

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 5

June 27, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

The Lord answers from the storm

—Job 38:1-11

Grace and peace are yours from the Lord Jesus Christ. The words for our meditation today are from our first lesson, from Job 38.

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

From a human perspective, God had richly blessed Job. He had ten children, fields of livestock, an abundance of land, a houseful of servants, and a substantial stack of cash. Friends and neighbors would look at Job and say, "Wow! You are incredibly blessed."

From a spiritual perspective, Job was also blessed. Job lived by faith in his Lord. He was focused on the grace and mercy of God. He was a father who had the spiritual interest of his family in mind. After every family reunion, Job would wake up early in the morning and have a special worship time as he interceded for his children, keeping them in his prayers to God.

But Satan had it out for Job. One day Satan, the Accuser, the Adversary, appeared before the Lord. Just with his name, Satan, we have a perspective of what is going on. Satan is opposed to God and his people. Satan brings accusations against God and his people.

And he certainly did that with Job. Job was a believer in the Lord. He trusted God based on grace alone. But Satan came and accused Job of fearing and trusting in God only because God had blessed him with earthly stuff. So not only was that an attack against Job, it was an attack against God.

Satan was so convinced that Job only followed God because God had given him earthly possessions that Satan took an oath against God. He essentially said, "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and *I swear* he will curse you to your face" (Job 1:11).

But the Lord knows his people. God knew Job. And even though Job didn't hear this conversation between God and Satan, we hear it. And we discover God allowed Satan to turn Job's life upside down. God allowed this to prove under oath that Job was not what Satan was accusing him of. God was coming to the defense of his child, and he knew that Job would remain his faithful child.

And here's where things turn in Job's life. Job didn't know the dialogue between God and Satan, but he became very acutely aware of his attacks. It was a like a perfect storm. Job didn't get any warning. There weren't any signs that devastation loomed on the horizon, but adversity struck. And it struck hard. One news reporter after the other came and told of devastation after devastation. Job lost his livestock. He lost his crops, land, servants. Imagine if all of your bank accounts were completely wiped out, and you lost your job. That's what happened to Job.

And finally on that one day a news reporter came and told Job that all ten of his children were dead. Your entire family was wiped out in one storm. Job even lost his health. He had experienced his own sea of pain, and he could therefore write from experience of his own intense inner suffering. Job struggled. He struggled to make sense out of it all. Why would God allow such things to happen? It didn't make any sense to him from his perspective, and yet, through all of these things, Job remained a faithful believer in God. He was patient. In the midst of pain and suffering, Job exclaimed, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end I will see him" (Job 19:25). He had faith in his living Redeemer.

But Job has some so-called friends who didn't give very good advice about what was happening in his life. They essentially told Job that the reason these bad things were happening to him is because he had committed a certain terrible sin in his life. That wasn't true, and Job knew it. And so back and forth, these people told Job to repent of whatever terrible thing he did. Job kept telling them that he hadn't done any terrible thing that would cause these things to happen. This back and forth argument goes on for many chapters.

But then Job started losing his patience. He actually began complaining to God. "Why are these people torturing me with their questions, God?" But he wasn't just trying to figure out why he was getting awful counsel from his friends, Job began questioning God himself. "I have been faithful to you, God, and look at what you have done to me. Why me? Why these terrible things? You are not being fair! If I could talk to you face to face, I would have all kinds of questions for you. I would give you a piece of my mind! If only I could have a few minutes to sit down with you, I'd tell you that you aren't doing things right." Job had lost his patience, and he was yelling at God.

Job did have one friend who at least spoke some truth. He was actually angry with Job. Job had been justifying himself rather than God. His friend Elihu was angry at Job for those words he spoke. Even though he was younger than the other men, he eventually needed to say something. He couldn't keep quiet. He spoke a lot of words. He wanted Job to think through his experience in this world. Do we always know how God operates? He cautioned Job. "Job, you say that you want to speak with God. Are you sure that is wise? Are you certain you can see everything clearly? You want to bring your case against God for all the troubles that you are facing. But are you sure that you have the right perspective?"

