



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The First Sunday in Advent, December 3rd, 2006

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

(Job 38-42) What we have seen thus far in our sojourn through the book of Job, is that God originally allowed Job's sufferings to commence in order to show Satan and the armies of heaven that Job cherished God more than possessions, family or his health. But after Job showed that he did in fact love God more than all else in the world there was yet another purpose that God sought to achieve by letting Job's suffering drag on for several months. That purpose, according to Elihu, was to purge a residue of pride that had lain dormant at the bottom of Job's life. Job was shaken by suffering just long enough for his hidden sin of pride to be stirred up and put on display when he tried to justify himself at God's expense. Job's suffering we said, is not the pain of the executioner's whip but the pain of the surgeon's scalpel. The removal of the disease of pride is the most loving thing God could do, no matter what the cost.

Remember the words of the Lord: Better to suffer the excruciating pain of a gouged out eye than to let any sin remain in your heart. If this does not seem obvious to you—it is probably because you don't abhor sin and prize holiness the way God does and the way you should. Let us examine ourselves carefully at this point.

Toward the end of Elihu's speech (32-37) a thunderstorm gathers and out of the whirlwind comes the voice of God to Job (chapters 38-41). "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" "Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me." God has been questioned by Job long enough. Now it is time for Job to be put on trial. It's time for God to be the questioning attorney.

God's interrogation goes something like this: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." You weren't there, Job, and you don't know how I did it. "Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb?" It was I, Job, I set its limits not you. You weren't there and you don't know how I did it. "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?" You never did it. You can't do it. You don't know how to do it. I have always done it. I always will.

Then God takes his focus off the world below and turns it to the heavens, the skies, and the animal kingdom. So whether we focus on the earth or the sea or the dawn or the snow or hail or constellations or rain, the upshot is that Job is ignorant and impotent. He doesn't know where they came from. He doesn't know how to make them work. He is utterly surrounded, above and below, by mysteries. And so are we, because the scientific advancements of the last two hundred years are like sandpails of saltwater hauled from the ocean of God's wisdom and dumped in a hole on the beach while the tide is rising. God is not impressed. And we should be overwhelmed with our ignorance not impressed with science.

Think of it, Job! When a man sees a work of God, like your suffering, can he see its connection to ten thousand other realities in the world like I can? If not, how will he dare judge its wisdom! And yet this ignorant Job presumed to question the ways of God!

At the beginning of chapter 40 God pauses in his interrogation to give Job a chance to respond. "Then Job answered the Lord: 'Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?'"

Job is getting the point: a finite creature who has no wisdom to run this world and is utterly ignorant of 99.999% of its processes, has no business instructing his Maker and Ruler how to run the world, even condemning God for the way he runs it.

But God's not finished, he presses his case further against Job in 40:6-9 as he speaks again out of the whirlwind. "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?"

This is disturbing argument. Does God mean that we are to submit to the justice of his ways simply because he has a powerful arm? Are we supposed to acknowledge his right simply because he has might? Is something right and good just because God does it?

I think the answer to that question is yes and no. On the one hand, there is no greater reality than God with which we can judge God's actions. He would not be God if he submitted to something outside himself.

But on the other hand, when we say the sentence, "God is good," or: "God always does what is right," God wants us to mean more than simply, "God is God." He wants us to see that his might does not make right in the sense that it could be capricious and arbitrary and irrational and nevertheless right. Instead he wants us to see that his might is purposeful.

So in 40:10-14 he challenges Job to join him in this holy and purposeful might. "Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour forth the overflowings of your anger, and look on every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you, that your own right hand can give you victory."

This is very different from saying, "Acknowledge that my might is right no matter what I do." Instead God says, "I employ my might to clothe myself with splendor and to abase the proud and (by implication) to exalt the humble." In other words the rightness of God's might is not merely that it is God's, but also that its purposes are consistent with his excellence. The goodness of God is just this: that he upholds his glory by abasing the proud and giving the humble delight in his excellence.

So in bringing Job to submission God did not simply say, "Might makes right. So stop condemning my ways." He said, in the first place, there are countless things about running the world of which you don't know the first thing, but I know perfectly. So it is presumptuous to assume you can counsel me about how to run a more just world. You can't begin to know all that has to be taken into account in making decisions about how to run the world for my glory and for the joy of my people!

And in the second place God showed that his might is not arbitrary but purposeful. And the purpose is to uphold his glory by abasing the proud and blessing the humble. Therefore Job should not presume to accuse God of being arbitrary or capricious or irrational. He should submit to the wisdom and goodness of God's dealings and hold fast to the promise that "God withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

Which in fact he did in Job 42:1-6. Notice the three acts of submission:

Verse 1-2: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted." He submits to God's absolute sovereignty: that God can do whatever he pleases, and is not constrained by anything outside himself.

Verse 3: "...I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." He submits to God's infinitely greater wisdom and knowledge: he has spoken about things of which he is very ignorant.

Verses 4-6: "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

"The lessons for us are plain and simple and profound: 1. Believe with all your heart in the absolute sovereignty of God. Pray that God would give you that conviction. 2. Believe with all your heart that everything he does is right and good. Pray that God will give you that assurance. 3. Repent of all the times you have questioned God or found fault with him in the way he has treated you. Pray that God would humble you to see these murmurings as sinful. 4. Be satisfied with the holy will of God and do not murmur.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.