

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Christ's name we pray. Amen

Last week we had an introduction to Job the book and Job the person. This morning we are introduced to Job's friends, who, when hearing the news, all come to be with him in his pain. In one of the most beautiful scenes in the story, they sit with him in silence for 7 days. They say nothing, they do nothing, they are simply present with him. It's an incredible act of wisdom to show Job that his is not alone.

When Job finally says something, the conversation with his friends gets a bit messy. Their dialogue takes up most of the book, as the friends share their views, and Job responds to each of them in turn. If you've read some of Job on your own, you know that while they are compassionate about his suffering, Job's friends are convinced that he's done something to offend God. Eliphaz goes on to ask, "Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?" It is in this conversation that the book develops: they wonder together, why is this happening? Job is a good person, an idealized version of the best person, in fact, and he is suffering. Why is even the best person is not exempt from human suffering? We hear Eliphaz ask Job: did you think you were immune to such things? You've helped so many people and yet here you are, the one suffering, and you cannot manage.

We all know it's a different experience to be the one suffering, to be the vulnerable one, to wonder what brought this on, to declare, "I don't want to be in this situation; I don't want to be having this experience! God take this away!"

In fact, Job breaks the 7 -day silence by cursing the day he was born . . . he prays that he was never conceived, that God would have kept that day in darkness . . . he wishes he was not a part of creation. The text emphasizes that Job never curses God directly, but does he not curse God's own work? How much room God gives us to be human in our relationship with God and creation? Deep in the experience of his own suffering, Job ventures into this gray area. It will be many chapters before God responds to Job . . . one

wonders about God's role in the meantime . . . does God hold space for Job and his friends to grieve, to wrestle, to express their ideas and feelings? Does God wait for them to be ready to hear?

This is a big theological question: what is God's relationship to us? Job was going along, living what he thought was a good life, and then finds himself in this state of loss and grief – he wonders what is going on and where is God in the midst of it all? I wonder how many of us resonate with that perspective. We try to be the best people we can, live the best we know how, be good members of our community. We may not be as squeaky clean as Job, but we're all doing our best.

We're living in a time where the very concept of a good life is being challenged. Our changing climate is forcing our culture to question the way we do things and evaluate the concept of good. As we talked about last week, at the core, is our very theology of creation . . . We will see toward the end of Job how he comes to realize that it isn't enough to be a good member of his community. God broadens Job's focus from himself to all of creation, so he can see the expansiveness of which he is a part, and calls him called to live as such.

What does it actually take for us as individuals and as a culture to shift to a cosmos-centered theology? What does it look like for me to live a life consistent with this value? I find myself torn . . . there are a lot of things about my way of life that I'm attached to, and I feel resistant and scared to explore at what "different" might actually look like. Then I wonder about living cosmos-centered or as a part of creation, and I feel drawn in. I wonder if you do too.

The climate isn't changing in the same dramatic ways here that it is in other parts of the world. Still, the effects are persistent; with every dry hot, dry summer, we lose more trees and our aquifers continue to lose water. When I think about the local and global effects of climate change, I feel overwhelmed and sad and scared, and try to keep it at bay until the busyness of life or the fall rain distracts me. It's a real discipline to confront ourselves and each other with a situation to which we must respond, yet shakes the foundation of our very existence.

I think this discipline must include allowing ourselves to feel the emotions that accompany our reality. None of us want to be in this situation; none of us want to feel this vulnerability; no one wants the climate

to be uninhabitable for generations to come. And it's extremely humbling to face the truth that while we were being good people, our culture caused this. There is just no getting around it. We can blame those who came before us, but the only real way to hold them accountable is to look deep into their assumptions and motivations, and ask, is this the best way; who does this benefit; and challenge ourselves to ask: 'what impact does my choices have on the rest of creation?' . . . and how does that ultimately impact me? Eric Boulton often says, you take care of the farm and it takes care of you.

I think about Job sitting in silence for a week. I think about him trying to work out where he went wrong, going back through his life and his choices, trying to figure out where his actions broke down. I think about him lashing out in anger. Yeah, I can relate to that. It's really uncomfortable; I know I have big feelings about it all inside of me. I love that the poet who gave us Job, wrestled with Job's feelings for over 35 chapters. There are so many facets to his pain, there are so many lenses through which Job looks. He gets lost in his experience . . . I think to really wrestle with something, to really go there, we have to lose our grip on it for a little while. Even Jesus entered darkness before experiencing newness of life . . . in fact, entering darkness was essential . . . is essential. This stuff is difficult to think about, difficult to face; we want to jump right to solutions and opportunities . . . but we can't really get there until we take the hand of Jesus and let him lead us into the darkness. It's not about being good or bad . . . it's about facing what's happening and allowing ourselves to receive the grace that comes with telling ourselves (and God) the truth. There is life waiting for us on the other side with a new vision. In the mean time I believe God holds space for us to find our way.

In the words of Mary Oliver:

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

With new eyes on creation, where will our imaginations take us, where will we find ourselves in the family of things?