And then the friends are silent, and a dark black cloud starts to form in the west. A storm was brewing, and it didn't look like a normal kind of storm. As those black clouds and thunder and lightning came over Job's head, God spoke. The Lord answered from the storm. Job is ushered into the courtroom of God. He will get his hearing. But the opening remarks come from the Lord.

"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). Gulp! Maybe Elihu was right. Maybe I did go in over my head. Maybe I was speaking words with a limited perspective. Maybe I don't have a full knowledge of how things are fitting together for my life.

God continues, "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:3). Oh man. This is worse than examination day at Emmanuel Lutheran Church. It's not just a pastor who is asking me questions. This is the Almighty God. This the Lord who is in a class all by himself. There is no one like him. And now he is going to ask me questions. What could those questions be?

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?" (Job 38:4-11).

God is referencing the creation of the world. There are some allusions to the flood as well, but primarily think "creation." Who was there to see the creation of the world? Nobody. Oh, certainly this must have been one of those places where God messed up, right? Wouldn't make more sense to have created Adam and Eve on day one of creation? Let them sit there and see. He could have created Adam and Eve and then said, "Adam and Eve, watch this. Let there be light. Let there be water. Let there be birds and fish and cows and monkeys." Yes. That would make much more sense, wouldn't it? Did God mess up? He would have had an eyewitness to the creation of the world. No more of this evolution talk. No. There would have been human beings who could testify to what they saw.

But God didn't do it that way. God created everything in this world and then at the end he created human beings. He created them on day six, not day one. Job, where were you when I did that? He wasn't there. No human being was there when God laid the foundation of the earth. Nobody saw how the oceans were carved or the mountains were formed. Nobody saw how the stars came into being to shine the lights in the night sky. Where were you when all that took place? Where were human beings when creation came to be?

Nobody was here. Did God mess up? Did he not think through that well enough? Wouldn't it have been so much easier to have an eyewitness account of all these things so that someone could answer, "God, I was there with you. I saw you do it?" What is the only thing we have to go on? God says, "You must trust me. You must trust my words."

God was reminding Job that he was just a human being, and that there are certain things that are beyond Job's understanding. Job was considered to be a very wise man during his day, but even Job didn't understand everything about God. The creation of God is a good example. Can I logically understand everything that God has set up? And as far as the bad things going on in Job's life? Job needed to humble himself, and to submit himself to a God who does things that are beyond understanding. "Don't try to understand me," God was telling Job. "Just trust me. Respect me. Honor me. Even though things may not make sense to you. I know what I am doing."

My friends, you have storms in life, don't you? The cancer diagnosis isn't good. Your bank account just can't hold water much less money. You recently buried a family member or friend. The aches and the pains that you are facing right now are too much to bear. You can't get the rest you need. The storms are gathering. Things are dark. But in the midst of that, the Lord speaks. And what does he say? "You don't have the full picture in view. You can't see everything going on. But I ask you to trust me. Trust my words."

He has not said that he will reveal an answer to every burning question you have. But where he speaks, there is where you know. He says, "Trust my word." Trust words like "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his promise" (Romans 8:28). We may not know the reason for problems and hardships, but we know the result. It will work for your good.

Do you want the greatest picture of that? We may have a lot of times in our lives when we ask, "Why?" Why do these things happen in my life? Why does God allow this pain and sorrow? Why?

There's an answer, you know. In fact, God asks the same question. As the Son of God is suspended about the earth on a cross, he opens his heart and mouth and asks, "Why?" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). If there was anybody who was innocent, anybody who had a just cause for storming into the throne room of God and demanding an answer, it was the perfect Son of God. God had poured all the sin and guilt of the world on Jesus. All the punishment and justice of hell itself was laid on Jesus' innocent account. Why? Why have you forsaken me? Great question, Jesus.

And what is God's answer? "I had to do that to you, my Son, so that I would not have to do it to anybody else. I slammed the gavel down and proclaimed "Guilty" against you, my Son, so that I would never slam the gavel against a human being."

And God comes to us and says, "Trust me. Trust my words. I declare that for you. And if I can declare that for you for your eternal salvation, then I most definitely know how to operate in this world to make all things work out for your eternal good." Listen closely, my friends. God speaks. The Lord speaks in the storm. Trust those words. Amen.