

38: 25 Who cut a channel for the downpours
and a way for blasts of thunder
26 to bring water to uninhabited land,
a desert with no human
27 to saturate dry wasteland
and make grass sprout?
41 Can you draw out Leviathan with a hook,
restrain his tongue with a rope?
2 Can you put a cord through his nose,
pierce his jaw with a barb?
3 Will he beg you at length
or speak gentle words to you?
4 Will he make a pact with you
so that you will take him as a permanent slave?
5 Can you play with him like a bird,
put a leash on him for your girls?
6 Will merchants sell him;
will they divide him among traders?
7 Can you fill his hide with darts,
his head with a fishing spear?
8 Should you lay your hand on him,
you would never remember the battle.
42 Job answered the Lord:
2 I know you can do anything;
no plan of yours can be opposed successfully.
3 You said, "Who is this darkening counsel without knowledge?"
I have indeed spoken about things I didn't understand,
wonders beyond my comprehension.
4 You said, "Listen and I will speak;
I will question you and you will inform me."
5 My ears had heard about you,
but now my eyes have seen you.
6 Therefore, I relent and find comfort
on dust and ashes. **(Common English Bible Translation)**

We have today two sections of the conclusion of God's speech to Job, and Job's final response to God. As I've noted the past several weeks, for much of the book, God is talked about— by Job, by his friends, by the narrator... but for three chapters late in the book God talks and Job listens. You could say that Job had put God on trial and questioned God's order and justice. And when God takes the stand in God's own defense, God reveals the ways in which Job has made humanity, and his own particular human life, the center of the universe

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and reminds Job that he, and all human beings, are just one small part of a giant cosmos that is NOT ALL ABOUT US. We got that last week, I think.

We have two snippets of God's speech in our reading today. The first from chapter 38 asks Job who it is who digs channels for rain to fill so plants might grow in parched land where humans do not live? Of course the answer is God. There are no humans there... And the fact that God does this suggests God's creation is not just ordered for the good of human beings— life comes even where human beings are not. The second snippet is a portion of a long passage about Leviathan. We don't know exactly what Leviathan is; it is most likely a mythological sea beast that inspires dread and fear... In the previous chapter, God talks about Behemoth— a parallel, likely mythological land beast that inspires dread and fear. Both creatures seem to represent natural beings and forces that are a part of the created order that are out of human control and capable of hurting or even destroying human life.

The questions that God asks Job about Leviathan point to the very real limits on human power— no human can conquer the Leviathan; none of the typical ways we conquer sea creatures will work. God even seems to delight in this ghastly creature, its power, its strength... These creatures that are bad news for humans are yet part of God's good creation. And they are evidence that creation is not for us; it is for God... creation does not belong to us; it belongs to God. One scholar suggests that these creatures are parallel to the Adversary figure we met at the beginning of the book. The idea of some evil power at work in the created order that can wreak havoc in human lives... God's point seems to be that all of it, the good and the bad, it's all part of God's creative plan and it's all under God's power— it all exists only because God exists and God wills its existence.

God answers Job's many questions with more questions— and leaves us surely with even more questions of our own. But Job gets the point... as we heard at the end of our reading today he drops his case against God. He acknowledges that all his God-talk before was rooted in misunderstanding— he grants that he cannot understand the wonders of God. He knows this now. He knows that he does not know. God's self-revelation has made this plain. And Job is content— even though at this moment NOTHING has been restored to him, his losses have been massive, his suffering profound, and none of that changed when God spoke— he still is left with dust and ashes, but he finds comfort now because he knows that he does not know and

he can rest in the abiding presence of God. He knows God now; he doesn't just know about God. And that has made all the difference. All he needs is God.

That's all any of us need. But how many of us know that?

Privilege has a way of obscuring our awareness of this most basic truth. I think I need a lot of things— a roof over my head— and running water— and a lovely new Prius— and a full fridge— and adequate funds in the bank— and a pension plan— and health insurance— and wi-fi— and the respect of people I meet and serve— and vacations and study leaves— and quality time with family and friends— and a good school for my kid, — and Netflix, definitely Netflix—and... I could go on and on and on... Couldn't we all? Some of these are genuine needs. A lot are trivial comforts. If I lost it all; I'd still have God. And what more do I need? But does my heart trust in God alone? Truly? Did Job's heart trust in God alone when he was delighting in wealth and privilege? It might seem funny to loop back to Job's wealth and privilege because we've been thinking of Job as representative of the most destitute and oppressed in the world. But remember how much he lost, from what heights he fell.

I've been thinking a lot about privilege the last few years. It's a sneaky thing. When you've got it, you usually don't realize it. That's part of the nature of privilege. You move about freely, speak your mind comfortably— not even aware necessarily that you are so free and comfortable. Several years ago I read an excellent book by Jim Wallis called "America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America." I think I need to read it again. Perhaps we'll read it in the Anti-Racism Study group after we finish our first book.

Early in the book he talks about growing up in a suburb of Detroit, but venturing into Detroit proper in his adolescence for work and other experiences. He worked on the janitorial staff at the Detroit Edison Company with a young black man, his peer, named Butch. He and Butch became friends. Butch grew up in Detroit at the same time Jim was growing up in suburban Detroit— and the more they talked the more he realized they lived in different worlds. He shares a story of the first time he went to dinner at his new friend's house, how quickly the young children in the household embraced him while the older children hung back, suspicious. He remembers vividly his friend's mother explaining the talk she gives her children about what to do if ever they are lost. She told them that if they see a police officer they should go and hide in the bushes until the officer goes away and then emerge and try to find their way home. Jim was shocked because his mother's speech to him had involved seeking out a police

officer if ever he was lost and that that officer would surely help him to find his way home. Though this was many years ago, still to this day such disparate parenting is going on. The point is not a denigration of police— there are many faithful, respectful, outstanding police officers who would help any child find his or her way home. The point is rather a recognition of the effects of systemic racism and the privilege that some of us have without even knowing it. The privilege of being able to raise our kids to trust institutions and public servants... the relative safety with which we navigate the world.

Unexamined privilege leads us to act in all sorts of unconscious ways to prop up unjust systems and structures to protect our advantage. Examined privilege can allow us to use our privilege to further the cause of justice, and the health and well being of our society as a whole. And... more basically... one thing I think we can take away from the story of Job, is that unexamined privilege can be a barrier to genuine relationship with God. We don't need to rely on God quite as much when things usually go our way. Even when Job lost EVERYTHING, and suffered greatly, though he started off praising God nonetheless— when God stayed silent for a good long while and his suffering stretched out... he became indignant. How could God allow this to happen to such a faithful servant... or to any human for that matter? He put God on trial. That's something a privileged, entitled person would do. And today we saw how that all turned out. Job drops his case, realizes what he really needs, and finds comfort in dust and ashes.

I hope that we don't have to pass through the trials of Job to get to this point. I hope we will invest in learning and awakening, that many of you will join our new anti-racism study group that starts next Saturday afternoon. I hope we will willingly listen to and learn from those in our society who suffer disproportionately. And in time, I hope that we can build relationships with people profoundly different from us who will then help us to realize and examine our privilege. And I hope, in the process, we'll move from knowing about God, to truly knowing God.

Resources in addition to scripture which were cited in or influenced the writing of this sermon:
Clifford, Richard J. *The Wisdom Literature: Interpreting Biblical Texts*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
Wallis, Jim. *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*. Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2016.