

Sermon: Rebuke the Wind

New North Church, Hingham

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20 June 2021

Based on **Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-41**

The Bible is a strange place. But reading the Bible can change you. It can challenge your beliefs. The Bible can mystify. It can enlighten. It engages our imaginations. We can be with Moses in the desert one minute and with Jesus in Jerusalem in the next. The Bible also teaches that God truly is the God of all nations.

Where do we encounter God in Scripture? The simple answer is, everywhere! The Bible tells the story of God's redeeming love. It tells the history of salvation¹, and it knits together two faith traditions, one with the other.

We all know the story begins "In the beginning..." or, "When God began to create heaven and earth..."² What was there before the beginning? God. The earth was unformed and void, but there was God. There was darkness over the face of the Deep. God said, "Let there be light," and off we go.

The Bible also tells us just what we need to know, no more and no less. It adds extraneous details at just the right moment in the story. We hardly ever get physical descriptions of anyone in the Bible, so that when we do, we know it must be for a reason. In the Book of Judges, we are told that Ehud is a left-handed man. Why do we need to know that? You'll have to look it up because today, we're here to talk about Job.

'There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job' (Job 1:1). That's how it starts. The Book of Job is a complicated story with deep and ancient roots, but the gist of it is, ha-Satan, a member of God's divine council who goes looking for trouble on Earth, drops hints that Job, 'a blameless and upright man,' might not be the God-fearing man he is believed to be.

The action gets going when God approves a plan to test Job. You may have heard people say that so-and-so has 'the patience of Job.' Actually, Job was far from patient; rather, Job is a *sufferer* who exhibits *steadfast endurance*. Everything is taken from him: his family, his oxen and sheep, his health – everything but his life.

In response, Job protests to God about his undeserved situation, and he questions why all these things have happened to him. But he never blames God. Looking for justice, he instead decides to sue God, demanding an explanation in open court that only God can give.

Think of that: Job sues God. No one ever sued the Egyptian pharaoh, or Zeus, or even the Roman emperor. And if they did, it would have been ugly. So, there's no precedent here. Job is either very gutsy, or he is certain that his case is airtight. In any event, he demands an answer from God.

And then the LORD *answered* Job out of the whirlwind.

In most translations, God says, "Gird up your loins," which is one word in Hebrew (גִּדְּוּרֵיכֶם) and is a correct translation in the context of preparing for battle. But when we hear God speak like that, it adds an intimidating tone of voice to the rest of God's speech, a tone which may not be there in this context.

In normal conversation, the Hebrew word means, 'Brace yourself,' as we heard it today. This Hebrew word also includes a thing at the end called a 'word particle' (נָא) and it means 'We pray, now.' It's archaic and in modern English, we'd say, 'please.'

So, "brace yourself, please," said God, who is only being polite to his servant Job.

A woman named Jane Marczewski, who is a three-time cancer survivor, wrote, "I am God's downstairs neighbor, banging on the ceiling with a broomstick. I show up at His door every day. Sometimes with songs, sometimes with curses. Sometimes apologies, gifts, questions, demands."³

She has suffered, been tested both physically and emotionally, and has realized some things about God. She had heard that "some people can't see God because they won't look low enough, and it's true," she said. "Look lower. God is on the bathroom floor." Right where she found herself so many times, praying for mercy and relief.

What makes Job's story so compelling is that most of us have been – or will be some day – in Job's situation. At some point in everyone's life, we'll be the one 'banging on the ceiling with a broomstick.'

Whether we are in the grip of some deadly disease or caught up in an abusive situation that seems hopeless, we'll be angry with God and will demand answers. And maybe that's why the Bible so often portrays God as a loving parent who is always there.

The Bible teaches that God is in charge. God is not worried about the ‘design’ and how it works. Neither is Jesus – he’s confident enough, and tired enough, to take time out for a nap.

This incident occurs on the same day that Jesus told the parables of the automatically growing seed and of the mustard bush that will provide shelter for all the birds of the air. There is no obvious lesson today, no parable, no apparent teaching. But there is a little revelation of Jesus’ true nature, of who he really is. At his most vulnerable, he seems to be teaching the disciples to trust in God for protection. And then he himself rebukes the wind. Who can do that, the disciples wonder?

Rather than give us the obvious answer, Mark merely writes, ‘Then they came to the other side of the sea.’

Up to now in Job, with one exception, all references to God have been old tribal names: *El Shaddai* (God Almighty); *Eloah*, or *El*. It’s only now that the author switches to YHWH, the one who makes things happen, the one who delivered the Israelites up out of Egypt, because whenever God establishes a direct personal relationship with humans, it is YHWH, the God of the Covenant, who shows up.⁴

But at no point does God give Job a straight answer. Instead, God shows Job how everything works and who is responsible for all of it.

So, what is God trying to teach Job? That Job is ultimately insignificant?

God says, “You wanted to meet me? Well, here I am. You had questions. Well, what about all of this?”

God provides no answer at all to what was bothering Job and yet, somehow, Job is satisfied. How can that be, after everything that happened to him?

God does provide one thing, something that Job never thought he would get.

As in the old days in the Garden, when God would meet with the man and woman in the cool of the day, God *encounters* Job. God listens, and God teaches. God shows Job the big picture and Job gets some God-time, and maybe that’s all he needed.

The Bible may be a strange place full of difficult passages and odd place names, but sometimes, it reveals just what you need when you need it.

It's all in here. We are free to jump in at any point to see what we might discover about the nature of God, the teachings of Jesus, and about human nature. We can see the many ways that God encounters people and how they respond.

So, dive into the Bible. Ask questions. Demand answers. Find wisdom and understanding. And then talk about what you found.

Amen.

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¹ The UCC *Book of Worship*.

² *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, (The Jewish Publication Society, New York, 1985).

³ Jane Marczewski, "God is on the Bathroom Floor", <https://www.nightbirde.co/>, accessed 19 June 2021.

⁴ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 528.