

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, Your Spirit our teacher and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

For 37 chapters of the book that bears his name, Job has demanded that God tell him what he has done to deserve what has happened to him.

Job's world has been shattered – He lost his wealth,

His children,

His health and his marriage is on very shaky ground

Then his faith takes a pummeling owing to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar's "counsel".

They had initially come to comfort and console Job,

But when Job began to lament, they launch into attack mode.

Beating on Job

Oblivious it seems to his physical condition and despair.

They insist that Job has done something wrong in God's eyes and God is punishing Job because of it.

Job never comes to the point where he curses God.

But, he does come to the point where he accuses God of being unfair and uncaring.

Job even goes so far as arguing that he could vindicate himself — prove his case as it were — if God would come before him!

The old adage – “be careful what you wish for” comes into play with the verses William read from Job 38.

What unfolds is not what Job probably expected
As we have moved through this great story, it probably is not what we expect either.

We might expect God to come out and say, “Look Job, this was a test to prove the sincerity of your devotion to me”

Or, “job this was a test designed to exercise and strengthen your faith”

Or, “Job, I allowed this so you can see where you are in your spiritual journey.

But no,

God does not even come close to any of these things

There is no justification given – this is the Lord who speaks to Job

**Who is this that darkens counsel by words
without knowledge (vs.2?)**

This is followed by 77 questions, one right after the other

Questions about the earth and questions about the creatures of the earth.

There is no hint about the thing between God and Satan that got the story going!

Out of the whirlwind is an appropriate context and setting for the 77 questions God poses. Picture if you will Job hearing those questions Like the dreaded pop quizzes beloved of too many of my high school teachers – only more so – concerning much more weighty and cut to the chase

issues than a French or Latin verb declension or
some chemical formula!

Like Job then – I could not and dared
not respond.

It was overwhelming

I could not think that fast or take it all in.

As much as I thought I knew, understood and
remembered,

I knew and understood so little!!

At the end of the questions (ch. 42) – all Job can
essentially say

**I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.” (vs5-6)**

I thought I knew more than I realize I really do.

God, you and I are not on equal footing, like two neighbours settling a dispute.

This I now understand!

That's it you say?

That is how the book ends?

Well...almost

But it is the end of God's speech to Job.

What Job had asked for all through the book is an audience with God

He gets his audience, but the why questions so predominating Job's life is not answered.

Essentially, God says – I'm God! I'll ask the questions! I do not need the help or advice of impatient and ignorant mortals to control the world any more than I needed them to create it!

What an unsatisfying ending we could say.

Yes, there is the bit about being rewarded many times over for the grief and disorientation Job has been through (42:10ff)

But the book still leaves Job's poignant and powerful questions unanswered.

And these questions are as pertinent now as when Job first posed them.

The story of Job stands on that reality

Why are good people not exempt from suffering?

When my life takes a turn for the worse, is God still there?

Does He still love me?

Is He still caring for me?

Is what is happening to me a form of God's
punishment?

Does the level of suffering, affliction and pain I am
experiencing or my friend or loved one is
experiencing a result of sin in my life or in my
friend or loved one's lives

For Job,

These were not removed academic questions of a
case study in a class room.

They are not removed, academic class room case
studies for any of us.

Pain, affliction and suffering always come with
human faces attached

How many who read Job or hear the book
read or preached about or studied cannot see
someone they know,
Maybe even themselves, as Job like – world
shattered, by the unexpected, the unwanted, the
unnecessary and the unwarranted;
Faith further shaken by insensitive comments and
quick, trite answers by those we consider friends.
Or faith shaken because we find ourselves
wondering as did Job – whether God has
abandoned us or gone off to deal with more exciting
and energy giving people than we are!.

So, what does God's answer to Job out of the
whirlwind say to us?

It is a clear reminder that God does not answer 'why' questions.

God is not accountable to us

Katharine gave me permission to tell this story, for it is her story, but it has profoundly affected our lives and ministry and we (she) often tells it or remembers it when the 'whys' come into our lives.

Twenty one years ago when we were being considered by the congregation of Cooke's Presbyterian, Chilliwack, to become their new ministers,

Katharine and I did a lot of soul searching.

There were a lot of why questions and not a few laments over the possibilities of a trek this far west!

We had been in Atlantic Canada for nearly 15 years,
Our girls had been born there,
We had a cottage on the north shore of PEI
Though Katharine and I could never be Maritimers
by birth, we had put down some very firm roots.
Family were only 2 hours away by plane and one
time zone

While lying in bed and praying about the
move one night, the questions rotating around in
her head, "Lord, why are you calling us? Surely
there must be people as or more qualified between
Sackville New Brunswick and Chilliwack BC /"
Why do we have to go all that way?"

Suddenly she remembers the room became
still, but electric

She heard a voice – not in the room, but within herself.

It was a stern, but kind voice.

