

June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Scripture:

Psalms 101: 1-3 & 23-32

Job 38: 1-41

“Where were you when...”

“Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said:

“Who is this that obscures my plans  
with words without knowledge?”

Brace yourself like a man;

I will question you,

and you shall answer me.

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”

So opens our passage for today from the book of Job.

Rather harsh words from a book that for the most part is rather harsh as a whole.

Job --- for the most part is all about suffering ---- Job’s name has in fact become synonymous with suffering.

If you had to sum up Job in a word --- the book and the person ----- most people would say something like --- “suffering” ---- Job is all about suffering.

Job suffered ---- other than Christ Himself --- Job suffered as much as anybody else in all of scripture.

Job suffered --- yes --- Job was patient ---- yes ---- “we still often hear the phrase --- “He or she has the patience of Job.”

But more than these --- that Job suffered and was patient --- there is a third reality to the book that far outweighs these things.

Indeed a significant part of Job --- some would even say the most significant part of Job ---- is not only far from harsh --- but is in fact glorious and beautiful.

And we'll get to that a bit later.

But first Job and his suffering.

Job suffered yes --- but Job didn't suffer quietly or piously ---- he was not pleased about it ---- and he shared this with God.

Job was vocal about his displeasure with his lot in life and he let God know about it.

And Job would not take no for an answer.

As one commentator put it ---- "Job went right to the top." ---- Job went to God with his complaints and concerns --- he protested to God and demanded and answer --- and as we see in our passage today he got one.

But it isn't just that Job suffered that makes him important to us.

It isn't that Job was vocal about his suffering that makes him so important.

It is that he suffered as so many of us suffer --- in family matters --- with personal health ---- and with material things.

Job didn't suffer from rare or flukish things --- Job didn't suffer because of outrageously odd circumstances or events.

He suffered with precisely the same things we all suffer with --- family --- health --- and material things --- things we can all relate with.

Whether we are old or young --- rich or poor --- male or female --- big or mall --- weak or strong --- over employed --- underemployed or unemployed --- whatever the case we can all relate to Job's sufferings.

But before we carry on ----- it behooves us to remember that really it is only underserved suffering that troubles us.

The person who stays up until 4 in the morning playing video games or drinking alcohol --- has much less of our sympathy when they wake up with a head ache the next morning than does the one who went to bed at 10 o'clock and tossed and turned all night only to wake up feeling not so good.

The up late people --- "Well maybe they deserve it a bit." --- the drinking too much people --- "Well maybe they deserve it a bit." --- but the one who went to bed early --- didn't drink too much didn't do anything wrong --- we feel badly that they suffer undeservedly.

The person who ate out for lunch and dinner 3 weeks straight day in and day out ----- when they complain about not having any money to go to the movies --- it's hard to be sympathetic --- but the one who was frugal and watched their money carefully only to have a tree limb crash through their living room window --- leaving them no money to go to the movies with us - ----- them we have a little sympathy for.

It's not just suffering --- it is undeserved suffering --- that troubles us most.

The suffering that bewilders us ----- and then ultimately outrages us is the one that comes from out of no where --- unannounced --- unfairly --- blind sides us --- especially when we feel we have been good ----- whatever good might mean to us.

It is this kind of --- undeserved ----- unmerited --- out of the blue --- blind sided kind of suffering that Job represents and personifies so well.

When we hear of Job's plight ----- we are sympathetic with him --- we feel for him ----- we root for him --- we feel badly for him --- we want to see him catch a break --- and come into some kind of good fortune.

Job was doing everything right --- and then suddenly everything went wrong.

And we don't like it when that happens.

And we don't like it when it happens to us or to other people --- especially those we know and love.

We don't like the world to work that way --- where suffering seems random and good fortune seems fluky and inconsistent with good behaviour and attitude.

And yet this is precisely how the world works sometimes --- at least from a strictly human and worldly perspective --- as Job so pointedly reminds us.

