

First Presbyterian Church
Job 31:29-40, 38:1-3, “The Final Verdicts”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 10/31/2021

[Pastor Matt emerges from the back of the sanctuary as Job with disheveled clothes and painted sores on his face. It is Halloween, after all.]

JOB SPEAKS:

Oh, hey everyone. You’ve come to join the spectacle, have you?
It’s *EVERYONE COME POINT AT JOB* month, is it?
Old Job the laughingstock, eh?

Well, no problem on my end, I can take it.
If there’s anything I’ve learned after the last year,
I can take damn near anything. Well, and I’ve learned something else.
God can take it right along with me.

Whatever you say about me, no matter what you think about me or my family,
I couldn’t possibly care less.
I know who I am, and more importantly *God* knows who I am,
and what you think hasn’t got anything to do with it.

I should start a little further back.

Obviously, you know my family (other than my ... dear wife)
was killed in a windstorm, most of my servants were put to the sword,
and all my flocks were stolen, burned up, or like ...
thrown off a cliff by the Behemoth
and then swallowed by Leviathan.

To be honest, nothing sounds too farfetched at this point.

The next month I started getting all these sores on my body,
I can’t sleep, nobody wants to be around me, and maybe worst of all,
my friends came to see me.

They take that phrase, “Who needs enemies with friends like these”
to a whole ‘nother level.

They have been insinuating ... not all that subtly ... that the reason
why I’ve been having all these troubles is because of something I’ve done,
something my children have done, and that God is punishing me.
They even got me this T-Shirt, “I Make *Pour* Decisions.” Har, har, har.

But that's just my point – I'm the guy who makes *the right* decisions.

They say if I just pray hard enough, if I just turn back to the Lord sincerely,
then all this will go away.

But turn back from what? I haven't done anything wrong
– certainly nothing worthy of such torment and destruction.

So after my “friends” had finished with all their “comforting” of me,
I have to say...I got a little misty eyed.

I thought back to the old days – the days before this terrible year.

Back when I could go out and see my kids and grandkids
without worrying about impending disaster.

I thought back to when the hallways of my house
were filled with the thumps of little feet,
my days were marked by hard work,
meaningful decisions, and big laughs,
and my nights were peaceful and restored my strength.

I remembered gathering with crowds of people in the public market,
I could almost feel the energy I soaked in from people buying, selling,
sharing the fruits of their labors.

My buddies would look at me with respect and honor,
they knew that I had my stuff together and they'd tell their kids,
“You'd do well to watch the way Job does it.”

Now I hardly go out at all.

When I do, people look at me funny if I don't cover my face,
and they steer clear of me because of this terrible disease
I've been afflicted with. “*Please don't forget your mask!*” they say.

Now my friend's kids laugh at me,
repeating the line they had heard long ago in a mocking voice,
“You'd do well to watch the way Job does it,”
before they fling a cowpie frisbee in my direction.

My days are monotonous and lonely, I've got no money left,
and nobody to spend it on anyway.
But the daytime is a breeze compared to the nights.

It's the nights that get me.

My sleep is fitful at best, interrupted by anxiety, terrible dreams,
aches and pains from these nasty wounds.

I wake up feeling more exhausted than when I laid down.

Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest.

God's wrath is wrapped around me like a straight jacket.

When I try to walk by the river, God throws me into the muddy bank.

My friends say I should earnestly seek God?

Trust me, I do!

I call out, I pray, I beseech, I implore, I meditate,

I cry, scream, and scratch, but do you ever answer, God?

[SILENCE]

Did you hear that? No? That's exactly right. Nothing. Every time.

God doesn't bat an eye at me no matter what I do,
unless it's to pile on another layer of misery.

People say not to kick a man when he's down, but apparently God has discovered,
that's the easiest time to do it –

when my soft underbelly is exposed right down there by God's feet!

[the following section is adapted from The Message, Job 29-31]

If I've let myself be seduced by a woman and conspired to go to bed with her,

Fine, my wife has every right to go ahead and sleep
with anyone she wants to.

Have I ever been unfair to my employees when they brought a complaint to me?

What, then, will I do when God confronts me?

When God examines my books, what can I say?

If I've ever used my strength and influence to take advantage of the unfortunate,

Go ahead, break both my arms, cut off all my fingers!

Did I set my heart on making big money or worship at the bank?

Did I boast about my wealth, show off because I was well-off?

Did I ever gloat over my enemy's ruin? Or get excited over my rival's bad luck?

No, I never, never cursed them, even under my breath.

