

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“Out of the Storm”

*The third in a four-part series entitled,
Community that Enables a Journey*

Job 38-42

October 22, 2006

Job is a story of faith... in stages. And what I've been suggesting is that his story reveals an important model... a model that can take us to healthy faith.

To recap, he begins his journey on top of the world, everything is right... it is clear and concise. His portfolio and his family and his truth are together.

His faith, at this point, is concrete and unquestioned. It is his grandma's faith. He has been gifted with the spiritual, theological consensus of a community, a container. He says as much at the end of the story... in the last chapter. **“My ears had heard of you. I'd been to Bible School and I had paid attention.”**

So, having been through Bible Drill or confirmation or catechism... Job had an answer for every question of life.

A bunch of bandits ride in and rustle all the camels and you just say,

“Naked I came into this world and naked I leave it...”

A fire destroys your crops, a tornado kills your kids,

“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.”

You break out in boils...

“Shall we accept the good and not the bad?”

This is the kind of assurance Job lives with... There is a strong foundation to his faith. But these storms are serious storms and in stage two of his journey the foundation falls to pieces. The container breaks. It has to. Faith for the first stage will not be enough for the whole journey.

Borrowed answers work for a while but they never get anyone through the fire and Job is in the fire. And there in the fire, he demands that God make sense of things. He is a portrait of the human longing for meaning. For two chapters he clung tightly to the truth he'd been handed... the world view that had always worked... but when it no longer was enough, Job let go.

He is wrestling now, not with the devil or himself as we said last week, but with God. And to continue the story and quote from last week Kastanzakas asked his old mentor monk, **“You mean you wrestle with God and hope to win?”**

“No,” the old man replies, **“I wrestle with God and hope to lose.”**

Job wants to lose. The only thing worse than being defeated by the Divine... would be defeating the Divine... which would mean nothing is Divine, really. It's Job's... it's our worst nightmare. No meaning.

Nothing left to do but despair... which was, by the way, the *“last temptation of Christ”*... don't you think.

Hung there in the darkness...

God too quiet.

“Why have you forsaken me?”

And the inner voice saying, **“It doesn't matter, there is no meaning.”**

Job will not go there... so... he wrestles... for 34 obnoxious chapters he wrestles, which, remember, is a very important thing to notice. This takes a while. A crisis of faith isn't taken care of in an afternoon. You can't calendar its onset and you sure can't predict its resolution.

You can't take a pill for this
 or read one book and get what you need.
 One conversation with a guru

or a couple of sermons from your pastor aren't enough.

This takes time... and surely the temptation for Job was to just get on up out of the ashes and forget the whole thing. **"I've asked my questions of God and God has had long enough to answer... conclusion... God's not there to hear in the first place. I've knocked and no one's home."**

That's one of the hazards of letting go (there is by the way... a hazard in each stage)... of beginning to go deep. A lot of folks just break through the surface of their legalism and when the new answers aren't readily apparent they punt. They press past the provincialism of their day and their clan and then stop. If it were there... they'd see it... they'd see God and the truth. This is where too many leave it.

I'm sure they are out there but I've never met an atheist who was hungry to find God or the truth about God. Most of the atheists I've encountered are either worn out or they're lazy or they're arrogant or very naive. They've patted themselves on the back because they're not closed minded or legalistic. They've nosed around a little bit in the soil of their own soul and said, **"Well, I thought so... nothing there."**

Faith takes time and patience and perseverance. This knowing is process specific... there is a mode of acquisition to what is eternal and universal. Job has to stay at it... he argues with the Tradition... he argues with God. He lets the crisis run its course and it gets worse before it gets better but Job will not let God or meaning off the hook.

Job goes on and on and God waits and waits and waits.

When God finally speaks, he answers **"out of the storm."** The response Job hears comes from the storm he is in, not from the outside. The storm, the crisis, is the place from which meaning emerges. Any response that is going to give him meaning and make some sense is going to have to come from the thick of things... from the whirlwind of suffering and confusion that he is experiencing.

The truth he needs...

The truth large enough for his experience...

Will come from his experience.

The stone that he has stumbled on, this stumbling stone... becomes eventually... his cornerstone. Those who have borne and come through great suffering redemptively can tell us about that. Where the cross that became theirs... somehow led to life they had never known.

It is the central truth of our faith... God, speaking from that which seems to others only to be meaningless suffering. A cross, that looks to be foolish, is salvation...

Job knows something of that... and many of you do... that God speaks from the storm... and there are two very obvious things to see when God finally opens His mouth; God offers no scolding and no explanation.