Job was doing everything right and then suddenly it all went wrong --- so we have sympathy for Job --- we can understand him -- and we want things to get better for him --- precisely because we could all too easily be him.

So when Job begins to ask questions of God --- to God --- we get it.

Sure --- Job's been a good boy --- he deserves to know why things went so wrong for him.

So when Job asks questions --- persistently --- passionately --- and eloquently --- we find ourselves rooting for him.

When Job refuses to take silence for an answer --- we root for him.

When Job refuses to accept clichés --- we feel for him --- and we root for him.

When Job goes right to the top --- God ----- we respect him.

When Job doesn't go about cursing God ---- trying to get rid of the problem by getting rid of God ---- we find ourselves rooting for him.

When Job doesn't try to explain away his problems --- explain suffering --- we find ourselves rooting for him.

When Job doesn't try to tell us how to avoid suffering ---- we find ourselves respecting him.

After all isn't Job justified in all that he is feeling --- he's been good --- he's done nothing wrong --- so why him?

We can all identify with Job --- we don't get angry with Job we get angry and frustrated with what happened to him but not with him as a person.

We can see ourselves in him --- we identify with him.

We've all suffered ---- and we don't particularly like it.

We get Job.

But then things change a bit.

Job changes a bit.

When Job comes to the place of admitting --- facing ---- accepting the reality that suffering is a mystery --- a mystery that must be respected --- we suddenly find that Job is no longer just an ordinary everyday guy anymore -- -- he's different --- he changes right in front of our eyes.

He separates himself from most people --- he suddenly reacts differently that he ahs so far.

As we mature in life --- as life deals us different cards and hands we begin to realize ----- that there isn't necessarily any real correlation between the amount of wrong we commit and the amount of pain we experience --- or the amount of good we do and the amount of joy and pleasure we get.

Suddenly we come to realize that suffering may not be linked to good behaviour or bad behaviour --- at least as the world defines good or bad behaviour.

We begin to realize that in Christ --- in God --- things --- including suffering are for reasons beyond us.

Job does the right things --- and he is knocked down.

Job does the best he is capable of and he is knocked down.

Job is like the person just about to reach out and receive their reward --- and then they are hit by a car or struck by lightning.

We feel for Job ---- we feel badly for Job ----- we wish Job didn't get the results that he did.

We want Job to win --- we want Job to succeed --- we want Job to recover --  
 - we want Job to prevail ---- we want Job to triumph --- because it just  
 doesn't seem right – in light of all that he has done ---- why has this  
 happened to him we ask.

We want Job to win --- and to succeed --- and to prevail --- and to triumph --  
 - because of Job --- because he's been good and he doesn't deserve all of  
 this.

He was a good guy --- he worked hard and did what was right --- it makes  
 sense for Job to succeed --- and it just isn't fair if he doesn't.

So why all of this time in the Bible spent on this guy Job ---- why do we  
 have this book all about Job and his unjust suffering.

Job addresses the mystery of suffering head on.  
 Job addresses the mystery of suffering head on.

That in and of itself makes his life ---- his experience worthy of a whole  
 book in the Bible and not just a section or story within another book.

You could say that is a faithful summary of the book of Job --- he addresses  
 the mystery of suffering head on.

And as true as that is ----- it isn't the whole truth --- or even the central truth  
 of the book that bears his name.

As Job faces --- and questions ---- and struggles with --- and works through  
 the mystery of suffering ---- he comes face to face with an even greater  
 mystery.

The mystery of God.

The mystery of God ---- that's the heart of Job ---- the mystery of God.

Suffering is only a small part of the mystery of God ----- and Job pushes  
 beyond just the suffering part of the mystery of God and sees much more ---  
 a bigger picture that goes beyond just earthly circumstances --- his earthly  
 circumstances.

