

Crusts of Hearsay; Crumbs of Rumor
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“Why do you confuse the issue? Why do you talk without knowing what you are talking about?”

Now, there’s a question. And, yet, don’t expect an answer from God for Job that goes much beyond that in the form of an answer!

Poor job, you remember the story of his trials and illnesses, thrust upon him by God to prove to the spirit of temptation, referred to as Satan, that Job would be faithful to God – even under extreme duress?

Chastised by his friends, abandoned by his wife, sickened, crippled, beset by calamity Job will not give up his faith in God – in fact, knowing that he has done no wrong – he refuses to attribute any of his calamities to God. He refuses to curse God – such an outcome, had it happened, would have given the victory of the test to God’s adversary.

In this morning’s readings, we enter into an amazing response to Job’s laments over why these things have happened to him – a response by a God who reminds Job just who God is. Considered one of the most profound of biblical passages by many, there is no answer for why Job suffers – just a reminder that Job is not God, and God’s ways are beyond Job and humankind’s understanding.

Job is in the third book of the Tanakh – the Hebrew Bible, know as “Kethuvim” also referred to simply as the “Hagiographa” or “Writings.” We refer to much in this section as being part of the “wisdom writings” of the Bible – “most of which read like common sense sayings, reflections about the world, God, and the place of human beings in God’s world.”¹

The date of this book is not fixed, with some attributing it to a time as early as Moses. In fact, the Talmud states that it was written by Moses. No one living is sure.

What we do know is that it was written during an extended time of great transition and movement in the Hebrew world; a time of building and instructing a nation to honor their God; to grow and multiply; to not be swayed by idols, other gods, false religions and more.

It was a time when God was in their consciousness and everywhere else. God was embedded and threaded into their lives.

Yet, it appears that even then, even during a time when the hand of God was seen everywhere – there were those who still more than questioned why things happened; why did calamity befall good and decent people?

Job seems to have been written to respond to what might have been a growing unrest; a tendency by some to reject a God who did not seem to abide by the rules: "...if I do something good, if I lead a decent life, why am I being punished. My enemies, not I should be punished."

God's answer through the writer reminds me of growing up, when I would ask a question about why I couldn't get my own way about whatever. The second and third most frustrating answers I got were – "Because."

"Why," I would demand or whine depending on how secure I felt at the moment.

"Because I said so!"

"Aaaargh!"

"Now, finish your homework!"

"Aaaargh!"

The first most frustrating answer was "the mystery" response. This is the one I got from my early teachers in parochial school. "Sister," I would ask, "if God always was, is now, and always will be – well, how could that be? Isn't that like having a circle with no beginning or end? How do you do that?"

"It's a mystery," would be the reply.

"But..." I would sputter.

"It's a mystery, now get back to work."

"Aaaargh!"

I doubt it was much different 2500 years before that.

Just as my parents and teachers were always instructive, so, too, were the elders of the times and the writers of the Tanak, the Bible, and the other ancient works. And, they faced the same questions – in some ways with a more intense God in their lives – they knew better than many, I think, the Shekinah: the startling, glittering ever-presence of God; even if they had a less than a basic knowledge of the workings of the planet and its geophysical composition and behaviors. So, when God was angry with them land was parched, for example; and when God was pleased their amends and sacrifices the rain would fall to end the drought.

And...beyond that don't question God, just get to work. Worship, pray, deal with your suffering, offering it up to the glory of God and get back to work.

This is not to say that suffering is without merit or dimension, as much as we may dislike it. I think that, in part, depends upon what it motivates us to do.

We all know times of suffering, and how our own suffering can be helpful to others struggling to get through similar experiences. When we go experience such times and rely upon God to help us – we come through with a sense of God beyond what we have been taught, because in the process God intensely becomes what God always has been: an intimate spiritual presence: abiding, indefinable, expansive, and close by.

We discover that we have again been embraced and assured by a peace that exceeds all understanding.

The scriptures certainly point in that direction, but there is no specific chronicling of my particular journey in anything I had read. Parallels, yes. A need for interpretation and listening to how the text touches me – yes

Scriptures and the other writings remind me, instruct me of what others did in times of great turmoil and questioning. There is, in that way, an ageless transition between us and our sisters and brothers of an early and continuing Diaspora, who goal in movement and prayer is always seeking the presence of God.

And, there are some who say that the Book of Job and Job's laments were all answered simply when God appeared to Job. What God might have said is fine poetry, but the presence is what mattered.

Any of us who have found God in our lives know the story of Job. One might say God comes to us through Job and maybe that's why the writing was written and included in the first place.

Yesterday, as I mentioned earlier, Janie and I officiated at the wedding of Susan DeGeorge and Kathy Pokoik. Many of you may remember Susan. She is the Associate Minister at South Presbyterian Church, who has preached here now and then. She is also the one responsible for holding my hand then and now on my own journey toward ordination in this church, really a journey about seeking God in my own life – guided by her wisdom, trials and faith – through my own "Job."

You may remember Kathy, as well. She joined Susan on her visits here; she, too, has become a good friend. I hope you get to see them both soon. They were going to join us this morning but had family to get to airports. The demands of being married.

When I got home last night, I wrote them a small note of congratulations and gratitude for their wedding and all they had done for so many in their dedication to one another and courage. I found myself restating that true love is cathartic – not just for the couple but for the world. In so doing, I became aware that I was describing something I had discovered elsewhere, here for example. It is something that Janie and I have spoken about just recently: that there are places and times when we move beyond all the surroundings into the presence of God that shows us a vista, fills us with a vision, embraces us with such loving-kindness – that we are healed. Simply, we see things as they are – not through the glass darkly of Paul.

We find ourselves in a more real presence of God and presence of one another in God. We hear as maybe Jesus and his followers heard - a variation of “Well, done, faithful ones...” and we realize that faith and service and commitment and courage are deeper than the words on any page of any book.

And we seek more...

Officiating at the wedding of Susan and Kathy with Janie opened up that space of God’s presence; being called here to serve this congregation as interim minister opened up that space of God’s presence; being with Janie and all of you is to be in that presence with one another.

And, it is enough. It is enough to give us what we need to do what we need to do.

It had to be that same presence that surrounded and embraced Jesus like no other – a glow or an aura - that brought to life his disciples with the entheos – the spirit within – the enthusiasm to be on fire. Jesus charged, literally charged, them with that energy:

Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit!

Could you imagine the moment? This time of Jesus’ last appearance, filling them with the presence of God in ways that had never imagined? However Jesus may have spoken to them, really, he probably didn’t need to say much more than, “Go!”

No confusing warnings, strategies, scenarios, tests of faithfulness of spirit, just: “Go!” Let the spirit of God take you and I will always be with you, just as God has always been with me, so too will I be with you and the Spirit....

“Go!”

And probably before the words were out of his heart into theirs...they were already gone!

And he must have smiled. I wouldn’t be surprised if he thought as he did, “It is enough!”

And so, maybe the early answers to those questions are – the “because” or even “because I say so,” and the “it’s a mystery.” Maybe it is that they just weren’t explained in the right way. Maybe we were a bit too heavy on the rule part, the hearsay, the attempts to win and rumors to help that happen or cover our fear – so much distraction that we missed the real message like the writer of Job finally heard; the meaning behind the doctrine of the Trinity that Jesus shared without ever using the word trinity: that God is everywhere, present, and still calling and definitely loving you.

The Shekinah. Glittering now as it did then.

And, when God is present and calling like that – no one should mess with such a thing!

Why?

Because...

Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.bibles.com/absport/news/item.php?id=104>