

"God Answers"

Psalm 104: 1-9, 24-35

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

Sermon text: Job 38: 1-7, 34-41 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

38:2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

38:3 Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

38:5 Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

38:6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone

38:7 when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

38:34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?

38:35 Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?

38:36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?

38:37 Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

38:38 when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together?

38:39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

38:40 when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?

38:41 Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

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Even though Job is a favorite of many people, including me, *God's* answer to Job, as we heard in the text, can be disconcerting. *God's* response to Job can challenge the relationship we want to have with God. It points out to us how we *can* think about *God's* behavior.

We don't like the idea, in general, that our heartfelt concerns and the direct questions as to why things happen would be simply ignored; and we would basically be told, apparently heartlessly, by God to grow up, buck up, and we be put in a very small place somewhere. *God's* reply to Job in the text we just heard could sound just like that to some. But let's put the text in another viewpoint.

Last week we heard Job saying, "Oh that I knew where I might find him . . . I would lay my case before him . . . (and) I would learn what he would answer me . . ." If this were a modern day version we would probably see the side to side head movement and index finger pointing that is so popular . . . (repeat using gesture).

Slightly cocky, but being fair to Job and those of us who have experienced Job moments, this would be a natural reaction to frustration. We *need* to have those moments of apparent righteous anger for our *own* sense of self at times. It gives us moments of strength to help us get through the rough times, even if it is perhaps not wholly correct. Rage suppressed can lead to depression, so rage on if need be! God can handle it!

But then, what invariably happens when we respond to something in that matter, in the heat of frustration and anger, is that we find out in short order that there was some perspective that we missed out on and we often end up being more or less embarrassed about our behavior; or as Steve's Opa would say (index finger and thumb of right hand indicating about 2 inches) "So small - *with* hat!"

This morning's text is the moment of revelation for Job - that time when God finally answers him, and Job is put in his place. And being put in your place can be belittling, when one is made to feel small, but it can also be a relief! One may think, "Finally a strong voice to respond to my strong emotions - something I can snuggle into and realize that there is a power greater than me."

The reality of this text is that even though God finally answers Job, Job's problems aren't changed yet. Nothing has been resolved on a material level. Job "only" receives a response from God that puts him in his place. His children aren't returned miraculously to him, his wife, his home, his goods, his health - nothing is changed yet.

I won't go into details about how Job reacts to this revelation, because that is next week's text, but what we have before us is the truth that *God answers us* - God *does* respond to our needs, maybe not exactly when and how we would like it - but in an altogether fulfilling matter, if we can carry the burden for a while.

The knowledge that God is responding can give us strength and hope and power beyond the pain of the loss we are dealing with. Those moments of connection with God are as if we are saying to ourselves, "Who cares about replacing the losses, *God* knows me, *God* loves me, *God* cares for *me*, and *that* makes my life worthwhile." Being put in our place as children of the all knowing, all powerful, all present God gives us a perspective and a security that surpasses all man made mores.

God speaks to Job here in his great majesty and says basically, as Barbara Lang's sign on her refrigerator says, "Yes there is a God, and you are not him". God lists off all the things he has done, and puts Job's concerns in the proper perspective, offering Job, and us, an opportunity to release our concerns and know that we are, *thankfully not* in charge.

You know, I have been concerned lately that far too often I have, in my sermons, placed a great deal of responsibility on our shoulders with an emphasis on *our* responsibility to stand up to injustice and to take action. And it *is* important for Christians to do this. We have been called to take up our cross and follow Jesus, to feed his sheep and visit the sick and infirmed, among other things. But there are times when *we* are in need and searching for God, and it is those times that we need to know that God *is* there for us and we *will* one day, if we are observant long enough, *hear* God's answer to our calls.

That is the whole point of the Job Book, bad things happen, and we don't know why, but God *is there*, whether we know it or not, and we *will*, one day; either know it clearly, or we will have really strong hints - that God is a force that is overwhelmingly majestic and powerful. God *does* answer, and God is still creating in our lives as well as all over the universe.

God responds to Job as a voice from the whirlwind - reminiscent of so many references to whirlwind appearances of God - at least six different places in the Bible refer to God in the whirlwind. When we are suffering, doesn't it feel sometimes like our minds are in a whirlwind - dashing from one concern to another possibility to a wish that we would know clearly what we are to do, and then we know, but we don't and our lives feel like they are spinning out of control? And God comes to us in that 'whirlwind' and becomes the eye of the storm, the calmness and the centeredness.

He questions Job's questions and put Job into the scheme of all of life. So in the proper perspective, Job's life seems trivial. I am reminded of a woman in the last church I served while in seminary - my 'home' church of Central Christian Church in Lexington Kentucky. She was the wife of a wealthy man who was a loving husband, and she had all the possibilities one can have as the result of so much money. I found myself being jealous of her, until I got to know her. She suffered miserably from depression. It was almost as if when anyone would come into the room she would cower away and apologize for her

very existence. Then she started to volunteer for various parts of the church's outreach to others and she was at the church office often answering phones, as well.

I spoke to her once and she shared with me how vital she found it, for her own mental health, to be a part of other people's lives, because her problems seemed smaller, and the hope of being able to deal with her issues grew, when she could compare it to God's amazing work with other people. It is sometimes easier to see God's hand in the lives of others than in your own. And sometimes we can see God's hand in our lives better through comparison with *other's* lives. It is the idea, "I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet."

God answers Job. God answers us. And when we sense this we can finally relax. We can breath easier, we can feel safe again and know that we can start anew building our lives back up. Whatever we have lost, we *will* gain something in its place - be it sensitivity, awareness, a truth, a cause or a conviction. We can only overcome our pain and losses when we know that we are part of God - he is not part of us. He is the majestic power of life itself - of creativity and truth and growth, and we are subordinate to that, as it should be. Amen