for it, and I don't want anything fancy. Just something with FM, please!"

And as all parents do so well, they said nothing.

"But, I'll pay for it and I promise I won't spend much money on it." There wasn't a yes or a no. There was only a wishy washy, "we'll see." I just didn't understand that. In fact, to this day, I don't understand why I wasn't allowed to put a cheap car radio with FM into that vehicle.

I would drop the subject for a period of weeks or even months, thinking that after a while, if I brought it up again, they'd be more willing to say "yes." And when I finally brought it up much later, thinking they would have softened on their position, the answer was an emphatic "no."

I had finally gotten an answer out of them, but the answer wasn't what I had expected.

Job was in the same spot. After searching in front of him, behind him, to his left and to his right for God to lament his suffering, God finally appeared out of the whirlwind to give him the comforting message he had been longing to hear. Or so he thought.

Instead, the message from God was quite different than what he had expected. As if scoffing at Job, God said, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together, and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

Job was expecting, and so are readers of this story, a compassionate God to come down from heaven and comfort Job amid his suffering. We want God to say to him, "There, there, Job, you're right. What you've gone through is terrible. Let me explain it to you in great detail, and then I'll restore your life because of your great faithfulness."

But, we don't get that. Instead, what we get is a God who, first and foremost, is eager to put Job in his place (if we dare say that).

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God says. In other words, God says, you're not talking to an equal here. You're addressing somebody who is on a completely different plane than you are. You're talking to the one who laid the foundation of the earth! This isn't some human father figure you're dealing with. No, you're dealing with the creator of the universe.

And in that moment, Job hears something that is very hard for each of us to deal with when we go through times of terrible

suffering and feel the need to cry out to God in our agony. Through God's speech to him out of the whirlwind, Job is reminded that the life he was living, including the loss of his children and his physical affliction, was not about him. This life we live on this earth is not primarily about us.

Our entire existence, the good and the bad of it, is really about God. When God asks Job where he was when God laid the foundation of the earth, it's a rhetorical question. It's God's way of saying, "You wouldn't be here without me. I'm the one who created you. I'm the one who was here long before you were born and will be here long after you are gone. And so, because of that, focus on me and not on yourself."

William Safire, the late political columnist, wrote a book about the story of Job several years ago. And in that book he says this, "I think Job was humbled only when he had his eyes opened to what God had to teach him about the flow of power and obligation between the master and subject, between creator and creation. Through Job, God gives Man a deserved glimpse at his place in the universe and a sense of participation in its workings."

We have a place in the workings of this world, but God also wants us to know that we are the subjects and that God is truly the master. And when things don't go our way and we demand explanations for why things happen that don't make sense, we might just have to conclude that we will never know. Because God is the one with the infinite wisdom and power, the kind of wisdom and power we will never know.

So, can we take any comfort in this? When we are going through tough times and are eager to be reached out to by God in a loving and healing way, is there any comfort we can take in hearing that God is the ultimate creator and that we are ultimately incapable of understanding why things happen as they do?

Well, maybe that is our comfort. To have the certainty that there is a creator God in our midst whose power is defined by the making of the universe and whose love is defined by the sending of a

son to die for us on a cross, well, maybe that more than makes up for the fact that we don't seem to get the explanations we think we deserve when things go awry.

Let's focus on this God, then, instead of our own human deficiencies and calamities. Let's take comfort then, in the presence of an all-powerful and all-loving God, rather than dwelling, then, always on our own disappointments. Let's take comfort then, in the presence of an all-powerful and all-loving God, rather than focusing all our attention on our financial portfolios, or our aching backs, or what schools our kids are going to get into, or how good our yards look, or even why tragedy has struck us.

Larry Davies is a pastor who chronicled an incident that occurred just as he was separating from his wife. "While the children slept with friends, we spent the last night of our marriage senselessly arguing over who would get the furniture, the photographs and the dishes. I even remember hiding a plastic coffee carafe under the kitchen sink. Why? I'm not sure, but we often do dumb things when our lives are falling apart. By the time she drove off in a borrowed pickup truck, the house was an empty shell of blank walls, half-empty rooms and shattered lives ....

"Like Job, my lowest point was yet to come ... At precisely 8:00, the next morning my doorbell rang. On the front porch stood, hand-in-hand, a smiling young couple ready to meet with their minister for pre-marriage counseling. Their bright smiles soon disappeared as I walked them through the wreckage of my house toward the office. I explained what happened and assured them that I would understand if they asked another minister to handle the marriage service.

"What advice could a recently separated pastor possibly give this young couple that would enable them to prepare for a holy marriage? The answer? None! I could say nothing! At that point, I no longer felt qualified or able to give advice! All I had left was God ... All I had left was God!

"At that precise moment, the lowest point of my life quietly

became a momentous turning point because at that instant, I utterly and completely put my dependence upon God.”

God was all Larry Davies had left. Out of the whirlwind, God came to him and reminded him of who God is. Out of the whirlwind, God came to Job and God comes to us to remind us of who God is—powerful, creating, and all-loving, the God who was, is, and will be.

In our inconvenience, our trauma and pain, our loneliness and isolation, our conflict and our alienation from those we love, it’s still not all about us. The human story is primarily about the God who made us and, therefore, endures to save us. Amen.