

June 20 adult sermon

38 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^[a] shouted for joy?

⁸ “Or who shut in the sea with doors

when it burst out from the womb?—

⁹ when I made the clouds its garment,

and thick darkness its swaddling band,

¹⁰ and prescribed bounds for it,

and set bars and doors,

¹¹ and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,

and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

Have you ever had your experience of something change? Maybe it was a song that you heard on a date and now you can't hear that song without thinking of that date or the person you were with at the time. Or maybe it was the smell of cookies that only your grandmother could make perfectly and after they passed that smell that once brought unmitigated joy to the heart now carries some sadness and nostalgia as well. Or maybe it was that thing you did with your dad whether it was working on a broken car in the driveway, or fishing or playing basketball whatever it was changed after you taught your own child how to hold a wrench, or bait a hook, or throw a ball. Sometimes, our experience of something changes.

Now, I admit, our text here today has long been one of my favorite texts. And I'm gonna tell you that I can't help but smile every time I read verse three, "Gird up thy loins like a man" because I heard a friend tell me a funny story about a time in Sunday School when the teacher asked a child to read this verse and it came out "Gird up thy lions like a man and answer thou me" Instead of a runner getting ready to race, I can't help but think of chariot being pulled by lions and an invitation to race God in a Roman arena Ben Hur style. This misinterpretation of the text makes me smile—but is it? Now sadly, there are no lions here in these verses, but the question I bring before you today is, What might God be inviting us to in these texts?

Many of us know the story of Job—a righteous man who lost almost everything he had, his family, his wealth, his prestige, his home, and his health and was driven out from the heart of the city into the forgotten wild places of beasts. Job likens himself to jackals, dragons, and owls with great anguish and misery. Job demands God to answer for his misfortune—essentially Job invokes a legal challenge by oath—in short, Job sues God. These verses are the beginning of God's response.

I loved these verses because as a child, I thought that they captured the most human image of God the Father. Most of the time, God the Father is kind of hidden behind the cloud of Mount Sinai, or

the disembodied voice at Jesus' Baptism saying "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased". We hear him commanding Moses to return to Egypt from the burning bush and we infer something of his compassion when he tells Moses, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings" (EX 3:7) but for me, it kind of feels removed. Like the narrator's voice at the beginning of a movie. Like the difference between telling the person, you love that you love them and demonstrating that love in the manner they most value. Here, the omnipotent creator God shows us that they also have emotions.

What emotions do you hear? I'll admit that the first emotions I hear in these verses are anger, arrogance, and pride. I am caught off guard by God here because this isn't the emotionless, perfect narrator of the universe telling someone to do something. It isn't God stating that (he/she/ze/they) were going to do something. This is God talking back to Job. My childlike self thinks, "Ohh, God's gonna get in trouble!! Because I was taught that anger, arrogance, pride, and especially talking back were all things that I shouldn't do. What's going on here?"

As a hospital chaplain CPE resident, I encounter many different emotions. I am present to some people experiencing the absolute worst day of their life. I have witnessed the joy of family surrounding a life well-lived and the lonely sorrow of those forgotten. When I enter into a room, one of the things I aspire to do is to be a companion to the person walking among these emotional landscapes. Sometimes, this really powerful, deep thing called empathy happens.

Empathy isn't just seeing responding to a sad Facebook post saying, "that sucks" and walking away. Empathy requires you to really listen, hear, be close to and understand. It doesn't mean getting overwhelmed by another's emotions, but it does require us to be near and to accept feeling—to accept our own and another's humanness.

Job does a very brave thing. He brings all of his anger, his sorrow, his pride of his own righteousness and hurls it at God. He doesn't contain himself to only the emotions that are "proper" the accepted theologies his friends urges. His grief is so big that everything he knows is insufficient to hold it. Job unravels and bears everything before God. He asks God the difficult questions. The same questions we all ask when our whole world ends like, "Why did this happen? How could you who are supposed to be all-powerful, let my children die? Why couldn't it have been me? or Why didn't it happen to me?" Job doesn't contain himself to Psa. 23 "the Lord is my Shepard" or content himself with statements like "God is in control" or the words of "hope, faith, or trust." His anguish is too big, too overwhelming, too raw and so he brings it all to the God he may not even be sure is even there. He pours out all of his heart before God.

And the most amazing thing in all of scripture is that God shows up. God draws near to Job and speaks to him from out of a flurry whirlwind. God doesn't just speak with a dispassionate voice but shows that they also can feel emotions and empathizes with Job. It is significant that these verses begin one of the longest passages we have in scripture which is attributed to the All-powerful, Creator, Father God of the trinity. That God draws near to Job and by extension draws near to us.

In doing so, I believe God is telling us that it is ok to bring our full selves to God—even the difficult emotions that I struggle with like anger, grief, sorrow, loss—I even struggle with positive emotions sometimes like happiness and joy. My God is big enough to hold all of me. All of my doubts, fears, questions, and insecurities. In fact, I would argue that it is in these moments when we are most human, most vulnerable, that the Divine is nearest. Our God is big enough to hold all of us.

A few weeks ago, I was listening to a podcast from one of my favorite preachers, Nadia Boltz-Weber. She challenged and changed my experience of a classic story of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus gets

into a boat with his twelve disciples and then, like I sometimes do, falls asleep in the weirdest places. Jesus falls asleep in the boat and a storm rushes in. His disciples, no strangers on the water, are so afraid that they think their life is over. They are all going to drown. They wake Jesus up. He says "Peace, be still" and the wind and waves still. What is the next thing you hear? "Where is your faith?" Nadia Boltz-Weber asks if instead of an accusation, Jesus' tone here is an invitation. She has changed how I experience this classic story from the Gospels. Instead of the focus being upon how the disciples fail to measure up, what if the focus is on building a relationship with the Divinity that will outlast the short time they have with Jesus in person?

As I revisit our text here in Job, I find myself asking the same questions. What if the Almighty, Creator God isn't an accusation but an invitation? What if by drawing near to Job, not just in his words, but also in his emotional language, what if God is inviting Job to draw near to the conductor of stars and angels, to the tailor of sea and sky to the one who formed the blueprint of the whole universe. What if God answers Job's deepest, hardest questions by just being present. What if in response to Job's outpouring of his soul, God responds with some of his own?

So now, instead of only hearing anger in God's voice, I now hear empathy and compassion. Instead of only noticing the notes of arrogance and pride, I consider the Creator God that humbles themselves from the splendors of the world to show up and spend a while talking to a man in pain. Instead of hearing accusation of my own shortcomings and faults, I hear an invitation to come up and draw near to God—and yes, if offered, I will happily ride the chariot with lions and race a few laps with God. 😊

This is the heart of the invitation I now hear in Job 38.

This is the God that sent his only begotten son, Jesus to humanity and named him "Emmanuel" God with us. God sent his son to fall asleep in a boat and invite us to faith, while also showing us that it is more than ok to bring our deepest doubt, our hardest questions, and our fullest emotional selves before God. This is the Jesus who would experience all of humanity, die on a cross and rise again so that we may draw near to our Creator.

This is the heart of Father passed down to Jesus Christ that is spoken of in Hebrews 4 "14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested[d] as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us, therefore, approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

May we all hear the heart of God the Father inviting us to what we need today. Amen.