The heart of Job isn't that Job addresses the mystery of suffering head on --- -- the heart is that while addressing the great mystery of suffering head on Job comes face to face with the greatest mystery of them all --- the mystery of God.

When we focus all our energies of things like suffering --- anxiety --- fear --- our struggles --- we are hardly addressing the very heart of life --- the very heart of our existence.

When we come face to face --- when we focus our lives around the mystery of God --- then and only then are we truly getting the heart of the matter of what it means to be human.

The mystery of God ---- that's the heart of the book of Job ----- that's the heart of life.

At first Job rages in his pain and suffering ----- and roars in his anxiety and fear ---- at first he protests ---- but then suddenly he becomes silent in awestruck faith before the profound mystery of God.

Suffering only ever calls our lives into question --- not God's.

And Job begins to realize when he focuses on suffering he is only focusing on himself --- and then he realizes life isn't all about him ----so he finally truly turns to God in his midst.

Suffering only ever calls our lives into question --- not God's.

And that is how we find Job in chapter 38 today ----- turning away from himself and his suffering ---- and turning towards God.

Job is silent in God's presence ----- silent in awestruck faith before the mystery of God --- as God speaks from out of a storm.

“Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm.” ---- that's how our passage begins today.

God speaking ---- Job silent.

Job is ultimately awestruck by a divine whirlwind.

And it's not at all by mistake that God speaks from out of a storm.

Often it is only when we are stuck in the mire of a storm that we are open to God's voice.

So here is Job ---- and there is God --- in the storm --- and Job is silenced --- amid his profound suffering Job is silenced by the whirlwind of God in his midst --- by the mystery of God in his midst.

Suddenly it's all about God instead of his suffering.

When was the last time you were completely awestruck by a divine action -- --- by an act of God?

Was it here in worship --- or were you too busy doing something in worship such that God didn't stand a chance of getting your attention ---- was it on the beach --- or in your yard --- or where you too busy there too such that God didn't stand a chance in getting your attention?

What will it take for God to get your attention?

Will it take a profound act of suffering --- like it did for Job?

Will God have to dole out some severe suffering in order for us to become silent in awestruck faith before God?

How easily can God get our attention -- our full attention --- when was the last time you gave God your full attention?

I mean full attention --- and I don't just mean for 5 seconds before eating or going to bed or something like that.

When was the last time you were silenced in awestruck faith before God --- like Job was?

Maybe like Job God will first have to strip something away from us before we'll give Him our full attention.

Like Job --- do we first need to suffer a bit before we can take God's majesty and glory and radiant beauty seriously?

Job is given a whole new frame of reference by God in chapter 38 today.

God is saying to Job ----- rest your case ----- put your trust --- leave your desire for vindication in my hands.

“Rest your case ---- put your trust --- leave your desire for vindication in my hands.” ----- that's what God is saying to Job.

Give it over --- rest your case --- put your trust in me --- let go Job.

And that is precisely what God is saying to each and everyone one of us here today as ---- “Rest your case ---- put your trust --- leave your desire for vindication in my hands.”

God is superior to everyone in everyway ---- including in His capacity to love and forgive --- and so we leave things in His hands --- even when --- especially when ---- we cannot understand them --- and suffering most certainly is something we cannot explain or understand.

Look at Christ and His suffering --- look at the cross ---- there is a beauty and a moment of glory and suffering beyond explanation or understanding.

God doesn't respond to Job's suffering --- God doesn't even recognize it ---- God knows that Job's suffering is short lived and passing and so He really doesn't get caught up in it at all.

From God's perspective Job is nothing but petty --- caught up in all the drama.

God has something far more beautiful --- and true and good ----- in store for Job.

And God also has something far more good and beautiful and true for Job to concern himself with.

God shows Job a whole new frame of reference in chapter 38 today.

Job's perspective is so skewed that God doesn't even stop to enter into it --- instead He paints a picture far wider and grander and more beautiful than Job could ever even imagine and then invites Job to step in and take a look.

