

Archdeacon's Corner Continued

God appears to Job

Suddenly God shows up in a whirlwind and He responds personally to Job. God's first response is to Job's accusation that He is unjust and incompetent at running the universe. God takes Job on a virtual tour of the universe, and God asks Job about the order and origins of the cosmos. Where was Job when God created the earth or organized the constellations? Has Job ever commanded the sunrise or controlled the weather? God has His eyes on cosmic details that Job has never even conceived of. As God initially states, *"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth"*? The point of all this is to respond to the assumption of Job and his friends of what it looks like to run the world according to justice. Job and his friends have a narrow perspective on life to make any claim about how God should run the world.

And as Job has said earlier--- God's response shows that the universe is a vast complex place and God has his eyes on every detail of it. Job on the other hand has only his life experience to draw from. His view of the world is very limited and what looks like divine injustice from Job's point of view needs to be seen in an infinitely larger context. Job nor his friends are able to make such a huge accusation about God. Then God asks Job if he would like to micro-manage the world for a day according to the strict principle of justice that Job and his friends assume punishing every evil deed of every person at every moment with precise retribution. Job humbly replies, *"Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You?"*

In making his final point God draws attention to two fantastic creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. They are known creatures from ancient near eastern mythology as symbols of disorder and danger. These creatures exist in God's good world. They are not evil and God is actually quite proud of them, but they are not safe either. The point is that God's world is amazing and very good but it's not perfect or always safe. Our world has order and beauty but it's also wild and sometimes dangerous just like these two fantastic creatures.

So, we come back to the big questions of why is there suffering and is God just. Whether it's from natural disasters, physical ills, or from other humans God does not explain why. What God illustrates to Job is that we live in an extremely complex and amazing world. And, at least at this stage, a world that is not designed to prevent suffering.

God is asking Job, as He asks all of us, to trust in His wisdom and character and to see that He is fully aware, and in charge, and that our thoughts are not His thoughts. Job responds with humility and repentance. He apologizes for accusing God, and he acknowledges that he has overstepped his bounds *"Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."*

Epilogue

The book concludes with a short epilogue. First God says that the friends were wrong. That their ideas about God's justice were just too simple for the complexity of the world. God then says that Job has spoken rightly when asking honestly, "Why?" God approves of Job's wrestling with suffering, with all of its emotion and pain. God is pleased that Job simply wanted to talk to Him, and that He is always listening. That the right way to process suffering is through the sometimes difficult struggle of prayer and trusting in God.

The book concludes with Job having his health, his family, and his wealth all restored (it never says he is over the pain of his losses). Not as a reward for good behavior but simply as a generous gift from God, and that is the end of the book. The book of Job does not unlock the puzzle of why bad things happen to good people if God is just. Rather, it invites us to trust God's wisdom. When we do encounter suffering, the book of Job is inviting us to honestly bring our pain and our grief to God through prayer and to trust that God cares and that He knows what He is doing.

Praying that our Lord finds you and yours well,
Archdeacon,
The Ven. Mark Richardson