

## “God Answers Job”

This week we continue our journey through the book of Job. I thought it might be helpful to do a little recap before we dive into this weeks reading. Two weeks ago, Father Jim pointed out that the Job story is an **affront** to **our** understanding of fairness, because, as we are told in scripture, Job is a **righteous** man, who has his entire world destroyed before his very eyes. Imagine losing your cars, your house, your jobs and your children. Add to that, getting deathly ill, and a spouse who thinks that the best way to deal with it is to curse God. Fr. Jim **also** told us that traditional wisdom literature presents a formula that allows for people to receive **blessings** upon doing good, and cursings for doing poorly. It is with **this** framework in mind, that Job’s **supposed** Friends criticize him. They believed strongly that Job **surely** must have done something to deserve his plight. For, in the mind of humans, God gives rewards to His faithful people, **not** a severe outbreak of death and destruction. So, in one of their speeches, a friend tells Job to just come clean and confess his sins. He says, “If you will **seek** God and make supplication to the Almighty, if you are **pure** and upright, **surely** then he will rouse himself for you and restore to you your rightful place.”

Just what someone really wants to hear: Oh, you lost your job? Your house is being foreclosed? Your spouse is cheating on you? **Surely YOU** have done something wrong. Tell us what you have done. Did you cheat on your taxes? What did you do to upset your boss? Clearly you did not treat your spouse the way they wanted to be treated.

In our culture, we are told that there are answers for everything. “For every action there is an equal reaction.” Pop-psychology will blame this, that, and the other thing, for the bad in someone's life. But what if that is just the way of the world?

In Last week’s reading we heard Job’s response, to his friends, and to God. I think it is fair to say, that any one of us would have responded in the same way. Job says, in the message translation of last weeks reading,

*“I’m not letting up!  
I’m standing my ground!  
My complaint is legitimate!  
God has **no right** to treat me like this.  
**It isn’t fair!**  
If I knew where on earth to find him,  
I’d go straight to him.  
I’d lay my case before him,  
face to face,  
give him all my arguments firsthand.  
I’d find out **exactly** what he’s thinking,  
discover what’s going on in his head.  
Do you think he’d **dismiss me?**”*

*or bully me?*

*No,*

*He'd take me seriously."*

So. Job wants to take God to court. Have you ever wanted to take God to court? I know I have. I remember a time when I felt so lost, so alone, and in so much pain. And where was God? At that time, I was convinced that **God** owed **me** an explanation. I remember telling - or rather yelling - at God in my prayers. I said that He was **unfair**, He was **absent**, He should **man-up**, and **he** should answer to **me**.

I presented my case to God, just as Job had done. All my evidence was in place, every witness was prepared to testify. **My** closing arguments were really going to **nail home my case**.

Unfortunately, the person I thought was the defendant, was in fact the Judge!

This brings us to this week's reading. The Judge has decided to answer His critics. And God does so in a powerful way. We heard that "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:" The author of Job has chosen an interesting vehicle for God to speak from, but it was not random at all. In the ancient world, winds were an important determinant of weather. In the rainless summer months, moisture-laden winds from the Mediterranean flowed over the land during the daytime, moderating the midday heat, and leaving a heavy dew at night. These steady winds enabled threshers to winnow grain. In the winter months, the western winds brought heavy rain, and thunderstorms that helped crops grow. But, the winds also brought violent effects, as they do today.

One of my favorite things about growing up in the Northeast were the summer thunderstorms. They are so majestic. The loud thunder, the bright lightning, and the pouring rains. When the rain hits the ground, it looks like little soldiers marching down the street. I was always certain, that the winds were going to **rip** our house right out of the ground. The thing about the winds, is that they can help bring life in vegetation and oxygen, but, they can also bring death and destruction with their violent force! In the Ancient Near East, during the time and places that the book of Job was written, Storm Gods were quite common.

For example, in the Ugaritic epic of Baal and Anath, the god Baal is described as the "**Rider of the Clouds**" and his voice is the sound and fury of thunder and lightning. In the Babylonian creation story, The Enuma Elish, the storm God, Marduk, defeats Tiamat, the primordial goddess of watery chaos, through his control of the winds, and his use of the lightning.

The God in **our** reading **today** is the God of Israel, and the Father of Jesus Christ, YHWH. So those hearing Job's story, would be familiar with God coming in proclamation through a wind. A wind that blows storms to and fro, brings life and death.

