

If you ever have the need to read something serious, I recommend you read the book of Job in the Old Testament. It’s the story of a good man, Job, who had everything go wrong—all the good things and circumstances in his life were taken away, including his health. It is very serious.

The friends who came to help him did fine until they opened their mouths. Then they ruined it. In essence they said, “Cheer up, Job, you brought this all on yourself.”

That’s where we get the expression “Job’s comforters.” It’s not a compliment.

Job goes through a lot of severe suffering. And he, like so many of us, wanted to ask this question of God: “Why me?” also “What did I do to deserve this?”

Have any of you ever wanted to ask these questions? Especially on those terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days? (Yes, I know that is the name of a children’s book. Now you can see where I get my ideas.)

Why is a little word, only three letters. But “Why?” is a big question. Kids ask why all the time! Lots of times, when we’ve reached adulthood anyway, the only times we ask “why?” is when things are going badly.

And yet, hardly any of us ask God “why?” when things are going well. When a healthy baby is born, we don’t ask God why? No, we are happy, and hopefully we tell God “thank you.” But we don’t ask “Why? Why God, why did you let this wonderful little baby be born?”

When we recover from illness, we don’t ask why. When we have a narrow escape, we don’t ask why. When things are great, we don’t ask why.

It’s as if the good times of our lives damp down our curiosity. Where are our “inquiring minds” than?

Maybe we think we deserve all the good stuff, and that it is only the bad times that spark our curiosity. We just can’t believe that bad things are supposed to be happening to us.

Back to Job and his story. He was at the end of his rope and he was itching for answers. Job starts ranting and raving about this from Chapter 26 on. Somewhere in there, his friend Elihu tries to talk to him, also. Then God begins to talk. According to Professor (and preacher) John Holbert (Preaching Job), when God answers:

“The opening words of this speech sound like a salvo from a cannon. We might paraphrase as follows: “Who would be so foolish as to obscure the world’s design when they know absolutely nothing about it?”. . . What Job has challenged is the basic design of the cosmos; he has accused God of mismanagement, of overt cruelty, of allowing the wicked to rest easy and to triumph. These accusations have been made by someone who is “devoid of knowledge,” and have served the function of “darkening” or “obscuring” the reality of God’s ways in the world.”

Maybe we have felt that way, sometimes. Maybe some of us think we could do a better job than God Almighty, or that God could sure do with our help and advice and wisdom.

The God who created the universe, needs our help? No. Not likely!

So let’s see what it says in the Disciple Bible Study section on Job. (Richard Byrd Wilke and Julia Kitchens Wilke)

“God spoke out of the whirlwind. Job wanted a direct confrontation, a trial. He got God’s answer, straightforward, but on God’s terms. God is now asking the questions.

“Who is this” who talks about the universe when he doesn’t know the first thing about it? Stand up straight; tuck in your shirt. God is going to ask Job questions that will take his mind where it has never gone before.

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.’ . . .

. . . When I built the universe, says God, the way Solomon built the Temple—footings, foundation, cornerstone—where were you? Why did I build the universe that way? Surely you know.

And when all ‘the morning stars sang together, . . . where were you? Who orchestrated the music? Surely you know. . .

God points to an orderly universe; but it is a big universe, full of mystery, full of variety, greater than the human mind can comprehend. Job has never seen the architectural plans, but he should not think the universe is out of control. Wisdom. . . has helped guide the entire constructive process.

[And yes], there is some randomness in the world, some things that are wild, untamed, unpredictable.

Job and his friends see the wild things, the desolate places as outside God’s care. But God has the whole world in his hands.”

So, what of Job now? What do we think of him and his story now?

I’ll tell you what I think. I think I have a lot of Job in me. I have times when I think the world is not treating me right, and I wish God would do something about it. Maybe you do too.

However, this story of poor Job is in the Bible for a reason. And I think one reason is something I was taught when I was first entering the ministry: It’s all right, every so often, to have this kind of conversation with God. God can take any and all of our emotions. God can deal with us. God can handle anything we say.

It’s like the situation of dealing with a crying baby, or a screaming toddler, or even an angry adult. This too will pass. The baby will go to sleep. The child will get busy playing. The adult will get a good night’s sleep and wake up to a fresh day. The poor baby (or child or person) just got overwhelmed with what was going on at that moment. God understands us in the same way.

Here’s another thing we can learn, along with Job, and it is more important.

“Job finally catches on. First of all, his plea for the presence of God is fulfilled because God has come to him. Job receives God, not in sinfulness but in vulnerable humanness,

the way the wasteland receives rain or a baby ostrich emerges from the egg. Formerly Job had *heard*—hearsay, tradition, Scripture, the teachings of the sages—but now he has *seen*.

He has encountered God directly, face to face. God has answered not by removing the mysteries but by being present to Job. Job’s painful prayer has been answered: God has come to him.” (Wilke and Wilke)

I like that part: “God has answered not by removing the mysteries but by being present to Job.”

Hmm. Present to Job, present to us. Present with us. Does that sound familiar—does that ring a bell?

Oh yeah. That is what the name Emmanuel means—God is with us. Emmanuel is one of the names for Jesus, God’s Son. It’s the kind of name that describes his purpose.

You see, after the story of Job, after everything that happened in the Old Testament, from Creation to the challenging words of the prophets, God sent God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, from heaven, to live on this earth as a person, a regular person that we could relate to and understand.

He was a person like us. He lived in a family, a family that had its share of difficulties and ordinary life. They had to work to put food on the table. He grew from a baby, he cut his teeth, he learned to walk. He grew to be that fast-growing, 12-year-old boy, so fascinated with learning that he forgot to go home. He learned the carpentry trade and kept at it till he was about thirty.

And yes, every so often, Jesus, or someone in his family, had a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

And Jesus knew, heart, mind, and soul, that God was with him, and is with all people, even us. Sometimes bad things happen, but God see us through them. God can even bring good things out of the bad things that happen, and very often does!

God cares about us,; God knows about us. God’s Son Jesus has experience this sometimes terrible, sometimes wonderful life on earth.

We can’t grasp everything in this universe, but God has it all well in hand., and we can rest assured in God’s love and presence with us.

Amen.

(by Reverend Sally J. DeMasters)