

**Sunday, August 10, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - The Wisdom of Youth**

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I remember quite clearly coming home from my first year of college in Washington, DC and sitting at the family dinner table expounding on all of the new things I had learned – things which I was quite certain no one else had ever thought of.

I despaired that my family had been so uninformed on important issues of politics and current events.

Of course, I was wrong – I was mistaking my own newly minted opinions as fact.

While I wasn't offering anything particularly unique I was however opening a new dialogue with my parents, one that continued into adulthood – once I learned to listen a bit.

In today's passages from Job, young Elihu decides that it is time for him to talk.

He admonishes his elders for their weak advice and misinterpretation of Job's dilemma.

Elihu believes, contrary to Job's perception of divine silence, that God is actually speaking to Job in the circumstances of his suffering.

Elihu contends that God is speaking through Job's nightmares and through the pain Job endures.

According to Elihu, God is using this suffering in order to move Job to repentance.

Job must confess his sin instructs the young man.

If Job repents and prays to God, then God will refresh him and repay Job for his conversion.

Only if Job would repent, then God would answer him.

According to Elihu: Job is conceited and arrogant;

Job does not fear God;

God will not listen to Job;

God will not answer Job because God does not listen to the pleas of the wicked;

And now, it seems, God is speaking to Job through Elihu, a messenger of God. An angel.

Elihu will mediate God's grace to Job.

How is that for youthful boasting?

Author Cynthia Ozick in her introduction to *The Book of Job* describes Elihu as “young, intellectually ingenious, confident, a bit brash.

He arrives as a supplanter, to replace stale wisdom with fresh, and begins by rebuking Job’s haranguers for their dogma of mechanical tit for tat.

He argues that Job’s pride has precluded his ability to understand the uses of suffering.”

Suffering, Elihu believes, educates and purifies; it humbles pride, tames the rebel, corrects the scoffer.

Elihu is no more successful than his elders in providing Job with any comfort or insight.

Elihu may not be aware that he is reiterating the arguments of his elders, but he does bring a new dimension to the discussion, offering what one author described as “the most beautiful picture of God in the Bible.

While his senior colleagues gave up arguing, Elihu concludes his admonition by reminding Job and the others that God alone has the power to save.

*God is ‘exalted in his power’*

*God ‘does great things that we cannot comprehend’*

*The Almighty – we cannot find him – he is great in power and justice.*

Elihu has set the stage for our final chapters of this story when God speaks directly to Job.

His youthful enthusiasm encompasses a truth that his elders were unable to articulate.

This is where the lesson lies for us today.

Too often, we assume that we know best – that what we know and understand is the truth – the only truth.

Christopher Ash, in his book *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* asks:

Why do we listen to these repetitive speeches – what are we to learn from them?

He provides his own answer saying “presumably to warn us not to be like them when our natural pharisaism causes grace to be leached out of our conversation and we lapse into the religious certainties of grace-free philosophy or religion.

These speeches stand as a warning to guard grace jealously.”

We listen to these stories to remember that God is almighty, powerful and steadfast in his love for us.

We listen to remember that it is by God’s grace alone that we are here.

We listen to be reminded that the world is always changing and that our ideas evolve with our circumstances.

I think that today's service of blessing and welcoming Eloise is a great example of this.

Julia and Jeff represent a generation that is mostly absent from mainline churches.

They, like so many of their peers, are blending the traditions from their different faith backgrounds.

Rather than abandoning their faith, as many people have done, they are redefining it.

They want Eloise to be part of a community – blessed and welcomed – and they came to us seeking that.

As I mentioned earlier, I see today's service as establishing a precedent in our church – a precedent of extravagant welcome!

Next week I will be embarking on an adventure that will take me into a foreign place.

As a volunteer for Simply Smiles on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Reservation I will have the privilege of being welcomed into a community very different than any I have encountered.

For one week I will be part of a culture that is truly governed by elders; governed by tribal tradition.

I will need my faith in a loving God to counter the desperate hardship the Lakota people face.

We will be living with people for whom Job's story would be all too familiar – people who once had land, community, riches and family and now live in absolute poverty.

I go as your emissary – an ambassador of peace – intent on sharing God's love by example.

I wonder what would have happened at Job's house if his friends had sat down with him, young and old, embraced him, (even with his sores), and said, "We love you, we are here for you, we will pray for you, tell us what you need."

When I get back from South Dakota, actually just a few hours after I get back, we will finish our study of Job.

In the final chapters, as you likely know, God speaks.

He answers Job and he calls the comforters to account.

The story of Job has been likened to an opera, with a steady buildup to the grand appearance of God at the end.

Is this not a metaphor for our lives?

Don't we search all of our lives for answers – hoping for reassurance that our faith is real – that God is there?

Charlie sang of “doubting thomas” of ‘me of little faith.’

Through Job’s story we have been able to examine our own faith.

Our young people call to us to reconcile our beliefs with our actions.

Our neighbors in South Dakota ask us to live our faith in a way that honors their heritage.

This week, I invite you to listen to a new voice, a young voice – someone who might surprise you with their intensity and their insight.

If I can sleep on the floor and bathe in the river for a week, surely you can step outside your circle of comfort and take a risk on learning something new about your neighbor.

It just might change everything.