**This is how God approaches Job.** From the whirlwind, God finally responds to Job,

to make **His** case, and to pronounce **His** judgement. We must remember: the same God that allowed Satan to attack Job, is now confronting Job. For the rest of our reading today, God responds to Job with a litany of rhetorical questions. At first, it might appear that God is not answering Job's criticisms. And in truth, God is **not** answering Job's questions **directly**. One concern I have always had with this passage of scripture, is that God comes off kind of like looking an arrogant jerk. I mean, you would think God would **want** to respond to Job's complaints, and vindicate being God. The **reality** is, this is **exactly** what God does. You see, Job's questions, and attacks on God, were never really about the things Job claimed. What Job **was** in fact questioning was, fundamentally, **Who is God?**

Job was **convinced** that God should adhere to the same wisdom principles that humans do. Job believed, and many of us here do as well, that God plays by **our** rules, **our** wisdom, and **our** understanding, of how the world works. George Bernard Shaw once said, "God created us in His image, and **we** have returned the favor." God is not subject to humanity's concept of justice or fairness. In fact, this is the core of God's rebuke to Job. In verse four, God begins the onslaught of questions. God asks Job, of his whereabouts at creation. Does Job know how the world was formed? God also asks Job who the source of wisdom is.

Finally, God asks Job, who provides food for all creatures? Both God and Job know the answers to the questions. But then again, God is not interested in the answers. At the center of Job's attacks upon God, are the fundamental characteristics of God: God's all knowing-ness, God's all present-ness and God's role as supreme being. In his questioning of God, Job has challenged the basic design of the cosmos; he has accused God of **mismanagement**, of **overt cruelty**, and of allowing the wicked to rest easy and to be blessed. It is understandable why God might sound so harsh. With each speech, Job moved God further and further away from the center of creation, and as the center of everything. Job put **himself**, and **his** troubles into the center of life.

Throughout God's response to Job, **one point** is made repeatedly: Job cannot possibly comprehend what God is doing.

The sharpest possible limitations are set on human wisdom, and in Job's case, to relying solely on his own experience. In God's response, we can see the futility of human wisdom. God, as the world's primary and supreme being, is the **true** source of wisdom, **the determiner** of right and wrong, and **the author** of justice.

God's response serves to show us - no matter our context or situation - that the person of God is wisdom. This is not easy for us to grasp, or to understand. In so many areas of our lives, **we** feel that **God** owes **us**, that God must adhere to humanity's understanding of justice. A prime example of this can be seen in many of our political debates. So often we hear about "fundamental rights": rights to guns, healthcare and education. Or, we hear, "it isn't fair that I am not allowed" to this or that.

The real question must be, what does God say about these issues? God, as the author and finisher of all things, is the **only** source of wisdom, right or wrong, just or unjust. I know I really don't like this sometimes! But I also find it comforting.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am **not** saying, that we **cannot know** what is just and unjust, or that we don't have **access** to wisdom; quite the contrary. What I **am** saying, is that **God** is the one that determines justice, and **God** is where wisdom comes from. One thing that reminds us that we are fortunate, that we are **not** the source of wisdom, is the cross. In I Corinthians, Paul tells us, "The cross is **foolishness** to the **world's** understanding of **wisdom**." And in today's epistle reading, we are told, "Christ learned **obedience** through **suffering**." You see, if God worked according to **our** understanding of wisdom and justice, then **all** of us would have to make payment to God for our debt of sin.

But, because God's understanding is different than ours, He allowed his son to take **our place** on the cross. Luckily, God has given us a variety of means to decipher His wisdom, and His understanding of justice. God has given us holy scripture to help us on our quest. We also have prayer, and we also have thousands of years of church tradition. Most importantly, we have the Holy Spirit to aid and guide us through tough issues.

This is why in Job chapter 28, we are told, "The fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." When discussing issues about wisdom and justice, we must do so in fear and trembling. We cannot take it lightly, and, we should be willing to submit ourselves to God. We need to remember: God's wisdom tells us to turn the other cheek when struck. It also reminds us, that our possessions do not make us who we are. It is the wisdom that says that your life is not your own; but, it is also the wisdom that calls us to intimate relationship with God. Living according to God's wisdom, is countercultural on many levels. Although our temptation **might** be, to react according to our emotions, we must **instead** act in accordance to Godly principles found in wisdom.

Job's big mistake was **not** that he was hurt and upset, but rather, straying away from what he knew about God. Job forgot that it was God who was the source of all the blessings and benefits he enjoyed in life prior to the tragedy. It was God who created the earth, and allowed Job to have life to begin with. God loved Job, and Job loved God. The same God that was there in the good times for Job, was the same God during the rough times.

As we face the trials and tribulations that we are facing - or will surely face - we need to remember that God is God, and we are not. But we must also remember that God loves us, and He has us in His arms. God watches over His children, and sometimes we feel like He is not there, but He always is. When we are going through the hard times, even though we might feel like it is unfair, God has our best interest in mind, and at the end of the day he will always be with us. Amen.