

When God Doesn't Make Sense: Loving Again

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

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Georgetown Presbyterian Church

A man was brought to Mercy Hospital, and quickly taken in for emergency coronary surgery. The operation went well and, as the groggy man regained consciousness, he was reassured by a Sister of Mercy who was waiting by his bed.

"Mr. Smith, you're going to be just fine," said the nun, gently patting his hand. "We do need to know, however, how you intend to pay for your stay here. Are you covered by insurance?"

"No, sorry, I don't have any insurance," the man whispered hoarsely.

"Can you pay in cash?" persisted the nun.

"I'm afraid I cannot, Sister."

"Well, do you have any close relatives?" the nun asked.

"Just my sister in New Mexico," he volunteered. "But she's a humble spinster nun."

"Oh, I must correct you, Mr. Smith. Nuns are not spinsters; they are married to God."

"Wonderful," said Mr. Smith. "In that case, please send the bill to my brother-in-law."

It's tempting, isn't it, when things aren't going so well, that we insist God pay the bill for us. It's not our fault, and somebody has to take responsibility, somebody has to pay the bill—why not go all the way to the source, and demand that God pay it for us?

That kind of sums up the story of Job. Job has lost everything—family, livelihood, house and home—and none of it is his fault. Job had lost everything he had loved. His heart had been ripped out. In all his tragedies, Job is an innocent victim. And so Job demands some answers. Job demands that God justify himself and explain why God let all these bad things happen to Job. Maybe Job doesn't expect God to pay the bill, but Job does expect some straightforward explanations from God.

After a lengthy silence from God, God finally does appear to Job. God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind. And "whirlwind" is a good way to describe God's response to Job, for instead of giving Job a logical, cogent explanation for the cause of the suffering Job has experienced, God bombards Job with a whole host of questions. If Job is so smart, implies God, then maybe Job can tell how the stars were put in the sky, or who put the rain in the clouds, or who created the creatures of the sea. If Job is so smart, maybe he can explain how the world was established on its foundation, or why ostriches cannot fly, or how the horse gets its strength.

In his appearance before Job, God doesn't answer the question of the cause of suffering. But God does show that there is no detail in the world which falls outside of God's attention. God does show that there is not one maverick molecule in all the universe that doesn't answer to God. God does show that there are things that mere mortals will never be able to understand.

It is a powerful moment when Job encounters God. Powerful, and humbling. Job comes to the point that he realizes that only God can be God. Job comes to the point that he realizes that as a mere mortal he will never fully understand all the ways of God. And so in humility Job gives his answer to God: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted... I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."¹

It is, for Job, a moment of sacred awe before God. And for Job it is the moment when his life begins to be transformed. Job has seen that he will never fully see; he has come to understand that he will never fully understand. But he has met God, and in meeting God, he is content to let God be God. Job hasn't found the answer to his questions, but he has found something far greater—he has found the presence of the sovereign God of the universe in his life.

"I had heard of you before," said Job, "but now I see you with my eyes."²

Now I see. It is a moment of recognition for Job, a moment in which he stands reverently before the greatness of the one sovereign and holy God. Now I see.

Corrie Ten Boom used to compare life to a tapestry. Most of the time life comes to us in ways that confuse us. Life is messy, just a bunch of random threads, some tangled, some with frayed ends, some knotted up hopelessly. Most of the time life doesn't make sense. No wonder people are wont to despair.

But things are not always as they seem. When you look at the front side of the tapestry, all the random threads that were so hopelessly tangled and tightly knotted now appear as a beautiful picture, with each stitch contributing to the beauty of the whole.

This is not to say that the bad things that happen to us aren't bad after all, if only we look at them from a different perspective, because to do so would be to diminish our pain and sorrow. But it does mean that all our experiences in life—our blessings, our ordinary times, and our losses—all are in the hands of God and are woven into something that is far greater than any single experience itself. In the hands of God, all things can be transformed and given greater meaning.

When Job met God, Job got a glimpse at the front side of the tapestry of life.

Now I see, said Job.

How about you—do you see?

There is a poem that goes like this:

My life is but a weaving,
between my God and me,

¹ Job 42:2, 3b

² Job 42:5

I do not choose the colors,
He worketh steadily.

Ofttimes he weaveth sorrow,
and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
and I the underside.

Not till the loom is silent,
and the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas,
and explain the reasons why

The dark threads are as needful
in the skillful weaver's hand
As threads of gold and silver
in the pattern He has planned.

Job got a glimpse of the majesty of God. "I had heard of you before, but now I see with my eye."
How about you--Do you see?

Several years ago I went on a Walk to Emmaus retreat. During the three-day weekend, there was a time when we were encouraged to offer to God something that was weighing us down, something from which we desperately wanted to be free. It was called the "Dying Moments" service. Something happened to me in that Dying Moments service. I honestly don't remember what it was that I wanted God to take off my shoulders. But when I ceremoniously put it in the basket and returned to my seat, I felt a very palpable presence of God within me. It lasted only for a very brief moment. But for me it was unmistakably the presence of God. I had seen God in that moment.

I know that whatever problems or burdens there were in my life at that time weren't magically taken away from me. They were still there. But like Job I had seen God. God didn't give me the answers to all my questions, but I left that weekend with a peace that I had not had before. Because I had met God, I was willing to put things behind me and look ahead to new things in life.

I guess that's the moral of the story of Job. The story of Job doesn't take away the problem of suffering and evil in our world; in fact it probably creates more questions than it answers. But the story of Job does offer us an encounter with God, and through that encounter with God, we are given an opportunity to take the life we are given and live it as well as we can. We are given the opportunity to live again, to love again, to risk it all again, knowing that our lives are in God's hands.

The last verses of Job tempt us to believe that, if we just trust in God, we'll all have a happily-ever-after ending. After all, look what happens—Job's family and fortunes were restored twofold. And he lived to be an old man, full of days. He was willing to live again. He was willing to love again.

But is the message one of double riches, or is it something else? There are some who contend that, after all that Job had been through, “the happy ending to this story begins to look more like an extraordinary act of faith. You see, for Job to resume his life as it was before is to risk losing it all again.”³ Yet because Job had encountered God and had beheld the majesty of God in the whirlwind, he knew that, despite the risk of pain and suffering, life was still worth living to the fullest. For Job to have twice as much as before is to risk losing twice as much. Yet because Job had encountered God, he decided that he would live again. He decided he would love again, despite the risk of losing what he loved.

That's the challenge we are given in life. If you commit yourself in love, in you live with all you have, then you will risk great pain if you lose it. But the question Job poses for us in the end is, will you take that extraordinary act of faith and trust your future to God anyway?

What do you do when God doesn't make sense? Are you willing to trust God even when you don't know how things will turn out? Are you willing to believe that God will take even those dark threads of our lives, and weave them into something fraught with meaning?

Are you willing to believe that there is new life beyond your pain and your sorrow? Are you willing to live again, to love again, to risk it all over again, because you know the God in whose hands rest all of our lives?

³ Martin B. Copenhaver, “Risking a Happy Ending,” The Christian Century, October 12, 1994, p. 923.