

## “Who are We to Question God?”

Job 31: 35-37; 38: 1-11

I will tell you that as I sat down to write this sermon, I felt like this could not be a more inappropriate text for this day, especially when it seems like our world is falling apart due to violence and hate. Shouldn't I as a minister just dump this whole Job sermon and go with something else, something more relevant to our world's current situation?

I guess I could have done that but I realized that in the face of all that is going on in our world today, ironically enough, we do find ourselves in the same place Job was when he began asking questions of his God. This week, as I watched images of downed planes and children killed by bombs come across my TV screen, I found myself asking, just like Job did when he reached his breaking point, asking questions like, “God why are you letting these things go on? God, where are you? Why aren't you stopping any of this? God, don't you care about us anymore? God, have you stepped away from your creation and are you now allowing us to tear each other apart?”

As I experienced the pain and hurt these images of war brought to my heart, I found myself, like Job when he reached his breaking point, I found myself yelling

at God “Answer me! I need answers! God, where are you? God, why are you allowing this suffering to go on?”

Once again, at the beginning of the week, I thought this sermon would go in one direction only to discover about mid-week, the Holy Spirit was leading me in a completely different direction.

As I have lived with this text this past week, I have often been reminded that this is ultimately the point in the Bible that says God is God and we are not; sort of like that answer should satisfy all the questions that we might have along our journeys.

But I’ll be honest, I’m realizing that this answer just doesn’t cut it anymore for me. This answer of God is God and we are not just leaves me frustrated and angry at God more than anything else. And it certainly doesn’t answer all my questions or leave me satisfied in my relationship with God. All it really does is make me ask more questions and wonder about who is this God that has called me and this whole universe into being?

Are we supposed to interpret this “God is God and we are not”, answer as God’s way of politely saying, “Sit down, shut up and don’t ever think of questioning me again.” That seems a little harsh especially when I know that it is those moments when I find myself questioning that I find God the most. It seems like in those moments when I am questioning my faith, that I discover that my faith

has been strengthened. It seems like that as I continue my spiritual path, that it is in those moments when I find myself in a questioning place, that I most encounter the Holy.

So I guess when I really sit down and think about this God is God and we are not answer, no, I don't think God is telling Job to sit down, shut up and stop asking questions, okay, well, maybe the sit down and shut up part but God is certainly not telling Job to stop asking his questions.

So what is really going on in this text? If God is not rebuking Job or us for that matter for asking questions, then what is God exactly doing in this text? As I have lived with this text this past week, I have come to believe that God is teaching Job and teaching us an important spiritual discipline through God's response. God is teaching us that we have been asking the wrong questions this whole time and instead God is inviting us to reframe our questions. God is inviting us to change our questions from life-draining negativity into life-giving positive energy that will help sustain us no matter what comes our way in life. This spiritual discipline of reframing the question will help us weather the storms of life. You see, God's response is really an invitation to expand our vision, to see beyond our limited worldview and to instead open our eyes so that we can see the wider context of life. By doing this, we will have a better awareness of the world around us.

Let me explain: Chapter after chapter, Job has screamed at God. Job has cursed the world around him. Chapter after chapter, Job has laid out the case for his innocence and demanded God respond. And now God finally does.

God has allowed Job to get it all out while God patiently waited nearby and now it is God's time to respond. And as usual, God doesn't do exactly what we expect God to do. We might expect God to smite Job for Job's audacity. We might expect God to wrap God's loving arms around Job and cry with Job a little. We might expect God to come in a still small voice and simply say to Job, "Be still and know that I am God."

But God doesn't do any of those things. God comes to Job in a whirlwind, mighty and powerful and simply says, "Who are you to question me? Why are you talking about stuff you know nothing about in the first place? Where were you when I created the world and set it on its foundation? Where were you when I took charge of the ocean? Where were you when I designed the universe?"

And then God goes on from this point and gives one of the most breathtakingly beautiful descriptions of God's creation, a description that fills our hearts with wonder and truly opens our eyes to the vastness and beauty of God's creation. God comes to Job in power and in might and loudly states: Where were you when I created the world? Where were you when I separated light from dark? Where were you when I created life?

Impressive right, I'm sure that this got Job's knees to shaking. But regardless of the power and might, God wasn't trying to scare Job. God was just trying to shake Job out of his limited vision.

In that moment, God totally reframes Job's questions and instead of ignoring Job, which Job has accused God of doing all along, God invites Job to see the bigger picture. And as I have lived with this text this past week, I am realizing what a huge gift that was for Job and for all of us. Because one of the things that I have come to appreciate about God's response more and more, especially as we continue to see the world falling into more violence each and every day, one of the things that I have come to appreciate about this text is that God in no way gives Job easy or pat answers to Job's questions. God has actually sat and listened to Job's questions and accusations. God has taken Job's questions to heart and now God is ready to respond.

God could have easily said to Job, "Now, Now, don't worry your little head about this, given Job a cookie and then sent Job off to bed, like Job was some two year old throwing a temper tantrum for not getting his way.

But God doesn't do that. Instead, God sweeps Job up in the whirlwind alongside of God and together they go on a journey. Creator and creature, traveling together, viewing the vastness and beauty of God's creation. God respects Job

enough and more importantly loves Job enough to invite and include Job into this discussion as partners.

And what Job realizes from this journey is that he doesn't know as much as he thought he knew. What Job discovers instead is that the more he thinks he knows, the more he realizes that there is a lot more that he doesn't know. And the same holds true for us as well. We don't know everything. And we don't know as much as we think we know.

