

Karen Hollis | October 24, 2021

Job 31:4-8, 33-40 | Job 38:1-21 | Job 40:25-27; 41:1-10

Pentecost 22

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

Is it too on the nose today to say God spoke out of the whirlwind? When the wind blows through, we certainly all pay attention and everyone gets ready. We're particularly sensitive to wind on Gabe, but this region doesn't experience near the devastation that our neighbours do to the south. The earth responds with authenticity to changing conditions . . . and one response is hurricanes. Warming ocean temperatures are fuel for these massive storms, so we are seeing them more frequently and more intensely than in years past. If the wind is a messenger, what news does it bring? What is God speaking on the wind? In the book of Job, God speaks from the whirlwind and asserts God's place as the author of creation . . . God asserts God's place as the author of creation. Before we look at what God says, let's orient ourselves again to Job's world.

The people around Job believe that you only suffer if you've done something to deserve it, but Job, believing with every fiber of his being that he is innocent, engages in this laboured dialogue with his friends to express his agony. In the conclusion of this dialogue, to prove his innocence, he makes a series of oaths. In the Hebrew tradition the pattern usually looks like this: one makes a statement like "if I have overlooked the poor . . ." as if to finish the statement with something like, "then let me go without food." But the Hebrew oath is left incomplete, just in case. It's a way of saying, I am so confident in my conduct, I will welcome the consequences . . . but because we are human and have finite perceptions and understandings, the oath is left incomplete, and therefore ambiguous. For example, "If I harmed another in any way . . ." and the statement is left incomplete. You get the idea.

Then comes Job . . . Job is so certain of his innocence that he completes the statements . . . each and every statement. Job cries out:

If my soil has cried out against me,
and together its furrows wept,

If I ate its yield without payment,
and drove its owners to despair,
instead of wheat let nettles grow,
and instead of barley, stinkweed.

He is so sure he's blameless, he is willing verbalize that he will grow weeds, on which he surely cannot survive. As I've said before, Job is laser focused on his own world and his own suffering. He is deeply focused on proving his innocence and cannot see beyond it.

God has been listening. God hears Job in his suffering, God hears Job's experience. God hears all of the struggle and anger and anguish, and God has been present with it all. Here, at the end of Job, God finally speaks, and Job hears God in the wind. As we turn to God's words, I invite us to recall that when Job breaks his own silence at the beginning of the book, he speaks only of darkness and curses the day he was born.

"Annul the day that I was born," he says.

"and the night that said, "A man is conceived."

That day, let it be darkness.

Let God above not seek it out,"

Now God responds image by image to Job's first speech.

"Who hedged the sea with double doors,
when it gushed forth from the womb?

When I made cloud its clothing,
and thick mist its swaddling bands?

Where is the way that light dwells,
and darkness, where is its place?"

I imagine Job startled that God's response could be so personal, that God could respond directly to Job's own words. Perhaps he is frightened or disoriented by this affirmation of life. Perhaps for a while he loses the ground beneath him. While these words are personal, they don't answer the question, why? They do something far more important. God's words seek to challenge and deconstruct Job's beliefs, his world view, his particular response to suffering. They challenge Job to think bigger and see beyond the darkness to God's world, where darkness is in relationship with the light. Perhaps the very realization knocks the wind out of him as he watches the hedges of his world fall away.

When God began to create heaven and earth, the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, "Let there be light."¹ In Babylonian and Mesopotamian myths, the personification of those dark waters described in Genesis 1 is a monster called Leviathan, who is referenced several times in Job, and whose description we heard this morning. It's a kind of mythical creature, whose physique and mythology are similar to a crocodile. They are associated with the feminine, with birth and life, but also chaos and death . . . but also knowledge that culminates in death and is renewed with new life.² The watery chaos-dragon of old is perhaps more complex than any of us realize. "And his eyes are like the eyelids of dawn."³

Leviathan, and everything the creature represents, is part of God's creation. God made this world to evolve and renew. What does that say about God? What is the wisdom of light and dark in relationship? Is there a creative tension there that serves us well beyond our understanding? As Walter Brueggemann says, "God is beyond us . . . for us and beyond us."⁴ "Job learns that while the world may not be to his liking, the world will hold at its centre because it is God's world."⁵

¹ Genesis 1:1, Alter.

² Ted Andrews. "Animal Speak"

³ Job 41

⁴ Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth.

⁵ Brueggemann, Finally Comes the Poet, 61-2.

The world will hold at its centre for us, as well. Our fear and anguish are real, the data is real, our drive to fix the problems that plague us is also real. A few weeks ago I quoted Sallie McFague out of her book – and I love this title - A New Climate for Theology. I love the title because it immediately causes me to think differently about the issue. A New Climate for Theology . . . I wonder what the invitations are in this time to approach the world differently . . . to broaden our focus . . . reorient our theological lens. We can know a lot of things; knowledge is always unfolding within and around us . . . however we will always have a human, and therefore limited view . . . and we cannot know what the future will bring.

As we experience the wind blowing through our world . . . perhaps we too will hear the voice of God asserting God's place as the author of creation. Perhaps we will need a reminder of just how far God is beyond us, and how God serves us far beyond our human understanding, and loves us fiercely. Let us be attentive to the wind and listen for the voice of the One who will continue to offer us new life, no matter what the future brings.