The voice she said was so commanding that there would be no reply or further discussion from her

The voice simply said, *“I don’t answer why questions!”*

Subsequently, she had an opportunity to discuss this with a more senior colleague who had many more years of experience in ministry and was also very wise

His comment was that he could not think of ANY place in scripture where God answered ‘why’ he acted the way He did.

It’s true.

For example, when Moses questions his call from God – beyond the words about observing the misery of the Israelites in Egypt – God never tells Moses ‘why’ he is chosen to lead the people.

Tell the people I AM has sent me to you (Ex 3:14)

There remains in each one of us a sense to be able to explain everything, to need to know everything.

So, it is one of the hardest and probably among the most painful realities to accept and retain in the life of faith

There will be no answer from god to life's why questions!

A second truth that emerges from God's speech from the whirlwind and closely related to no

answer will be forthcoming from God to the “why” questions of our lives

Is that we must accept that in the matter of the workings of God in this world and in our lives

There will always remain mystery.

God does not respond to Job’s misery with explanations, or dismissive comments

Instead

He calls Job’s attention to the rich and varied wonder of the world in which we live.

He leads Job from the mystery of his suffering to the mysterious of creation,

From wonder to wonder.

This is not a move to deflect Job from his affection, suffering and pain.

But I wonder – is Job’s story reminding us that one of the important ways of reckoning with pain and sorry is not meaning making and answer seeking, But accepting and entering in the reality of mystery and cultivating wonder

Though God provides Job with no answers and somehow, at the end of the book Job is, dare I say it, at peace – He comes to realize his place in Creation

God’s questions do not immediately remove the pain, affliction and suffering of Job

But they do force Job to see a bigger and broader picture a longer view and his place in that picture.

God is not dismissive of Job’s suffering – He is never dismissive of ours.

At the same time, there are events,
circumstances, stations in our lives that we will
never understand fully this side of heaven.
Our grasping attempts at answering every question
and making sense of every mystery in life will not
fulfilled,
We will at least become disenchanted and at worst,
feeling we have failed someone, somewhere and
somehow.

Like Job, we are not meant to understand all
things in an explainable and complete way.
Some things we have to chalk up to “mystery”.
That is not a cop out by the way – it is an admission
that we are not the centre of all things

It is not all about us.

God's speech out of the whirlwind to Job also *puts to pay the universality of the so called retribution principle that still sadly remains the default position in the lives of too many of God's people*

The principle that says, the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer

If someone suffers, they are wicked.

If someone prospers, they are righteous

That principle is just too simple, bordering on simplistic in this very complex world in which we live.

Job is the prime witness to the fact that the retribution principle does not hold

To apply this principle in all situations of suffering, pain and affliction more often than not causes unnecessary grief, discouragement and despair.

To see the principle as the only explanation that makes sense will more assuredly cause you to ape behavior and words spoken by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar.

You must have done something wrong Job.

You are at fault somewhere.

Their words forgot about not only Job's humanity, but the suffering, pain and affliction he was experiencing.

Talk about kicking someone when they are down!

Job's story tells us then "stop seeing the retribution principle as "the only explanation that makes sense"

God's speech out of the whirlwind to Job,
In fact the whole of Job's story is *a call and a challenge to trust and obey God.*

As I say that, I think of a 19th century hymn that for reasons known only to the hymn book committees of the PCC over the last century – never made it into our hymn book.

Though I have heard it sung and sung it on many occasions.

It is John Sammis' When we walk with the Lord

I find the second verse a particularly apt to Job like situations.

Refrain:

**Trust and obey, for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.**

**2 Not a burden we bear,
not a sorrow we share,
but our toil he doth richly repay;
not a grief or a loss,
not a frown or a cross,
but is blest if we trust and obey. [Refrain]**

Through all the demands, accusations, nasty words
spoken with finger pointing gestures or raised
voices I can imagine were there with Eliphaz,
Bildad and Zophar,
Through his wife's refrain – "Curse God and die"
Job refuses to curse God

Oh, he laments and cries out to God – and does this powerfully and on numerous occasions.

So I expect there were times when his faith in God wavered not a little bit!

He demands an audience or hearing with God.

Yet never does Job cease trusting God

The verses we raised up last week

**25 For I know that my Redeemer^[a] lives,
and that at the last he^[b] will stand upon the
earth;^[c]**

**26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in^[d] my flesh I shall see God,^[e]**

**27 whom I shall see on my side,^[f]
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27)**

are undeniable proofs of this continuous trust in God.

In the end,

That is perhaps the most timeless and significant reminder from God's speech out of the whirlwind to Job. — *trust and obey God – there is no other way!*

For there will be Job like times and situations in our own lives and in the lives and family of people we know and love.

Know while God does not answer why questions.

Lament, questioning, even just deep sighs will not make Him turn his back on you or go off to be with more important people.

At the end of the book, we are told very firmly that *even in the stormiest times of our lives –*

*while we may not immediately or clearly see God – pain
suffering and affliction have a way of taking our eyes off
God – KNOW THAT GOD IS NOT SILENT OR
DISTANCE – HE IS HERE.*