

Out of the Whirlwind

October 17, 2021

Job 38:1-7 and 34-41

¹ Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: ² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements — surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

³⁴ "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? ³⁵ Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? ³⁶ Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? ³⁷ Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, ³⁸ when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? ³⁹ "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, ⁴⁰ when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? ⁴¹ Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" ³⁹ They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

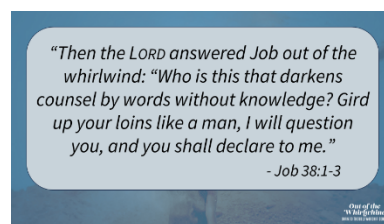


Today we hear from God. In Job 2 we were observers to Job's tragic story – losing so much in such short order.

In Job 23 we hear Job's bitter complaint – his response to his friends' condemnation and his desire to present his case to God taking center stage. Today we hear from God. As we prepare to do so, let us pray...

Turn with me to Job 38 today. Between chapter 23 last week and today's passage there has been more of the same. Job has defended his righteousness; his friends have continued their arguments that Job must have sinned. A new voice enters the conversation. Elihu rebukes the three friends and rebukes Job.

He also exalts God's goodness and proclaims God's majesty. In all of these ways Elihu provides a prelude to what God says to Job, to his friends, and to us in today's text. In the opening verses we read these words: *"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.'"* Job is put on notice. As we read these words, our assumption is that God is angry, that God is shouting at Job for daring to question, for daring to challenge the divine hand at work in the world and in his life in particular. These words are prefaced by the fact that the whole thing comes at Job from a whirlwind. There is not a storm in the land of Uz. The power of God's voice creates the whirlwind swirling around Job and friends. Think about what that would be like for a hot second. When one delves into Job's response in chapter 42, we will hear Job's understandably subdued response. We'll get to that next week, so, again, stay tuned!



God's response goes on for a while. God is in the zone with this one. God's response continues through the start of chapter 40, is interrupted by just three short verses from Job, and then continues through chapters 40 and 41. In total, God speaks for 127 verses. In reality, the fifteen verses that we have in this week's lectionary reading just gives us a small taste of God's response to Job. These verses barely do justice to the speech that pours forth from God. Please, please take a few minutes this week and read all of chapters 38-41, as you are encouraged to do in GPS question 3.

Here is just a sampling of God's questions to Job in our passage for today: *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?... Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?... Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?... Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?"* These words, along with the whirlwind

surrounding them, convey the power and might and immensity of God. They remind Job and they remind us that God is in control of all things. They remind us and they reminded Job that God is God, and we are not.

So rather than being words of anger being spoken to Job, perhaps the sheer majesty of these words is simply God being God. There are other instances in the Bible when God is simply God. Think of when Moses would go up on the mountain and God would just pass – just close enough to transform the countenance of Moses so that when he returns the people would shy away. Of course, Job would be awed by the power of God on display in these words, Of course, he would bow down at the majesty of God. I believe that's what happens when one encounters something approximating the full presence of God. Recall the disciples in the boat, that day when Jesus came walking across the water during the storm. He climbed into the boat and calmed the storm with but a few words. When they got an inkling of who Jesus really was, they fall down and worshipped him. Or think of Isaiah, in the temple of the lord, who sees only the hem of God's robe spilling into the common space.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?... Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?"

- Job 38: 4 and 34

"Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?... Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?"

- Job 38: 36 and 41



In awe, Isaiah crumples to the ground, all too aware of his sinfulness there in the presence of the Almighty. We too can have these moments, these times when we are simply awed by the presence of God surrounding us, touching our lives. About six years ago I was asked to come and talk with a man struggling with cancer. He had been a little angry at God, but he had worked past that. He wanted to share in communion and to know that God forgave him, that he was right with God. Afterwards he expressed his thanks and appreciation for being reminded of God's grace and forgiveness and love. It was a blessing to see how God lifted a weight off of him. Just three days later I was called to the hospital. This man, just 49 years young, the same age as me at the time, drew his last breath that afternoon. As he did so, a divine presence was there. In the corner of the room, just below the ceiling, I saw a group of dancing lights, hovering for a moment. And then they took off, exiting that space. His sister and I caught each other's eyes at that moment and we smiled. Afterwards she asked if I saw the lights too. We shared our joy of knowing his spirit was saying goodbye in its own way and that he was transitioning to a far better place in glory. God does not always come in the whirlwind, sometimes God becomes present in the still, small presence of the Spirit.

Turn with me to our gospel lesson for today, to Mark 10. Just prior to this passage we find the story of the rich young man – the one we touched on last week, the one who could not quite go all in for Jesus. Peter's declaration that the disciples have given up everything to follow Jesus was met with Jesus' assurance that *"the last will be first."*

From here, immediately before today's passage, Jesus takes the disciples aside and tells them that he will be condemned, mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed. And after three says he will rise again.

