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Pentecost V
June 23, 2024
Text: Job 38:1 – 11 & Mark 4:35 – 41
Title: What Do You Know?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Why me? What have I done to deserve this? What else could possibly go wrong around here? These are questions that every one of us has asked at some point in life. Usually that point involves some personal difficulty or tragedy. It feels like the weight of the whole world has come to rest on your shoulders, and you'll collapse at any moment. Think about any of those times that you've gotten news about some terrible loss, like the death of an important person in your life.

Many of us have been through it far too many times. The phone rings, of course it seems to always come in the middle of the night or early in the morning, and someone on the other end of the line is telling you that death has struck or is about to strike someone that you love. The pain is difficult. The news is devastating. You have no idea what you'll do without that person in your life. You don't even know what to say. Then imagine the addition of physical pain to your loss – like injury from a car accident – and things are even worse.

That's the point that we find Job at by the end of the second chapter of the book named after him. In the first chapter of Job we find out that he is an incredibly rich man. He was one of the richest men of the day with more wealth than he knew what to do with, but that's not as important as the other detail that the writer tells us about and that is Job's faith. Aside from his location and his name, Job's great faith is one of the first details that we are told about him. The first verse of the book says that he was a man who, "...feared God and turned away from evil." The size of Job's fortune was a secondary detail compared to his faith in the Lord.

After telling us about his faith and fortune, Job's book continues with these details. There comes a day in heaven when Satan is speaking to the Lord, and it is God who says, "Have

you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” Satan accuses Job of being loyal to God because of all of the blessings he has received. He maintains that if the Lord allows him to destroy everything that Job has then that great faith will disappear. The exact words that Satan says to the Lord are, “...he will curse you to your face.” In the course of one day, Job receives the news that all of his possessions and wealth have either been destroyed or stolen and that his seven sons and three daughters have been killed.

Just one small part of such tragic news, such as the death of a child, would be enough to send some people over the edge, but Job responds in an incredibly different way. He doesn't ignore his pain and sorrow because he displays them by tearing his robes and shaving his head, but he follows it up by falling to the ground and *worshipping the Lord*. Job doesn't blame God, but simply declares, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” This first episode ends with the words, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”

Another day arrives and the same circumstances occur. The Lord again says to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” Only this time the Lord continues, “He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason.” This time Satan accuses Job of holding onto his faith because he is healthy, and the Lord allows Satan to put Job to the test one more time by attacking his body. Job is infected with sores all over his body from head to toe, and even his wife tells him to “Curse God and die.” His reply is to ask, “Shall we receive good from God, and...not receive evil?” His words were not sinful.

From this point on, the writer of the book of Job describes a lengthy conversation between Job and his three friends who have come to comfort him in his pain and misery. Their

discussion centers around why God allows good people to suffer. The three friends accuse Job of committing some hidden sin, and say that he deserves all of the suffering that he has been given. They encourage him to repent, and say that the proof of his sin lies in the tragedy that has struck his household. They claim that he is being directly punished for whatever he did to offend God, and at one point he is even told that he deserves far worse than what he has already suffered. Job responds throughout the book by defending his innocence and his faith, but he justifies and defends himself instead of defending God's sovereignty, justice and rule. Only the youngest man there, Elihu, answers them properly, and he clearly makes the point that "...it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right."

It is only at the end of the book that the Lord speaks directly to Job. Today's Old Testament reading is the beginning of the Lord's reply in Job 38, and the beginning of that reply reveals our weakness before Him. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me." Another way to translate that last line is, "...you will answer me." Essentially the Lord is telling Job and the others that if they are so smart, then they can prove it to Him by answering what He is about to ask them, but He also tells them that they will not be able to answer because they are speaking words without knowledge.

"Words without knowledge," that is the result of human philosophy and reason apart from the Lord's Word and His teaching. Your mind simply can not begin to fathom the wisdom and power and knowledge of God, but that doesn't stop it from trying, and as it tries, sin convinces your mind that it can understand God on its own. Inevitably, these conclusions reached by your mind wind up being false because they are tainted by sin just like everything else that we say and do. The end result is that we force God's work and will to conform to us

instead of us conforming to Him, and whenever we do that we lose sight of who God is and what He says about Himself. We make God into who we want Him to be instead of who He really is, and that is a violation of the First Commandment because at that point we are not worshipping the true God but worshipping a god of our own creation.

There is nothing that you or I can do to understand God and His works and ways, at least nothing that we can do on our own. Who of us can give even a *partial* answer to any of the questions that God places before Job? Just listen again to what the Lord asks, “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?’”

These are impossible questions for anyone but the Creator Himself to answer, but yet there are people who try to find answers all the same. What they are missing is what we miss when we rely on our reason for answers, we miss the Word of God that He has given us to provide all of the answers that we need, and I hope that you noticed what I just said there. God’s Word gives us all of the answers that we *need*. He has not given us His Word to provide all of the answers that we *want* in spite of what we think we deserve to know.

Once again, the answers that we need are provided in Jesus. He is the Word of God in the flesh as John says in the first chapter of His Gospel, and He is the reason that any of us can know anything concerning the Lord’s works and His ways. The Spirit works to point us to Him in the Lord’s written Word.

In today's Gospel reading we have a perfect example of how the Spirit does this part of His work, "And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" To the disciples who were looking at Jesus without the eyes of faith, the identity of Jesus was just as much a mystery as the questions that the Lord put to Job, but to those who read God's Word with the eyes of faith the mystery is clear. His ability to control the winds and sea tell us that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has all of the authority and wisdom that were present when Job was questioned.

It is in Jesus that all of the answers that we need are provided. Will we be condemned for the sins that we know we have committed? No, because the blood of Jesus paid the penalty that we owed. Do we have to do anything now that Jesus has redeemed us? No, because Jesus has done everything for us that we needed to do. There is very little that we need to know about our relationship with God now that Jesus has defeated death and the grave for us.

Why do wicked things happen to what we consider to be good people? Because there is still sin in the world that infects everything and everyone and no one is "good" before God, but the eternal effects of that sin are rendered powerless because of Jesus. We know that now because of the Word that the Spirit works through to give us understanding, and Job ultimately knew that his answers were to be found in God when he spoke the words that inspired one of our most famous hymns, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth." Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.