And let's be honest, this is not such a bad thing. When we think about it, it really is a wonderful freeing thing! We don't have to know all the answers. We don't have to be right all the time. We can simply appreciate the mystery and wonder of the world around us. All we really need to know to survive, to sustain our spirits is that we have a Creator who is going to be by our side no matter what. We have a God who will be with us as we continue our journey together.

Now, this way of thinking could be dangerous. We might say that this partnership with God puts us on equal footing with God. And let's face it, we've all heard of and know of certain people who tend to think this way. We say that these certain people have God complexes. No one around here, I'm sure but we know those other people. We tend to say that these type of people think they know everything or that they believe that they can control every detail of their lives.

Well, I have some bad news. We all have some form of a God complex, me included. Because each and every day, we all get up in the morning thinking we can control the outcome of our day. We fool ourselves into believing that we can make some order out of the chaos that fills our lives. We make our lists. We make our plans. We check that list twice, trying to make sure we didn't miss anything.

And I'm going to let all of you in on a secret—We can't control the outcome, no matter how hard we try. No matter how many lists we make, no matter how many details we think we have covered, chaos can still come into our lives unexpectedly. Chaos finds a way into our lives and when it does, suddenly, we find our lives spinning out of control.

Once again, I know this sounds really depressing but I'm going to say that is not really the case. In fact, it is actually wonderfully freeing. Just like Job, we are given permission to realize and embrace our limits. And in realizing our limits, in embracing our limits, the only thing we can do at that point is trust that God will take of what Job, what others, what we cannot know or have the ability to do. When we realize that we are not God, all we can do is trust that God will take care of us.

Sometimes, we get so caught up in our own issues, in our own problems, in our own concerns that we cannot see beyond them. Sometimes the fog of despair becomes so thick that we cannot see a way out of it. And it is in those moments,

we find ourselves asking, why do bad things happen to good people? It is in those moments when we want to know what we did to deserve this suffering. It is in those moments when we want a response from God.

The thing of it is God will respond, make no mistake about that. We can ask all the questions we want of God but we have to realize that we may not like the answers that we get from God. Because God isn't going to treat us like children. When we demand answers from our God, God is going to be honest with us and treat us like God's partners in God's creation.

Because when God does respond to our questions, it won't be with a simple or straight yes or no answer. When God responds, it will be to tell us that there are things that are beyond our understanding. When God responds, it will be to tell us that there is a whole universe working around us. But, wait for it... when God finally responds to our questions, God will also tell us that in spite of the vastness of God's creation, God is aware of all that is happening in our world. And that thankfully and gratefully, God is aware of what is happening to us. God has not left us alone.

I know these may not be the words of comfort we were all hoping for this morning. They are not meant to be. These words from God are meant to expand our vision and see that yes, God understands this world is not a safe enough place for humans but it is the world that we in as the people of God. God's response

reminds us that God gave his creation the freedom to be who it is and that freedom is a great gift to humans and animals alike. And let's be honest, we wouldn't want it any other way.

Would we really worship and praise or be in a relationship with God if all God did was control our every whim? Ask anyone who has ever worked with people, and they will be the first to tell us that we just cannot make people do what we want them to do. I know it would be so much easier but life doesn't work that way. Being around people doesn't work that way. Being partners with God doesn't work that way. God respects us too much and more importantly loves us too much to treat us that way.

As humans who are in a relationship with God, we are allowed to make our own choices and yes, this goes for other people as well. God will not simply make us do what God wants us to do just because God created us. God love us too much to do that.

God created us to be in relationship with God and with other people. God did not create us to be little things that God could control. Sometimes I bet God regrets that decision but that is not what God did when God created the world, when God created humanity. God created us to be partners in God's service and that means giving us, giving all of creation the freedom to be who we are, warts and all.

Let's face it, I'm not telling us anything we didn't already know. We know the world doesn't work the way we think it ought to, no matter how hard we try. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people and if truth be told, sometimes we will never know the reason why behind some of the stuff that happens to us or to other people. All we know is that suffering exists in our world.

So here it is: if you take nothing else from this sermon, please take this piece to heart. Hear it. Memorize it. Let it be your first thought in the morning and your last thought before you go to bed.

Here it is:

If we are looking for an answer to human suffering, God's response simply tells us that we will never find it. This story is not designed to be about divine pastoral care. Instead God's response is about God respecting us too much, loving us too much to give us easy or pat answers. Rather instead, God's response becomes an invitation for us to reframe our questions of why into a new life-giving vision of God's creation that surrounds us. Because, here is where I want us all to listen, it is in creation, where we find the constant reminder of how much God loves God's world. It is in creation where we find the constant reminder of how much care God has put and continues to put into this world. It is in creation where

we find the constant reminder of how much effort God will go to in taking care of God's world and all the creatures in that world.

It is in creation where we find the constant reminder that we are always surrounded by and always embraced by the ever present love and grace of God, a God who loved us so much that God gave God's only son so that God would know the pain and suffering that we experience here on earth, a God who gave his only son so that we might live.

It is in creation where, although we might not find all the answers to our questions, we are thankfully reminded that God is God and we are not. And God loves this world too much to let it slide into chaos once more. Because in the end, it is in creation, where we discover how much God loves us and respects us as God's own Beloved Children. And where we can be thankful that God is God and we are not. Amen.