As the disciples process this news, James and John hatch a plan. They realize that Jesus' life and ministry will soon be coming to an end. This triggers thoughts about grabbing power and about securing one's position. James and John ask Jesus to do for them whatever they ask. Jesus asks what they want. In response they say, *"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."* What a huge request! They want all the glory and majesty and power. They want to be Jesus' righthand men in the kingdom of heaven. To achieve that position, what a life they would lead in their time left on earth! Before we think this too great a question to ask, we must acknowledge that at times we too wander off the right path. We too can chase promotions or recognition. We too can seek to accumulate "stuff" as a sign of our success. And, yes, we too can come to look up and realize how far we've gone astray.

The other ten disciples are angry when they hear what James and John asked of Jesus. He once again gathers the disciples around close and speaks gently to them. Jesus begins by pointing out that many in power lord their power over others, some even being tyrants. I'd bet Herod's and Pilate's names quickly leapt into the disciples' minds. Perhaps James and John recognized themselves and their recent request in this illustration about lording power over others. Helping them to understand what he will call them to Jesus says, *"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,*

"Whoever wished to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wished to be first among you must be slave of all."

- Mark 10:44

One of the
10 Attributes
of a Servant Leader

and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." Jesus is again reminding them and us of the call to humble servanthood. This is a hard place for us to assume, isn't it? Now I do not mind doing something nice as an act of service to my wife or one of my kids. I'd even do some nice act of service for most of you. But to be a "slave" to all – to anyone and everyone? To submit my will to the will of God and to serve anyone who happens along? That'd be about like going from the right and left hand of Jesus to scrubbing toilets in the bowels of hell.

To reinforce and explain what he is asking of all who will follow, Jesus goes on to say, *"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* This is the cup that almost all of the disciples too will drink, the baptism that they will face – to give their lives for the sake of the gospel. Giving his life as a ransom for many is the ultimate example of humble service, of being last so that all others can be first. Talk about placing the humanity of the disciples in the correct perspective in their relationship with and to the divine. Finding the right perspective is what God's speech to Job will do for Job and for us if we are willing to spend some time with these words from God.



So, let's turn back to Job now. As we again consider these words from God, I invite you to consider a different angle. What if God is simply (now, simply in divine terms, you understand) giving the Creator's case the way Job wanted to give his personal case? What if God is gently reminding Job of the correct relationship here, much as Jesus did with James and John.

Honestly, it is a reminder we all need at times. We all have times when we question God's way, when we think our way superior to whatever God might be up to, when we outright think that God is wrong.

And to take it one step further, what if God is wooing Job by talking about the nature of the Creator? For many of us, this might be an even more risky thing to consider. What if God is reaching out, even lovingly pursuing Job, with the majesty and grandeur and awesomeness of who God is? Before you dismiss this idea of God wooing Job, think with me for a moment. Have you ever looked up at night and lost your breath for a moment as you took in the vastness of the stars in the sky? Have you ever been overwhelmed by a song in church or on the radio – one that brought tears streaming down your face as you worshipped the Lord our God? Yes, my friends, God does pursue us with his majesty, grandeur, and awesomeness. Yes, our God does pursue us!

Are God's words from the whirlwind just to Job? Are these words spoken to us too? Put another way: are they for us? Clearly, these words are in the Bible, so they must have meaning for our lives. We must also ask: are these words to or for Job's friends? Do they too need to be reminded of God's power and might and awesomeness, of God's love and care for each of us? At times we all need to be reminded of these words and of just who God is.

Consider in this light the questions that God asks. How vast is the universe? Can we make it rain? What are the foundations of the earth? Last week Job admitted that he could not answer God once in a thousand times. But, really, can any of us answer these questions? Can we even really begin to?

We too need reminded at times of our place in God's creation. We may be superior to the rest of the created world, but we are far from God's power, might, and wisdom – perhaps we can think of ourselves as but one grain of sand in the vastness of God's oceans.

This image of God is of a God who is personal and intimate, who is closely connected to and deeply in love with all of creation. This may also be a moment that prefigures what the theologians call the “condescension” of God, the time that God choose to come down to earth, taking on flesh and walking among us. In the incarnation, God came to meet us where we are at. In Christ, God was revealed in love and in beauty. Maybe in the New Testament this whirlwind is a new wind that blows in a new vision of God and a new way of relating to the one who loves us so completely.

God's speech in chapters 38 through 41 leaves Job a bit speechless and a little starstruck. All of this humbles Job. Again, I encourage you to read these chapters this week. We all need a good reminder of who God is once in a while. When we return to the book of Job next week, we will see how God turns to the “comforters” and condemns Job's friends and their words. As a part of the condemnation of Job's so-called friends, God honors Job. “*My servant Job*,” he is called. God is clearly on Job's side. Join us next week as we explore the end of the story. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Job is awed and humbled by what God has to say. When has God spoken to you (directly, through an experience, through the word of God), leaving you as a more humble follower?
- 2) *Pray*. When have you most recently experienced God's presence wooing or pursuing you, drawing you deeper into relationship? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord your God.
- 3) *Study*. Read Job 38 through 41 in their entirety. Take in the full scope of what our loving God is saying to Job and to us. What is your response?