

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, October 17, 2021**

Guest Preacher: Margaret McGugan

“God’s World and Not Ours”

It seems in this lengthy poetic prologue between God and Job, the answer to God’s questions is as clear as mud. “Who are you”; ‘where were you’; ‘what do you know’ and ‘can you.’

As we listen to this Old Testament reading this morning, God’s tumultuous voice out of a whirlwind, answers Job—not with clear, precise answers but with more questions....

‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?’

Elusive no more, God speaks to Job at last. It is God who has the last word. So, we had better listen up.

The Bible records few human beings for whom conversation with God was an easy task.

Moses found himself talking to a burning bush.

Isaiah was engaged by a vision of God which, temporarily at least, sealed his lips, and

Jeremiah heard words from God that terrorized him.

Job’s experience is similar, in that he is silenced by a whirlwind, a force that only God can produce, and it requires his immediate attention.

Job has poured his heart out, has shaken his fist toward heaven, defended his integrity, challenging the pious prevailing attitude espoused by his comforters, all the while making his case for the world according to *Job*.

Job and his friends have had a series of disputes about the nature of God, the meaning of human suffering, and a host of other issues. While the voice from the whirlwind fails to answer the essential questions that Job and his friends have put to God, the questions God presents to Job demonstrate the impossibility of challenging God.

No one could have been prepared for what Job experiences next. The barrage of questions for which Job has no answer comes rolling down like floodwaters, quickly including him in the larger order of God’s creation. This critical doxology certainly overrides the case that Job has been making for how things ought to be.

On the one hand, it may appear that the Lord’s words serve to overwhelm Job into a retraction of his case.

On the other hand, the Lord’s words will lead Job to a renewed vision of what it means to be human.

‘You have spoken words without knowledge,’ God declares.

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?’

‘Who determined its measurements---surely you know!’

‘Can you lift up your voice to the clouds so that a flood of waters may cover you?’

Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you---‘Here we are?’

The answer to these questions— ‘who are you,’ ‘where were you,’ ‘what do you know’ and ‘can you,’ reveals a great distance between God and humanity.

God alone has the knowledge and the power about all these things.

Job does not have this cosmological knowledge, nor the power to sustain or sway the world in which he lives.

Job may indeed be God’s special servant, as is made clear in the prologue but that special status does not mean that the distance between Creator and creature has been overcome.

God’s sovereign love extends to the whole of creation. God tends to Behemoth, who dominates the land and Leviathan,(La, vi a than) the sea monster, as if pets.

Job has made his case; but his perspective is limited, and he has spoken ‘words without knowledge.’

‘Stand up and answer the questions I will put to you’ is as deliberate a challenge as one can imagine and if we search further into the Old Testament writings, we will find other deliberate challenges written under wisdom influences, in which the asking of questions was calculated to be a test of character as well as of intelligence. In the book of Judges, at Samson’s marriage feast, Samson asks a riddle of the wedding guests who are perplexed by its meaning....‘out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.’

The basic question that God puts to Job, although it is expressed in a number of variations, is this:

Who possessed the wisdom to create the heavens and the earth?’

And the obvious answer is: only God.

The answer is so obvious, in fact, it is never directly stated.

Yet, Job finally gets its meaning.

It is only God who owns the wisdom, the understanding, and the knowledge to have created the heavens and the earth and it is only God who governs them today.

The voice from the whirlwind is persuasive: this is God’s world, not Job’s and not ours. Our knowledge about the greater order of things is derived from observation and conjecture, not from an eyewitness account.

Maltbie D. Babcock wrote the words to the hymn, ‘This is my Father’s world.’ On one hand it is a hymn of trust and delight in the wonder and goodness of God’s creation.

On the other hand, it is a firm reminder that it is God’s world and not ours. *‘This is my father’s world and to my listening ears, all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.’*

Sometimes, we need to hear God.

Sometimes, we need to listen for nature's song and the music of the spheres because sometimes these sounds may bring the answer to our own complex questions.

God's hands have given us the wonders that He has shaped and fashioned for our sheer enjoyment.

And sometimes, what God has given us, challenges us.

The late, William Sloane Coffin an ordained Presbyterian minister and a peace activist became the senior minister at Riverside Church during the 1970's. In the late 1980's he pursued disarmament activism full-time, saying then that there was no issue more important for a man of faith.

He was quoted for many sayings and one which I chose this morning is this: "I love the recklessness of faith. First you leap, and then you grow wings."

When Rev. Coffin was an undergraduate student at Yale University, three of his friends were killed in a car accident when the driver fell asleep at the wheel. At the funeral, Coffin was sickened by the piety of the priest as he spoke the words from Job: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (1:21).

Coffin was so outraged that he even considered tripping the priest as he processed up the aisle of the church. As Coffin was preparing to act out, a small voice asked him, 'What part of the phrase are you objecting to?' He says that he thought it was the second part: 'the Lord took away.' 'Then suddenly it dawned on me that I was protesting the first: 'the Lord gave.'

It hit me hard that it was not my world; that at best we were all guests.

And "the Lord gave" was a statement against which all the spears of human pride must be hurled and shattered.'

'Who are you;' 'where were you'; 'what do you know' and 'can you' are questions that challenge us today.

Like the barrage of questions God gave Job, I ask all of us to think about these questions.....

How are we going to clean up the Great Pacific Garbage patch?

How will we dispose the debris left behind space exploration which is floating around the earth?

How can we get fresh drinking water to Northern Canada?

How will we feed the world population in 20, or 30 years?

How deep do we bury nuclear waste so it can never harm us in the coming centuries?

How can we stop the opioid epidemic?

I wonder if the logic and order humanity has developed over the centuries is being challenged. We need to realize that we are guests on earth and as stewards, we must take care of the world and God's people.

Just like Job, we have underestimated God.

There is human logic and order and then there is God's logic and order which is at a higher dimension than Job or we can understand.

There will be questions we cannot answer without enlisting God's wisdom. There will be situations that challenge us and only God has knowledge.

In a very literal sense, the book of Job raises more questions, than it does answers.

This sermon has raised more questions than answers.

At the very least, we are assured that God is God, and we are not; and that we as human beings struggle with things we cannot understand.

Nevertheless, our hope is tied to the firm conviction that this same God will take care of that which we do not understand, as we see in the good, created world around us. The created world we had no hand in creating.

And through all the questions, and all the riddles and all the suffering, the straightforward answer, as remarkable for what it omits as for what it contains is to find **peace** with God.

We do not possess the wisdom to contest God.

Through trust in God, we will find peace.

God talks to Job about God things, about God's power to create.

Whose world is this?

This is my Saviour's world, oh let me not forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.