God wants Job to move from a place of self concern --- self righteousness --- selfishness --- a place of ---- "I know I'm right." --- and --- "I deserve and explanation." --- a place all about --- me --- me ---- me --- I'm in the centre -- I'm the prime concern ----- to a place of wonder and awe.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?"

"Who shut up the sea behind doors  
when it burst forth from the womb,"

"Have you ever given orders to the morning,  
or shown the dawn its place,"

"Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea  
or walked in the recesses of the deep?"

"What is the way to the abode of light?  
And where does darkness reside?  
Can you take them to their places?"

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow  
or seen the storehouses of the hail,"

"Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons  
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?"

"Can you raise your voice to the clouds  
and cover yourself with a flood of water?  
Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?"

"Do you hunt the prey for the lioness  
and satisfy the hunger of the lions?"

"Who provides food for the raven..."

These are some of the questions and thoughts God shares with Job.

They are an invitation for Job to enter into the divine mystery.

They are an invitation to step out of the mucky mire of this world for a minute and step into a far greater beautiful eternity.

“I hurt God --- why do you let me hurt so much?”

“How can you let me hurt God?”

“Why is this happening to me God --- work is hard --- life is hard why me God? ----- Why me now God?”

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”

“Who shut up the sea behind doors...”

“Have you ever given orders to the morning...”

Why do I have to work with such tough heads God ----- why me --- can’t you just give me some better people in my life --- just make it easier for me Lord --- a little easier and a little less difficulty would be nice for once God?

“Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?”

“What is the way to the abode of light?  
And where does darkness reside?  
Can you take them to their places?”

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail,”

How come everything doesn’t go the way I want it to God ---- why doesn’t everyone bend to my wishes --- why do you let people get away with the things they get away with God?

“Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?”

“Can you raise your voice to the clouds  
and cover yourself with a flood of water?  
Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?”

Yes God speaks a bit about Job’s weaknesses and foolishness but the thrust of God’s response isn’t even really a response at all --- the thrust of what God does is an invitation --- an invitation to wonder and awe.

An invitation to wonder and awe that leads to fidelity and celebration.

An invitation to wonder and awe that is all about being overwhelmed by the goodness and benevolent mystery of the majesty of God.

Sometimes I think we have almost completely lost our ability to be overwhelmed by the goodness ---- beauty --- majesty and mystery of God.

Here in Job God reaches out a hand for Job to grab --- a hand that lifts him up out of the drama and misery of suffering so that he can see the beautiful horizon ever before him.

God reminds Job that He is still sovereign.

God reminds Job that all the earth -- all the animals of the earth --- everything that happens on the earth is in God’s hands --- and that Job has nothing to worry about.

The burden of worry --- the concern for sorting things out ---- the desire to hold so and so accountable ---- the need to solve the mystery of suffering ---- - all of these things and anything else Job might be burdened with ----- God renders pointless.

God assures Job that He is in total control of everything and that Job has nothing to worry about.

How can we get to that place too?

How can we dwell in that place where we aren’t concerned with solving the mystery of suffering -- or the mystery of suffering in our lives?

How do we get to that place of profound trust in God --- what is holding us back?

The answer ---- ourselves --- we are all that is holding us back.

God is ever before us inviting us ---- reaching a hand out to us willing and ready and longing to pull us up out of the mess that is often our lives.

Job is all bent out of shape when his focus is on the lesser things in life --- himself ---- instead of the glory of God.

Job is not concerned with the mystery of God but with the mystery of his life ---- his husband or wife --- his kids --- his job --- and so on --- earthly material secondary things.

Part of what Job reminds us that our understanding ----- of God's actions and reasons are irrelevant --- totally irrelevant.

And all that really matters is God's glory --- how we can glorify God – not how we can or cannot understand why He does what He does.

