

Job 38:1, 4-18

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series A, Proper 14)

Lessons for the Day: Job 38:4-18; Romans 10:5-17; Matthew 14:22-33

(Our) Father Knows Best!

August 9, 2020

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’? “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is changed like clay under the seal, and its features stand out like a garment. From the wicked their light is withheld, and their uplifted arm is broken. “Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.” (Job 38:1, 4-18, ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

When you hear the name, “Job”, what is the first thought that comes to your mind? I imagine that for most people it is the patience of Job. The psalmist tells us: **“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him”**. (Psalm 37:7, ESV) Job is held up in Scripture as an example of a man who does what the psalmist says. He is patient in the face of suffering. But it is also true that Job became impatient with God. Yes, he may have been misled by his friends, but Job starts to think God was being unfair; that God wasn’t recognizing all the good that Job had done. The man who has shown such a great faith and patient trust starts to question the why and wherefore of God Himself.

St. Paul tells us: **“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”** (Romans 11:33-36, ESV) God’s ways may not always be clear, but as Job is confronted by God with a series of questions that show our weakness and God’s greatness, we learn we can be sure that God, who is perfect in wisdom, love and power, truly does know and do what is best in all things.

I was asked by someone, “How do we pray in confidence and faith when we know that God’s answer might be no?” Since we are so often convinced that only we know what is truly good for us, we find it hard to accept the fact that we aren’t in control of all things—or that there may be things that we want which are not in keeping with God’s plans and purposes for us. But we can find comfort and assurance in this: that God is in control and God really does know what is best. We can trust Him to do what is best for us, even when He says ‘no’ to the things that we want or to the choices we want to make in our lives.

There is a song by Rev. Terry Dittmer entitled, **“And God Said Yes”**. Many people think that God only answers prayers when He says ‘yes’, and that His yes is the proof of His love for them. But God answers all prayers. Sometimes He says ‘yes’; sometimes He says ‘no’; sometimes He says ‘wait’.

When we pray for spiritual blessings such as forgiveness, stronger faith, or help against the devil, we should pray confidently and boldly, remembering that God has already promised to say ‘yes’ to us in these needs. But there are the things that revolve around temporal blessings, that are concerned with the things of this world. Here we need to learn to pray as Jesus did: **“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”** (Luke 22:42, ESV) We need to trust that God will do what is best; that, even in those things we cannot understand, God has a plan and a purpose that will work for our good. We need to learn to accept God’s no as quickly and as

faithfully as God's yes.

Job had heard God's yes in so many ways. He had a good family, health, and wealth. He gave help and advice to others. He lived by faith in God's grace. He recognized that God was the source of the blessings he enjoyed. But, by the will of God, things changed. Everything Job had was taken away from him. At first, he was patient and trusting in all this. His response to the loss of his children, his wealth and all his possessions is: ***"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*** (Job 1:21, ESV) Even when his health was taken away, and his wife encouraged him to curse God and die, Job was faithful. ***"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*** (Job 2:10, ESV)

Sadly, in part due to the influence of the friends who come to comfort him, Job becomes confused and frustrated because God has apparently deserted him. He begins to interpret his misfortunes as meaning that God no longer forgave him and was angry at him. Why was the God who had blessed him in the past now saying 'no' to him? He had no idea why God was allowing him to suffer. Unknown to Job, God was letting Satan test him precisely because God was pleased he was such a great man of faith. God was preparing Job as an example of faith for us.

Like Job, we may not always understand why God works the way He does in our lives. There are times when God says 'yes' to us, and other times when God says 'no'. The problem is that we like to be in control of our lives. As long as we can call the shots we feel secure. We feel God should agree with us, so when we ask Him for help, we expect Him to say yes.

It is so hard for us to remember that our Father knows best. When Job questioned what God was doing, God answered, not with a defence of His actions, but with a reminder that He is the One who created the world. He is the One who still takes care of the world. ***"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"***

The point is that Job did not know it all. He did not have the wisdom and experience of God. He did not have the power of God. He did not have the righteousness of God. He needed God to do what needed to be done. We need God to look after all the things that we cannot control—like the whole of creation, which is ordered and sustained by His almighty hand. We need God to deal with the sin of our lives, because we cannot save ourselves. We need that Saviour who came into this world in human flesh and blood, and who gave His life for us on the cross because we would die in our sinfulness if He didn't pay the price for our sin with His life. We need that Spirit who works faith in our hearts, faith that we cannot find on our own, because we, by nature, are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. We cannot believe; we cannot be holy; we cannot control the forces of nature. But God can—and does. He forgives us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit does work faith in our icy, sinful hearts. God brings us into a relationship of love and life, as He becomes our father, and we His beloved children. In His grace, God works in all the vastness of creation to do what is best for us, His beloved children.

I heard an announcer on the radio talking about his vacation plans and what he hoped he would be able to do, and he added the words, "COVID willing". I understand that he was thinking that everything we plan in these days can be changed because of the reality of COVID. But things don't happen or not happen "COVID willing". The pandemic around us is a disease. It does not have will or purpose. It just is, and we respond to it. God, on the other hand, does have will and purpose. God reminds Job that the sun rises and sets because of His will and command. All things unfold under His watchful eye and His perfect, careful plans. He acts for our good. Yes, our Father knows best. He knows how to lead us through this pandemic; He knows how to bless us in our lives. He knows how best to lead us to the life we have with Him forever.

With our loving, wise and powerful God at work for our good, we can come before Him in confidence and trust, asking

for help in our needs—even when He says no to our requests. Jesus asked Peter: ***“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*** (Matthew 14:31, ESV) We have the confidence of the hymn we ‘sang’ a few moments ago: *Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.* (LSB 752, st. 2) Yes, we can be sure that God is still in control. All things unfold under His care, so whether God says, “yes”, or whether he says, “no”, we can trust in our loving Father, who knows what is best, and will always do what is best for His beloved children. Amen.