

*Lord God, who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of all our fears, all our trials, all our worries. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this hour and may we lean into your everlasting arms of love, secure that we are yours, now and always. ... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

Our theme continues these next few weeks as UNRAVELING...seeking God when our plans fall apart. Each week we spend time looking at our lives in partnership with a biblical narrative where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans and our lives... and weaving us into something new.

The scripture read by Edie today is from the book of Job. There's a lot to be understood about the context of this 'hymn to wisdom'. Let's begin here to see how Job's life has unraveled and what new thing is revealed.

A brief background of the book of Job is this: First and foremost, Job is a folktale. It is a style of writing that is ancient and myth-like. It has roots in Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian tales of righteous sufferers which predate the bible. The entire book is like the Bible in a conversation with itself. The purpose seems to be to challenge simple truths that are more like illusions humanity creates about God that are not true to God's nature. In the words of James Howell, reading Job will 'shatter illusions you harbor about God, many of which you think you learned from scripture itself.'<sup>1</sup> The writing reveals the heart of God and the harsh realities of life on earth. Howell goes on to state, 'Job takes us far beyond the proverbial 'patience of Job' (never occurs in the book!) and the simplistic version of a just, rewarding, and punishing God, and toward the God to whom Jesus cried out on the cross.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Howell, James C. Job, in Wesley One Volume Commentary, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020. 280.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The folktale begins like many tall tales, ‘there once was a man’ who is from a far off place, the land of Uz. This should be a clue that this is more of a parable than a story of fact. Job is presented as a rich and righteous man who is blessed.

Secondly, the God that is portrayed is NOT the God we know... bragging and boasting and proud of his man Job. This god reacts to a snarky comment from the adversary who seeks to find fault. Just a quick note, the adversary is more like a prosecuting attorney at a trial. A wager is proposed to see how devoted Job will be if all the blessing of life are taken away. The adversary wagers that Job will give up on God. So the god in this story agrees, with the stipulation that no harm come to Job himself. To be clear... this is not a god of love. Thus, we know this is NOT the God we serve.

In short, everything Job holds dear—his property, his family, his wealth, his physical health—has been taken from him. Reduced to suffering and misery, Job laments his circumstances and tries to make sense of what has happened to him. Job shrieks from his harrowing experiences, rails against God and his understanding of God. Ultimately, God does not mind. God welcomes Job’s accusations and critique. After all, isn’t that what people do when they are engaged and connected to each other... have dialogue, work through problems, seek understanding and reconciliation?

In the middle of Job’s trials and complaint appears Chapter 28, a poetic interlude on Wisdom. In the passage Edie read for us today, we are reminded that God’s wisdom is beyond human understanding. In fact, the question is ‘where can wisdom be found? (v20). God of course knows, for wisdom is in God. For humanity, we can only seek wisdom in deep connection with God, in reverence and awe.

Now, let’s look at what’s unraveling in this poem... what’s being untangled... what mystery is being revealed... and ask how should this inform our lives?

There are two verses that served as ‘speedbumps’ in my reading and hearing of this text. Maybe they stood out to you, too.

Verse 22 says, *Destruction<sup>[c]</sup> and Death have said, “We’ve heard a report of her.”* When I hear that, I pause and think how it is through death, sufferings, and

losses...the things that are so difficult to handle... how close we are to God, lean into God, seek and cry out to God... craving God's presence with us.

When I imagine what this has been like in scripture, Paul writes about it to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:18-21) as God's wisdom is not the wisdom of the world, but of Christ crucified.

What about in my life... how do the challenges of death & loss speak into my life? For example...When I had a disagreement with my boss and was re-assigned to a new location... or when I didn't receive the passing grade everyone told me I would receive... or when it was so very hard to get up and go to work that it was the hardest thing I did each day... or when my beloved grandpop died... and when my grandmom died... or when my 'forever' relationship died... or when test results meant a need for a biopsy...

And what about the experiences of people I treasure as we wrestle to understand the illness & death of a child, the difficulties that living anxiety & panic attacks bring... a miscarriage, a divorce, a seemingly impromptu decision to move across the country, the challenge in finding a new job, ... not to mention the wider view of difficulties in our nation in political division, racial injustice, and blatant falsehoods and disrespect spewed from leaders of our country?

We too, like Job ask & shout, where are you God? How can this be? Teach us...that we may be wise!

Which leads me to the second speedbump, the final verse 28, "Look, the fear of the LORD is wisdom; turning from evil is understanding."

This verse challenges everything I thought I knew about God... do good and all will be well. This verse pushes me to unravel a theology of prosperity ...those material blessings of health and possessions and money are from God. Rather, I have a new, deeper understanding that being blessed is a matter of nearness to God.

How does this theological struggle speak into our lives? How does the suffering we experience in life lead us to a deeper relationship with God and lead us to recognize hope for the future?

The answer found in the book of Job is in the reframing of who God is...that God is love; God is near; and there is no one like our God. God's faithfulness is steadfast and without fail. The world has harshness, death and loss, yet God is present in the midst of these heartaches. Suffering is not foreign to God, in fact.

Even God grieves the effects of evil and injustices. That is why God is found at the foot of the cross.

Elie Wiesel, who endured the atrocious conditions of Auschwitz and survived, reflected that 'Job is our contemporary'; that we are in this fable and Job is in our world. Wiesel stated that Job could be 'seen on every road in Europe'<sup>3</sup>.

Hear is the good news in this fable story...beginning with chapter 38, the Lord responds to Job. God is present, God hears, God has not forgotten, God is faithful. God speaks to Job the truth of the matter of life in this world... 'Gird up your loins' (prepare yourself for a long journey). Friends, as we know, this journey isn't easy, it is filled with twists and turns, bumps and bruises, but the best of it is... we are not alone for God is with us!

Amen.

Do Prayers of people, then,

Go to Prayer of  
Confession led by Liturgist

Lord's Prayer

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.