

Sunday May 15, 2022
Lesson 9: In Awesome Wonder
Scripture: Job 38: 4-11

Context:

As we continue in the season of Easter, we learn how to take the steps as disciples of Jesus and to learn of practices to help us draw closer to God and respond in our daily lives. Today's lesson focuses on the book of Job and the humility he exhibits in recognizing his place in God's creation. We are reminded of our human finitude as well as the infinity of God.

The book of Job is found in the Old Testament and is known for its focus upon the issues surrounding theodicy (God's will), and human suffering. The book's title comes from the protagonist of the narrative, a man named Job. The beginning of the book opens giving his background; he is a man who is extraordinarily blessed and prosperous, upright, and pious leading to the question of "Why is he these things?"¹ What follows is an account of both the heavens and earth colliding to answer the question, or at least muse what happens when the blessed and prosperous man is faced with adversity. Does he remain faithful and pious? Or is there a link between righteousness and blessing?

As the book explores these questions with the character Job at the center, there are several rhetorical features used to push the narrative. First, there is irony as the divine speeches provide a look into how humans process God and then miss the mark.² Secondly, there are questions of existential being as Job processes what all humans must go through as being alive leads to personal growth and becoming.³ These existential questions are also paired with questions about God. Who is God and how does God interact with humanity? Job seeks to understand this question and find his place during life especially as he deals with all the negative things which seems to have come upon him seemingly out of nowhere.

Only at the end of the book, including part of the passage in today's lesson, does there come any resolution and answer to the questions. God responds to the questions of Job in a series of speeches which are rhetorical questions. God asks Job a question and then provides the answer. It is time for Job to listen and to navigate the questions he himself has asked of God.

God makes clear to Job of how he does not know all things, evident in the fact of how Job was not there when God made creation. God is the one who sees how all things work in form and function. While Job may have his questions, his anger, and his doubt, God is the one who knows the true limits and boundaries to the earth. One only has to look to creation to see not even the wisest or knowledgeable of us knows how everything works and there are things which God truly only knows. God knows the bounds of the earth, the depths of the sea, and the mysteries only God can know. Humanity is reminded of the limit even to our discoveries and ways of knowing how the world works.

¹ Janzen, J. Gerald. "Job," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 18.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

Application

In the past several weeks, we have talked about how to make our mark in the Christian faith as well as discovering the practices which lead us closer to God. Several times we have brought up the concept of stewardship, of how to take care of what God has given us and to be responsible in preserving and honoring what God has placed in front of us. As we read the text in Job, we are reminded of how God made creation and we are to be humbled and encouraged to honor creation with how we use our resources.

There is a cautionary tale here as we read this text. God is giving us a clue to our limits, both in how we respond to nature and even unto how we understand our place in the world. Humans are not God and never will be God.

Firstly, let us look to nature and how we engage with the world around us. Ask any farmer or conservationist and they will tell you the land is a gift. Yet the land is also to be respected. If you abuse the soil, or destroy the woods, you feel the effects in various ways. Sometimes, land cannot produce food again if it is damaged or cultivated improperly. Once wood is cut down, it is down and cannot be reproduced overnight. God made limits for the land, as well as rules by which it is to be preserved and honored for future use.

Secondly, there is the reminder in this text of the humility humans are to cultivate and reflect upon as we go through life. Whether it is dealing with land, the property we use, or even how we order our relationships in the work or personal world, we learn there are limits to our actions. When we are arrogant or haughty, believing we know all or how our needs reign supreme, we can learn the hard way on how we are not God.

As we reflect on our text, it may not be necessarily fair to assert Job believes is haughty in his dialogue with God. If anything, as I've read this response, I have noticed the proximity of God's speech to the speeches of Job's friends. They seem to have figured out pain and suffering, reminding Job of his place in a way which deems them as superior. There is the attempt to explain his pain and suffering because of sin or lack of faith. In their failing as friends, they also fail to understand God.

In our current charged atmosphere in both political and ecclesial sectors, we see the dangers of believing in our superiority and our attempt to dominate others thinking we know of God's ways more than others. While often time there is truth amidst the points people make and believe, they become lost when people become objects, and property or land become just tools to trade and give away or diminish. We lose sight of how all things are connected to God's creation.

I once saw a meme which floated among my church members which pointed to a truth we all occasionally forget: "You will never look into the eyes of someone whom God does not love." What words to remind us as we attack or smear others of how we are all intimately tied to one another and before we attack, slander, or try to push down, we are treading on dangerous waters. We are telling the Lord God we know what's best and how some of God's creation does not deserve to be treated with honor and respect.

The same goes for land and property. The land is God's and we would do best to respect it in the various ways whether it's listening to conservationists to keeping our environment clean. When it comes to property, we are reminded to damage or take from others for our benefit leads to nothing but more pain and more suffering in this world. And as God points out in God's speech to Job, there are repercussions when we think we know it all and do not respect the role of our God in creation and use God's creation as bargaining chips in life.

How do you honor creation? Why do you think humility is a central virtue in the Christian faith? What does good stewardship and humility look like in how we treat the land, property, and personal relationships? How can you look upon others you do not like or love and see how God loves them? Who are people who you look towards to guide you in good stewardship?

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