If only someone would give me a hearing! [*signs paper*]

I've signed my name to my defense—let the Almighty One answer!

I want to see my indictment in writing.

If God will tell me what I'm accused of,

I'll write it on a poster and carry it around town.

I'll staple it on my face as a Halloween costume!

I'm prepared to account for every move I've ever made—

to anyone and everyone, prince or pauper.

So, what have you got on me, God? What?!?

[the following section is adapted from The Message, Job 40-41]

THE LORD SPEAKS:

Why do you keep talking without having any idea what you're talking about?

Gird up your loins like a man, Job! Up on your feet! Stand tall!

I have some questions for you, and I want some straight answers.

Where were you when I created the earth? Tell me, since you know so much!

Who decided on its size? Certainly you'll know that!

Who came up with the blueprints and measurements?

How was its foundation poured, and who set the cornerstone,

While the morning stars sang in chorus and all the angels shouted praise?

And who took charge of the ocean when it gushed forth

like a baby from the womb? That was me!

I wrapped it in soft clouds, and tucked it in safely at night.

And have you ever ordered Morning, 'Get up!' told the Dawn, 'Get to work!'

so you could seize Earth like a blanket

and shake out the wicked like cockroaches?

Have you ever gotten to the true bottom of things,
explored the labyrinthine caves of deep ocean?
Do you know the first thing about death?
Do you have one clue regarding death's dark mysteries?
And do you have any idea how large this earth is?
Speak up if you have even the beginning of an answer.
I'm waiting...

[Pause]

Do you know where Light comes from and where Darkness lives
So you can take them by the hand and lead them home when they get lost?

Why, of *course* you know that. You've known them all your life,
you grew up in the same neighborhood with them, right?

Have you ever traveled to where snow is made,
seen the vault where hail is stockpiled,
Can you locate the arsenals of hail and snow that I keep in readiness
for times of trouble and battle and war?

Can you find your way to where lightning is launched,
or to the place from which the wind blows?

Who do you suppose carves canyons for the downpours of rain,
and charts the route of thunderstorms
which drench the useless wastelands
so they're carpeted with wildflowers and grass?

And who do you think is the father of rain and dew, the mother of ice and frost?
You don't for a minute imagine these marvels of weather just happen,
do you?

Can you get the attention of the clouds, and commission a shower of rain?
Can you take charge of the lightning bolts
and have them report to you for orders?

Now what do you have to say for yourself?
Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?

JOB SPEAKS:

Lord, stop! Of course I'm not taking you to court...*I couldn't afford the lawyer.*
Look, I'm sorry, this is all too much, I could never answer your questions.
I should never have opened my mouth!

I'm ready to shut up and listen.

THE LORD SPEAKS:

Then stay put, son because I have some more questions for you,
and I want straight answers.

Do you presume to tell me what I'm doing wrong?
Are you calling me a sinner so you can be a saint?
Do you have an arm like my arm? Can you shout in thunder the way I can?

Go ahead, show your stuff. Let's see what you're made of, what you can do.

Unleash your outrage. Target the arrogant and lay them flat.
Stop the wicked in their tracks—make mincemeat of them!

If you're so great, then dig a mass grave and dump them in it—
faceless corpses in an unmarked grave.
I'll gladly step aside and hand things over to you—
you can surely save yourself with no help from me!

JOB SPEAKS:

Lord, I know you can do anything, and you're the Creator of everything.
I won't deny my innocence, but now I know I was talking about things
that I didn't understand ... at all.

My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you.
I humble myself before you, and repent of my insistence
that you answer me.

*[JOB runs out the back of the sanctuary, washes face, changes clothes,
returns after "God of Wonders."]*

JOB SPEAKS:

Hey everybody! It turns out,

I was right – I didn't do anything to deserve all those terrible things.

And it turns out that God was right:

It's not my place to question what God does or doesn't do
in the world.

My friends are in the dog house, but it's okay – they threw a BBQ for me,
and I'll keep praying for them.

As for dealing with God during a tragedy,

I don't really recommend all the tough talk,

because I know that God doesn't need to answer all our demands.

But at the same time, we can know that God is big enough

to take whatever rage I feel when I see injustice in the world.

So be honest, and don't worry about what other people think.

Oh, and it's true that all my original kids are still dead,

but I've got bunch of new kids – how cool is that?

And now that my sickness is gone,

I think I could live for another I don't know...140 years?

But if you try this at home you should know: individual results may vary.

BENEDICTION:

I kind of feel like singing. You can join me if you know it.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Praise God all creatures here below

Praise God above ye heavenly host

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.