

# “Who Are You?”

Job 38:4-18

August 10, 2014

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

You are probably familiar with the Christian song, “Our God Is An Awesome God.” It has a catchy tune and memorable lyrics. I read that the song’s composer, Rich Mullins, was surprised that many people misunderstood the meaning of the song and especially the phrase “awesome God.” Many people seemed to think that “awesome God” meant that God is “impressive”, “cool”, or even “amazing”. Mullins was using the word “awesome”, not in the popular sense but in the way that the dictionary defines it: inspiring an overwhelming feeling of reverence, awe, or even fear.

We, of course, prefer the first understanding of “awesome”. Not only does it make us feel comfortable to have a “totally awesome” God, but it may also give us the impression that we can understand who this God is and what and how He has done things. We limit God to what our human reason can comprehend and accept. We understand God according to what makes sense and what makes us feel good.

However, it is the second understanding of “awesome” – evoking reverence, awe, and fear – which permeates our experience of God in our Old Testament reading for today. In Job 38 and 39, God speaks out of a whirlwind to remind Job of the many things which Job could not even begin to comprehend, things which we today, even with our scientific, logical minds cannot fully understand. Who then are we before such an awesome God?

We tend to think of Job only as a man of great faith and great patience. The back story of Job is that He had had it all: great wealth, a loving family, good health, and, most important, a strong faith in God. Satan took all of this away. His wealth was stolen. His children all died in a freak storm. His body became ill with sores so painful that the only way he could find relief was by scraping them with pieces of pottery.

None of this made sense if God is only “cool” or “totally awesome.” It makes no sense if God is required to act as we think He should. Job’s wife advised him to curse God and die, to give up on the One who had made him and blessed him with so much and simply blame God for all of his problems. This understanding of God would make perfect sense to our human minds. God was not being fair to Job so Job *should* retain no allegiance to, no faith in Him. Why not give up and curse God?

Job had three friends who came to visit him, not to comfort him, but rather to get him to admit to some terrible and hidden unrepented sin for which God was punishing him so severely. This understanding of God also makes perfect sense to our human minds. If bad things were happening to Job, then he must have done something really bad and God was justified in punishing him. Why not just confess the sin instead of hiding it? In that way, he’d be forgiven and get God off his back.

For a while, Job ignored such advice from his wife and so-called “friends”. He did not blame God or question Him. Eventually, though, Job began to waiver. God was not making sense to him. He wasn’t so awesome any more. God didn’t fit into the box Job had made for him. God wasn’t acting the way Job thought He should act. He wasn’t being fair with Job.

Job thought he knew better how things should be run. So he confronted God in very harsh terms. He even called God his adversary. In Chapter 31, Job said, “Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me as a crown; I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him. (Job 31:35-37)

Here is where God called Job out for challenging Him. Just prior to our text, in response to Job’s challenge, God speaks to him from the whirlwind and says, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” In other words, God is saying, “Who are *you* to tell *me* how things should be done? You know nothing of what you are talking about. Who are you to question me?”

Job had not created the world nor had he had any experience in running the world. He simply didn't comprehend the complexity of God's creation – how it had been made or how it was being maintained. Job thought he knew about good and evil, fairness and unfairness, life and death, but through His questions, God reveals that Job really had no clue as to what he was talking about.

Job's problem was his confusion about his relationship with God. Job was basing that relationship upon his own verifiable knowledge about who God is; his own opinion about how things should be run; and his own experience of what was right and what was wrong. He put all of this above his faith in whom God had revealed Himself to be and his trust in what God had done and what God had promised to do

Sometimes when we read and hear about these Old Testament people like Job, we chastise them for their lack of faith, their imperfections, and their mistakes, without realizing how much we are like them. We may not always be the people of faith we think we are.

Like Job, we often depend more on our knowledge in our relationship with God than we do on our faith. Although the Word of God clearly states, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one," (Rom. 3:11-12) we just know that it doesn't really apply to us – at least not fully. We just know that we are pretty decent people, not nearly as bad as the Bible makes us out to be.