God never says, **"Shame on you Job..."** In fact, at the end of the story God says to Job's friends, **"Job spoke what was right."** Meaning... Job was innocent and God was silent about it... pain and all.

There's no scolding... and there's no explanation... no answers offered. .

When God finally speaks, God speaks as a poet... A poet...
 Not an academician.

Not a theorist or a philosopher.

Not, thank goodness, as a preacher.

God is a poet here and I think the form of the literature, the form of God's address, is important. This is by far, the longest speech by the Divine in scripture. And it's poetry. There is rhythm and beauty and a thousand wonderful images.

Job isn't led back into faith by a debate... or by discourse... but by art. There's no divine dialogue... it's just an invitation to close the mouth and open the eyes and see.

“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb?”

“Have you ever given orders to the morning?”

“Does the rain have a father?”

“Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom?”

For almost an entire chapter God goes on and on about a crocodile.

Job listens and Job sees... all that is around him and senses what is beyond him. He feels it, the mysterious rhythm and rhyme of creation... the fathomless nature of the cosmos. Job has an honest moment with his smallness and God's grandeur.

That's what moves him... God's reality.

And what he says in this moment is so enlightening. **“I'd heard all this before... but now I've seen it with my own eyes.”**

Job has moved to another level of faith. It's not borrowed and inherited any longer. It's not vicarious... It is direct... direct knowing of God and it is knowing at a different level. This is not rationality.

There's no syllogism that has been worked out now to Job's satisfaction.

“Okay, now I know why the innocent suffer.”

“I mean, I was confused there for a while but...

That really clears things up.”

Nothing is cleared up... But he knows. He is perceiving at another level and it has happened because he, as Jesus said often, found “eyes to see.”

Frederick Buechner is always helpful, *“He had seen the great glory so shot through with sheer, fierce light and life and gladness, had heard the great voice raised in song so full of terror and wildness and beauty, that from that moment on, nothing else mattered. All possible questions melted like mist, and all possible explanations withered like grass, and all the bad times of his life together with all the good times were so caught up into the fathomless life of this God, who had bent down to speak with him though by comparison he was no more than a fleck of dust on the head of a pin in the lapel of a dancing flea.”* (*Peculiar Treasures*, p68)

It is real, awesome, and direct encounter that moves Job to another level of faith... This is what a healthy faith journey involves... **“I'd heard all this for years... but now I see.”**

And we're asking, remember, what kind of a community might enable that?

In week one we talked about building a container and giving people, especially in the first half of life, the answers they need. We have to do that.

Last week, we talked about being a community that can walk with people when the container begins to break. We can be graceful and patient and understanding with one another. We can be real and honest about all that does not add up... and all... all... all that we don't know.

But we're asking again... **“What must we be as a community to help people journey beyond that dark night?”** If there is anything we can do or be... what is it?

This story, I think, shows us the way. It's the Divine poem that shows us the way. God's poetic painting of a picture for Job... **"Does the rain have a father? Does the hawk take flight on your wisdom?"** God needs Job to imagine something larger... Some reality beyond...

And that's what we need to move on in a faith journey. We need a community that helps us to sense the sacred... that helps us to touch the transcendent. That invites us over and again into reverence and awe and mystery... So something larger is perceived at another level.

Like God, we must be poetic... not simply propositional... **"Here's the truth, plain and simple. Take it or leave it."** No... no... it's more like... **"Have you ever given marching orders to the morning?"**

What people need, I believe, whether they know it or not... is not more of the same on Sundays. They need sacred time and sacred space... or they'll never know every other time and space is sacred. It'll remain mundane... we need more.

So... we must be poetic together... not chatty. We must point with symbol and ritual to something beyond... not explain it... or cut it down to our size or our understanding. It can't be just **"I want to apply this to my life."** It must be larger enough that you want to "apply your life to it."

We must lift one another's hearts and eyes with hymns and art and imagination and story and crosses and vases and gestures and more hymns...

A band on a stage... probably won't do... we'll need an altar.

We'll need images... ancient and new.

We'll need wisdom, not explanations...

We'll need holy days... and holy weeks.

We must keep offering one another what leads us to be quiet... and in awe... and surrendered... and what leads us into a deeper knowing. We'll need people present to a greater reality...

We need this... a table and it's mystery.

Something broken that you might be healed... and that you might **"taste and see that the Lord is good."** And a cup poured out and flowing eternally... eternally... eternally from the Divine heart to yours. That you might know and know always that God is love and you are his object.

That's what we need...

That's what we offer...

Come, take all of it and eat.

Burt L. Burlison, Copyright, 2006