

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who reveals God to us, our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

We're almost to the finish line in the Book of Job. Next week we get the Epilog and find out the rest of the story as Paul Harvey would say. We began this journey 4 weeks ago with the Folk Tale that set the scene for what we call the Wisdom Dialog where Job's three friends each get three chances to "help" Job see the logic and "justice" in his suffering and loss. In between each of the friends' speeches Job answers them back revealing just how unsatisfactory each of their arguments is for his specific and personal suffering. Job has considered each of their arguments and after rejecting them, he calls on God to answer for Himself. That brings us up to today's reading where God does in fact speak from the whirlwind. Any time God appears or speaks that event is called a Theophany. God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush and at the Baptism of Jesus God spoke from heaven. Then on the mountain of transfiguration God spoke again telling Peter, James, and John to listen to Jesus. Job challenges God to defend Himself against accusations that God is hostile and the universe God created has no moral compass, where deeds are not met with appropriate responses of reward or punishment. I believe this opinion is shared by a growing number of people today. All you have to do is look for 5 minutes on any news channel to see video clips of anarchists taking over or at least trying to take over sections of our major

cities. The people behind such movements with the rioting, the looting, and the attempts to tear down monuments and statues feel empowered to do these things precisely because they know their actions won't be met with appropriate responses.

I remember when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It was back in 1973 or 74. I had lived through all the rioting of the 1960 civil rights movement and the anti-war protests. The High School I attended in Geneva Ohio decided to fire one of our most beloved English teachers, Mr. Lowell Millikin. I had him for a couple of classes and his loss as a teacher hit me pretty hard. It affected almost everyone who ever had him as a teacher. I have no idea how it started, but we all had this great idea to hold a sit in and a protest march. Every student and many of the teachers participated and we closed down the school for a couple of days and marched to the superintendent's home in the evening. By about the third day of our sit-in the school board relented and re-hired Mr. Millikin. Sometimes protests against injustice do prevail and right wins over wrong. I wish that were the case every time. Unfortunately, in far too many cases what's right doesn't win in the end and today, it's hard to even determine what is right from wrong.

So, how does God defend His image in this challenge by Job? He begins by asking who this is who darkens counsel by words with no knowledge. The Hebrew word we have translated as counsel also means plan or design. God is reminding Job that God is the creator and designer of the entire universe and it is in fact an

“intelligent design.” In all of Job’s complaining about his unfair treatment, God begins His defense by scolding Job for obscuring his design because of Job’s ignorance. Although Job’s words were ignorant, God’s design is something Job should have known; otherwise, he could hardly be blamed for obscuring it. In the following speeches, God describes the design by asking rhetorical questions that Job or any other follower would or should know. God’s questions aren’t an attempt to make Job look foolish, nor are they God’s way of skirting the issue and not answering Job’s challenge. They are God’s way, like so many great teachers of asking questions that pull or drag out knowledge from the student. These are not great mysteries here... I mean God asks where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth. Job knows he wasn’t even a gleam in his father’s eye... Who determined the measurements? Again, Job and anyone who hadn’t been living under a rock knew that God made everything and measured out the seas and the land... Now here’s the question that really blows my mind and makes me think. On what basis or foundation were the cornerstones of the earth laid? Another way of asking that questions is what holds this great design together? Again, Job has to admit it is God who does all those things and God is also the cornerstone that holds it all together. The function of these questions from God to Job are to remind us of who God is and who we are as well. They aren’t questions meant to belittle, but to remind Job and us of the majesty of Almighty God.

Some critics have suggested this verse about God causing the rain in the desert is proof God's design is flawed. What a waist, they say, for rain to fall where no humans can survive? God's view is a little more long-range than our human understanding. Rain in the desert provided a survivable pathway for the Hebrew people to travel back to the Holy Lands after their captivity in Babylon was ended. Water in the desert provided life for those same Hebrew people many years earlier when they were wondering for 40 years in the wilderness or deserts of what is now Saudi Arabia. In God's grand design the rain falls on both the righteous and the unrighteous, on saints and sinners alike.

So, what are we to make of God's rhetorical questions? First off, let's recognize these questions set the tone for God's whole Theophany. If God just came and praised himself we might say He's boastful or egotistic, or even narcissistic. Instead God draws Job and us in by drawing out of us what we already know to be true about God. With Job, we become participants in this description of who God is and by confessing these truths about God we become a community of faith, believers in this God who created everything with a plan and a pretty great design.

Despite the beginning of the Book of Job where God and the Satan have this bet concerning Job, the vast majority of scripture and my personal experience with bad experiences is that God doesn't cause them, nor does God desire bad things to

happen to anyone. As these rhetorical questions by God indicate, God is the one who not only created, but the one who also maintains the order of the creation.

Job is a book written for readers such as us. We get to look down on this story and we know all the inside, behind the scenes stuff that happens, like the prolog that sets the stage for the rest of the book. In the book of Job we get to peer inside the mind of God through this Theophany. For example, in the first chapter we learned that God not only desires the obedience of all his creatures, God also desires us to love him unconditionally. God already loves us unconditionally, but he also wants us to love him just for who he is and not for all the things we get from Him. God's desire for this unconditional faith is so great and such a deep part of who God is that God is willing to abandon justice in some cases to make this type of faith possible. That's why God's mercy always trumps God's justice and grace always wins in the end. If God simply wanted creatures to unconsciously obey, he would have stopped after creating the dirt and rocks and other inanimate objects.

The question then becomes; how does God create such unconditional faith? First by doing all those things God does in creating and sustaining the universe. In most cases the laws of nature are followed and justice is served. Yes, there are exceptions where justice doesn't seem to be fairly executed. Mercy, grace, and forgiveness are three of those exceptions. Unfortunately, in this world there are

also too many cases of injustice where the punishment we usually reserve for the guilty is meted out to those we see as guiltless and innocent, as with the case of Job. Even after 4 weeks of reading everything I can find about this Book of Job, I still can't answer why innocent suffer. What I can say is there is some comfort in knowing that all suffering isn't caused by the consequences of our specific sins. I will also add that when this book was written the doctrine of original sin hadn't been developed as thoroughly as we know it today. Once you add original Sin into the equation the question of why innocent people suffer becomes a moot point because there are no truly innocent people. The real question is why aren't we all receiving the same treatment as Job? As Saint Paul writes all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Thanks be to God that we all don't get what we deserve, but instead get Grace upon grace from a loving God who desires nothing more than our faith and trust in His goodness. May you experience the goodness of God's mercy and grace. May the whirlwind of God blow through you and give you that bold confidence that no matter what your circumstance in life, you know God is not only the one who made the foundations of the earth, He is also your rock and foundation as well. Amen.