

Job 38

July 22, 2018

Theme: Relationship with Creation

Preacher: Katie Misz

Video of the Scripture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dCF5-q2iDY>

Focus: Perhaps the best response to the ones who suffer is to be reminded of beautiful things. (Just as suffering is absurd, so is beauty)

I love a good game of baseball. (Lyle, do I hear an Amen?) You get up to the batters box and hope for that great feeling of the bat connecting with the ball. You swing for the fence, of course, because there is nothing like that great feeling. And then the wind-up...the first pitch comes in and you swing....strike one. The second pitch.....strike two. You choke up a little, desperate for that hit. Strike three. Blasted strike out. You can't help but hang your head, and the coach, pats you on the back and says. Chin up. Chin up.

Don't you hate that! Chin up!? Let me be upset! I struck out and let the whole team down!

A couple of weeks ago, I was writing in my journal at the end of the day. It had been a particularly bad day where my chin was anything but up. I felt very down and my journaling turned into a poem of sorts. It went like this:

God, they say you are the one who never sleeps.....so why do I hear you snoring?

You are the protective mother hen....who sat on her eggs and squashed them.

The good shepherd....who ate lamb stew for dinner.

The great gardener...who stepped on the plants and ran them over with a truck.

The doctor....who used the stethoscope to hit patients over the head.

The counselor....who laughed at the crying client.

Do you take delight in our pain? Relish our deaths?

Or are you just too tired to respond today?

The book of Job is also a poem of sorts. Now I don't want to compare my suffering to Job, but he goes on for 38 chapters about it!

Understandably, Job is a person who lost everything. Had a dreaded disease, wife and children are dead, house burned down, land lost all his money..

Job's three friends try to console Job.

But what do you say to someone who experiencing such suffering?

The book of Job addresses this problem...

How do you respond to someone who is suffering?

Job's 3 friends try to figure out how to sit with Job in his suffering.

They talk back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. And they try to come up with reasons for why this is happening to him. Did Job sin? Is God angry? Did Job do something wrong? Did Job NOT do something he should have?

Author and theologian Kate Bowler, was recently diagnosed with stage 4 terminal cancer at age 37. Dr. Bowler was one of my favorite teachers. She will leave behind a husband and a 4 year old boy. She recently wrote a book with an intriguing title, *Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I've Loved*. In her book, she talks about people's responses that have been helpful to her and responses that have been unhelpful to her since her diagnosis.

One that is unhelpful is the phrase, "Everything happens for a reason".

She says, "I've had hundreds of people tell me the reason for my cancer. Because of my sin. Because of my unfaithfulness. Because God is fair. Because God isn't fair. Because of my aversion to brussel sprouts." (Dr. Bowler didn't deserve cancer.)

And this is the problem....there really isn't a good response to suffering. It often doesn't make sense and explanations fall short. Meaning behind it falls flat.

Job's suffering isn't fair. He was a good man. A faithful man.

For 38 chapters Job grieves and cries out for an answer from God. God are you good? Did I do something wrong?

In suffering it is natural to begin to wonder if everything is chaotic and random...maybe God isn't in charge. Isn't good. Isn't even there at all.

And for 38 long chapters, God is silent. Like so often God is silent when we cry out in pain.

And then, when Job least expects it, God responds.

God enters right into the center of Job's chaotic grief.

God comes in the center of a whirlwind. A chaotic and terrifying storm.

It cannot go unmentioned that the last time Job experienced such a storm was when his children were killed. But this time, the whirlwind isn't deadly and violent....though it is just as powerful.

In the center of the chaos, depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, panic, despair, and grief,
THERE GOD IS.

God is not disgusted by Job's disease. Is not put off by Job's anger. Is not frustrated by Job's questions. Is not repulsed by his mess. God is there in the storm.

So we sit up in our seats....How will God answer Job? Will God give a defense? An explanation? A justification?

No. God doesn't answer Job's questions at all.

This is absurd! God never mentions humans, never even mentions Job or refers to Job's suffering!

Instead, God takes Job on a poetic tour of God's creation.

*God talks with knowledge and understanding that Job couldn't possibly have. The way the earth was formed. The boundaries of the sea. The foundations of the earth. The placement of the stars. Then, if you keep reading, God introduces these enormous beasts that seriously sound like science fiction horror movies. Only God could possibly know about these beasts and know how to tame them. First, there's the leviathan, a plant-eating giant dinosaur-esk creature with bones like bronze and limbs of iron.

And the Behemuth who is like a dragon that lives on the bottom of the sea. Is too big to fish. Cannot be caught or speared. Has giant pointy teeth, spikes on its underside. And it breathes fire.

And the real question is...do you believe in the Loch Ness monster?

Let me also highlight one more part of this creation tour. Our video at the end had a lovely picture of a couple with a sunset with the phrase, "Who gives wisdom to the mind and understanding to the heart?" Lovely! And the point is right, but I find it fun that the literal translation of this sentence is, "Who gives knowledge to the rooster?"

The rooster is part of an ancient Jewish prayer. That each morning when you arise to the sound of the rooster you awake in prayerful wonder that the rooster had the knowledge to wake you up!
it's the pre-alarm clock prayer.

I love this. God may be lovingly picking on Job a little bit here!! For Job spoke without knowledge (verse 1!) but God gives the rooster knowledge!

God is revealing to Job the wonders and secrets of creation. Almost like when you go to a new, amazing place for the first time and say wow, do you notice that? Do you see that? Check out this over here! (I just bet that is what Cindy and Luke and their kids have been like visiting national parks on their Sabbatical.....Look at that! Check this out! Look over there! (just check out the Buzz today))

God's response to Job's pain is to show Job something beautiful.

Suffering cannot be explained all that well...and perhaps an explanation wouldn't help ... So God's response is to point to something else that cannot be explained....Beauty.

Beauty doesn't have a good explanation....like suffering, beauty is a bit of a mystery..... Why are things beautiful that don't need to be?

Why does laughter exist? Or music?

Or Norman Wirzba talks about how crazy it is that we have so many foods! We need food for sustenance, but God didn't just give us something bland like...plain oatmeal as our only option. God gave us fruits of every taste and variety. Vegetables and spices to make them taste a million different palates. Combinations and varieties and cooking shows. And ice cream. This is God's love made delicious.

God interrupts Job's suffering by pointing to beauty.
Beauty doesn't cancel out suffering.
Beauty doesn't cover it up or make it all better,
Beauty doesn't solve suffering.
But the beauty of God's creation reminds Job that suffering is not the whole story.

It's like when you see a really tall tree. One that is big and old. And you realize that it was there before you were born, and will likely be there after you die. And maybe that it isn't part of your story, but you were part of it's story.

The picture is so much bigger.

There is a whole eternity. An entire universe. So many details and so many ways that love is made known.
Don't forget to look up.

In pain and struggle, one's head naturally drops.

Maybe there's something to be said about the baseball coach's wisdom....chin up.

Have you noticed the sunrises recently over the fields?
Did you see the stars on that clear night? Did you find Pleiades and Orion?
Get caught up in the beauty.
Have you noticed how the crickets chirp when the window is open
Or how soft lavender plants feel...and then how good your fingers smell after you touch them.
Have you eaten a watermelon? Like a really good, juicy one?
Are you in awe of how brown the grass is because of no rain....and then how green and soft it turns when the rain storm comes?

The one who stores the rain clouds
Who tells the sun to rise
And gives the rooster all the knowledge...hasn't abandoned you.

Chin up, brothers and sisters, you're up to bat.