The only thing relevant in terms of our response to God --- why He does what He does --- and when He does what He does --- is are we glorifying Him?

Are we glorifying Him --- that's the question Job truly holds before us.

The book of Job ----- drives home the point that unfortunately usually when we suffer we only become more and more concerned with ourselves.

And then thankfully ----- God steps in decisively in Job --- and reminds us this is a recipe for disaster and offers us a remedy --- or more appropriately THE remedy.

Focus on god and His goodness --- try less to understand Him --- and more to simply glorify Him.

Especially when things aren't going our way.

God reminds Job that that it is not Job's calling or place or concern to understand the inner workings of the movement of God.

"But God I don't understand this."

"Why me --- why now?"

Or ----- "God I just want more details ---- make that person explain it all to me --- I want to know ---- I deserve an answer?"

News flash --- we don't deserve to know --- we don't deserve an answer.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?"

"That person did me a wrong --- why are you letting them get away with it --  
- I deserve better than this?"

And on and on we go with our self centered --- I deserve ---- what about me attitudes.

And so God responds --- we may not like it but this is how God responds ----

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?"

"Who shut up the sea behind doors  
when it burst forth from the womb,"

"Have you ever given orders to the morning..."

"Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea  
or walked in the recesses of the deep?"

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow  
or seen the storehouses of the hail,"

"Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?"

"Can you raise your voice to the clouds?  
Do you send the lightning bolts on their way?"

“Do you satisfy the hunger of the lions”

“Who provides food for the raven...”

And of course the answer to these questions is --- “No” ---- and --- “I don’t know God.”

God doesn’t do this --- pose these unanswerable because He is careless.

And God doesn’t do it to tear us down or push us away.

He doesn’t do this because He is arrogant or a bully.

He’s God --- He knows what’s best for us even if we cannot see it at the time or ever even.

God does this --- asks questions like ---

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?”

“Who shut up the sea behind doors”

“Have you ever given orders to the morning”

“Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?”

Because he loves us and can’t stand to watch us gazing at our shoes all day long.

He takes us --- us slouching down and looking through a tiny knot hole in the fence ----- and he picks us up --- and places us on a mountain top --- so that we can see all the beauty and wonder and awe of His creation like never before.

God doesn’t want us to hold things in our hands --- try to figure things out all on our own.

Instead He wants us to trust Him.

He wants us to give things over to His benevolent love and compassionate nature instead of constantly trying to hold on to them ourselves.

And the only way that will ever happen is if we become silent in awestruck faith before Him.

Suffering only ever calls our lives into question --- not God's.

Job reminds us that if we are only ever concerned with suffering --- and answers to things of this world --- we are only ever ultimately concerned with ourselves and not God.

Job 38 reminds us that God is peaking to us.

Job 38 reminds us that the tables are turned it is not about us barking things out to God.

Job 38 reminds us that God is present --- and speaking --- and cares.

And Job 38 reminds us that there is a whole new and completely different way of looking at our plight.

“Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?” --- God asks.

God invites us to find a new reference point --- a new point of departure --- - -- “Where were you when ...” ---- means start all over again – find a new beginning a new reference point for your life.

And finally Job gets it --- finally he bursts out of the bubble of shoe gazing and selfishness.

After all the nonsense of Job and his friends and the advice of fools ----- God speaks and clears things up --- and Job gets it --- see the last chapter of Job ----- Job 42 --- Job gets it.

God is grand.

God is majesty.

God is glory.

God is too wonderful for us to know as Job says in chapter 42 verse 3.

He is too big for us to understand or grasp.

And yet He concerns Himself intimately with us and with our affairs.

We were no where to be found when God first acted and yet He cares for us intimately.

All we have to do is trust.

Trust and obey.

Give way.

Give glory.

Be silenced in awestruck faith and trust and reverence and awe.

Yes it can be ugly here --- really ugly ----- but there is more far more.

To God be the glory ----- now and forever amen.