

Sunday, October 27, 2024 Job 42:1-6 "The Stories We Tell About God"

In reading the Book of Job, it is challenging to consider which thread of the book the reader is supposed to follow to a conclusion about God. Does God care what we think as we obey?

God doesn't seem to come out well in Job. God's humility in allowing such a book in Scripture may lead us to live more freely and give up trying to justify ourselves. Job minds his own business but is caught up in something he doesn't understand. God appears to allow experiments with human life. In response to the pleading of an anguished Job, God appears to be able only to talk about himself and his skill and authority in creation. God restores the fortunes of Job as if the suffering and bereavement Job has experienced can be left behind with new children and new acquisitions and new position.

On the most basic level, the wisdom of the Book of Job says that bad things can happen to a good person, but in the end the good person is restored to wealth and honor. Yet we know this restoration does not always happen in this life, as in the violent death of God's Holy Son.

God's power and majesty are exponentially above human understanding and ability.

We see that not everything earnest people, the friends, say to try to honor God is meaningful and true. A vast majority of religious teaching is exactly what the three friends say in Job.

God doesn't address Job's questions. God challenges Job with God's power and skill in creation. God tells Job to stand up and take himself and God seriously, to be responsible for his interactions with God. But does God mean for the reader to conclude that that Job should stop fighting God, or that he should never stop fighting with God, never stop holding God responsible for the world? What should the reader think of human freedom, human responsibility? Is a person's life only in the hands of divine destiny?

Well, there are some things that are very clear from the text we read this morning?

God is sovereign.

God hears the words of humans.

God speaks.

God questions humans and expects a response.

Knowing something about God and encountering God are different.

God is always in the right.

A faithful person repents in any encounter with God.

Can you live within these guidelines? Is it enough for you? Is your heart cleansed and obedient as you read Job's words? What will it take for this to be something you receive joyfully? What do you think you are waiting for to be able to be quiet and humble before God?

The Book of Job is in the canon of the Bible and we must listen to it. It is not the only voice in the Bible, and we must hear it in context. Two parables of Jesus come to mind.

In Matthew 21:28-32, two sons are told by their father to go work in the vineyard that day. The oldest flatly refused, but later came around and went as asked. The other son courteously agreed to go, but never actually went to work. Jesus asked, "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" and the disciples answered, "The first." This is a powerful story, showing that God takes a long view of people's lives and waits for those who are resistant to God's Word to change. Also, God is not deceived by pious intentions or helpful words, but sees our actual life.

In Matthew 25:14-30, a man going on a journey gives his servants something to work with while he is gone. The one with 5 talents doubles his investment. The one with 2 talents works his money into 4. So we expect that the man entrusted with 1 talent will also find a way to use the money profitably. But no, that man has a crabbled story to tell about who God is. *"Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground."* This man feels relieved that he has not risked the loss what God gave him, so he can return it to God intact. This parable strikes my heart with the challenge of living faithfully during a time of God's seeming absence, as Job did. A suspicious, resentful heart against God keeps a person from joyfully wheeling and dealing with all the God has given them. Perhaps Job's friends also lived in fearfulness and calculation of cutting losses.

God's presence and our lives are in a bigger context than we can imagine. Our struggles, fears and doubts do not fit neatly together yet. God seems to honor the person who responds, questions, calls out, challenges God as a good and worthy God beyond our understanding. God expects people to honor and trust him, without pretending that we can understand or even agree with God. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, and the Syro-Phoenician woman are a few of the people that God allowed to sharply argue with him when they were distressed.

We know where this is going. In the end, we will bow with humility and repentance before God. Job says it matters how we get there. God can hear us grumbling and wheezing and doubting and yelling. God won't give us the answers that we think we can't live without, but God will give us what we need. The story we tell about God has to just forget being righteous in

God's sight, and focus on who God is and living with all that God has put into our hearts and lives