Like Job, we often rely more on our opinion to determine the will of God than we do on the Word of God. The Bible has many clear things to say about our priorities in life, our worship and Bible Study habits, our relationship to and use of money, our sexual behavior, our interpersonal behavior and so on. We will swear allegiance to teaching of the Word of God – until that teaching conflicts with something we really want to do. Then we say, "Well, that's just your interpretation of Scripture" or "I just can't believe God would really insist that we do that."

Like Job, we rely on personal experience to determine reality. When we suffer any terrible thing, we easily believe that either God doesn't care about us any more and has abandoned us. We believe that we have done something wrong for which God is punishing us. When we experience rejection as individuals or lack of numerical growth as a congregation in sharing the Gospel, we assume that we must be doing something wrong and must change our message or our methods. When we look at the economy today, the wars in many parts of the world, the natural disasters in many parts of our country, and all of the other problems we experience, we feel that there is no hope for the future.

Yet God speaks to us as He talked to Job, humbling us that He might exalt us. He says, "You think you know so much about way I operate. You think your opinion decides my will. You think your experience determines reality. Who are *you*?" And then God lovingly answers, "You are a forgiven sinner. You are my beloved child. You are an heir of My kingdom, a possessor of eternal life."

Now, none of this comes from our knowledge of who God is or how He should do things. In that sense, we are exactly like Job – what God is doing doesn't make any sense. How could we possibly know that there is a God who loves us? Natural knowledge of God only tells us that there is a powerful Creator, but nothing about His feelings toward us.

How could we possibly know that there is a God who has established a standard for behavior by which we shall be judged and condemned if we do not meet that standard? Natural knowledge of God, exhibited in our consciences, only shows that God has established a standard of right and wrong.

How can we know that there is a way out of God's condemnation – a way to beat death and live forever? Natural knowledge of God tells us nothing of this. We are left to our differing opinions of what may or may not be in the future as well as our experience of the here and now.

But God has spoken to us in His Word about all of these things. It should not surprise us that, because of the corrupting power of sin, we cannot know any of this on our own. Scripture reminds us

how incomplete our knowledge, opinions, and experiences are: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

We cannot fully understand God’s plan to rescue us. It makes no sense. His Son descends to us, takes on human flesh and blood, and becomes one of us? Incomprehensible! He takes our place under God’s Law, obeys it perfectly on our behalf, and this perfect obedience is credited to us by God? Unbelievable! He then takes our sin upon Himself and takes our place under God’s wrath and is condemned for our sin upon the cross? Inconceivable!

We cannot fully comprehend how the Son of God would rise from the dead to live, thus conquering the power of sin to condemn us and death to hold on to us. We’ve never experienced that. Yet, because of Jesus resurrection from the dead, our resurrections from the dead are assured. Because Jesus now lives forever in glory, we too shall live in glory. Impossible to figure out on our own, but true!

We cannot reason in our minds that water poured over a child’s head in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit rebirths that child, cleanses that child from all sin, and makes that child a temple of the Holy Spirit. We cannot figure out how words spoken by a sinful man in front of the church can, not only describe forgiveness of sins, but actually deliver the forgiveness to us. The same is true about bread and wine, consecrated and consumed, giving forgiveness and assuring us of our place in the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven.

What God has done goes against all logical explanation, yet is absolutely true! Despite what our human knowledge and opinions would tell us, we have sin, but we also have forgiveness for all of our sin because of the Son of God becoming human and taking the punishment for our sin upon the cross. Despite what our human experience would tell us about where our world is heading and what will happen, we have hope for a bright eternal future because of Jesus conquering death and hell for us and rising to life again.

We walk by faith, not by sight or experience. We walk by trust in our Savior, not what we think we know. Therefore, based on God's promises and God's actions on our behalf, if He were ever to ask, "Who are you?", we could respond joyfully and confidently in the words of our sermon hymn: "God's own child, I gladly say it. I am baptized into Christ!" Say it gladly! Say it often! Amen.