

**Sunday, August 24, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Out of the Whirlwind”**

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Did you ever wish that you could have a conversation with God?

Can you imagine yourself actually being in the presence of the one who created you, listening as your questions are answered – even questions that you didn’t know you had asked?

In our final chapters to Job’s story, Job’s plea for a face-to-face encounter with Yahweh is granted.

Out of the whirlwind comes God’s voice.

We are reminded that this story of Job is more than a question of good vs evil; more than a testament to faith or patience.

Along with Job we are challenged to explore our belief in and understanding of the power of God.

This wonderful story has engaged scholars, writers, artists and poets for centuries.

Let me share some of the commentary I have encountered in my studies:

**Moses Maimonides (12<sup>th</sup> century)** *When we say that God rules his creatures we do not mean the He does the same as we do when we rule over other beings;*

**John Calvin (16<sup>th</sup> century)** *Let us learn to humble ourselves, so that we may be taught by Him; and when we shall have been taught, may He make us contemplate His brightness in the midst of the shadows of the world.*

17<sup>th</sup> century British Painter/Poet William Blake created a series of 22 engravings depicting this encounter. Our own Bruce McEver shared a paper with me that he wrote while at Harvard Divinity School, interpreting the meaning of those etchings.

He quotes Evelyn Underhill who points out that:

*Blake’s illustrations/interpretation of Job’s experience mirror the classic stages of mysticism:*

1. *Awakening to a sense of divine reality;*
2. *the consequent purgation of the self when it realizes its own imperfections;*
3. *an enhanced return of the sense of the Divine order after the soul has achieved its detachment from the world*
4. *the ‘Dark Night of the Soul’ or the crucifixion of the self in absence of the Divine;*

5. *the complete union with the Truth, or the attainment of that which the third state had perceived as a possibility.*

Is that what we've learned from Job?

That our lives follow a discernable pattern – one of growth-not just physically from childhood to adulthood, but emotionally and spiritually as well.

Is our spiritual journey universal?

Does everyone follow the same path?

Are we all seeking the same goal or the same God?

**Archibald McLeish (20<sup>th</sup> century)**

*Man depends on God for all things; God depends on man for one. Without man's love, God does not exist as God, only as Creator, and love is the one thing no one, not even God Himself, can command. It is a free gift or it is nothing. And it is most itself, most free, when it is offered in spite of suffering, of injustice, and of death....*

*Love – love of life, love of the world, love of God, love in spite of everything – is the answer, the only possible answer, to our ancient human cry against injustice*

**Yehezkel Kaufmann (20<sup>th</sup> century)**

*God's answer is the beginning Job's restoration.*

*In itself, it restored his last and severest loss, his faith in God's providence.*

*God's reproach of the companions next restores his honor and good repute, which were lost consequent to his afflictions.*

*Lastly, God restores his material possessions which were the first to perish.*

Christopher Ashe, writing in *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* concludes that our long study of Job ends with the realization that the story is not really about Job at all, but about God. He says:

*The book of Job is about God....his character, sovereignty, justice, goodness and even his love. Above all it is about God the Creator of everything, the One who is God, who made everything....and therefore Job is about true worship, about our bowing down in reality and in the darkness to the One who is God, leaving even our most agonized, unanswered questions at his feet, for we are creatures, and he alone is Creator.*

We learn that the inequalities of life belong to man's outer lot; but this is immaterial to his spiritual life. This is the lesson that I bring back from South Dakota.

For me, this summer of study has been profoundly moving. Having the opportunity, the privilege really, to delve into scripture and to reflect on that scripture with you each week has deepened my own faith.

Undertaking this study, along with the weekly bible study on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has helped me to understand much about my relationship with God.

I want to close with two quotes from authors whose work I have drawn upon this summer:

Cynthia Ozick: (The Book of Job from The Holy Bible)

*Job's new knowledge is this: that a transcendent God denies us a god of our own devising, a god that we would create out of our own malaise, or complaint, or desire, or hope, or imagining; or would manufacture according to the satisfaction of our own design. ...The voice out of the whirlwind warns against god-manufacture.*

Christopher Ashe : (Job: The Wisdom of the Cross)

*This story points us to the mystery at the heart of the universe: a blameless believer who walks in fellowship with his Creator may suffer terrible and undeserved pain, may go through deep darkness and then at the end be vindicated. There is such a thing in the universe as suffering that is not a punishment for the sin of the sufferer...and therefore Job is passionately and profoundly about Jesus, whom Job foreshadows both in his blamelessness and in his perseverance through undeserved suffering.*

Let's spend a few minutes talking about your insights of what the book of Job has said to us this summer.