

The Question Is...  
March 20, 2016 (Palm Sunday)  
Job 3, Luke 19:28-44  
First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights  
Pastor Dave Carver



When I was a kid, I loved watching *Monday Night Baseball*. Curt Gowdy and Joe Garagiola would call the action, and I believe that it was at this time I discovered one of the coolest things about television: the “split screen technology”. With half the screen, I could watch pitcher Tom Seaver look down for the signs that Duffy Dyer was flashing, and with the other half I could see Lou Brock dancing off first base, threatening to use his blazing speed to steal second base. Split screen allowed me to take in two different aspects of the same contest at the same time, and it surely increased my enjoyment of the game.

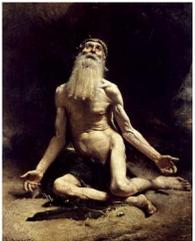
A few years later, however, my neighbor got a new television with a technology that I hated. It was called “Picture in Picture”, and what that did was allow you to have one show playing on most of the screen, while an entirely different program was contained in a small box somewhere else on the screen. He’d have one game on the big screen and another game in the little box, and flip back and forth between them.



So far as I was concerned, the Picture in Picture took two perfectly good games and ruined them by trying to mash them together.

This morning, we’re going to look at Job, chapter 3, and we’re also going to consider Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. At the end of the service, you’ll have to decide if this is more like the awesomeness of split screen technology, in which we have a helpful comparison and investigate the relationship

between these two chapters of the same story... or if it's more like the banality of Picture in Picture, which creates unnecessary distraction resulting in an unsatisfactory experience of either narrative.



<sup>1</sup>Let's look at Job. When we left him last week, he was sitting in silence with his wife and his friends after having suffered more grief and loss than anyone should ever have to suffer. For seven days, nobody said anything, and as we mentioned last Sunday, it is one of the most tender scenes of sympathy and affection in scripture.

That changes, as Job opens his mouth in what we English majors would call a “soliloquy”. That is, Job makes a speech here that reveals a lot about his inner self, and we're not really sure at whom these comments are directed. Is he talking to himself? His wife? His friends? The Lord? Or is the author of Job using this speech to communicate with the readers or hearers of the story? One of the great things about a soliloquy is that the answer can be “all of the above”. Job's words here offer an amazing insight into the depths of his character as well as an opportunity to consider the main themes of the rest of the book.

The chapter begins with Job cursing the day that he was born, and as he gets warmed up, his questions intensify. After lamenting the day of his birth and disavowing the night of his conception, he asks three significant questions. In verses 11-15, he says, “Why didn't I die at birth? That would have been better than living until now...”

Not content with that, however, he asks in verses 16 – 19, “Why didn't I die before I was born? I would never have known any pain at all!” And then he gets to the logical conclusion in verses 20 – 26, where he wonders, “Why does anyone even live at all, when we are bound to be so miserable?”

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<sup>1</sup> Job, Leon Bonnat (1879)

The net effect of Job's soliloquy is that the reader is left with one hauntingly profound question: this man who has lost all that he has ever loved stands in front of us and says, "Why did this happen to me???"



<sup>2</sup>On the other side of our split screen, we see Jesus as he enters the last week of his life. For most of the day, apparently, he does not say very much. His silence, however, extends to neither his supporters and disciples nor his adversaries and critics. The disciples and the crowds are yelling and singing to the Lord, and the religious leaders are barking at Jesus, warning him to make his followers stop that noise. As you've heard, Jesus' response is that if the children of God are prevented from praising, then the very creation itself will sing out.

And when the parade is over, Jesus has a soliloquy of his own. It's much briefer than the one we overhear in Job, but it is just as filled with bitterness and questioning. He looks over the city of Jerusalem from a vantage point that Luke wants us to see as very similar to the one to which he was taken by Satan during his temptation three years previous, and he weeps. He weeps for what is, and he weeps for what he knows will surely come. And through his tears, I believe that it's pretty easy to see one hauntingly profound question: "Oh, oh, oh... How did we wind up here???" Jesus considers what has come before, and he surely knows what will come to pass in the next few days, and like Job, he is overcome by grief and emotion.



And this is what I think: I think that Job's question and Jesus' question are essentially two sides of the same coin. To use the television analogy with which I started, I believe that they belong on the same screen. Is there really much

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<sup>2</sup> *O Jerusalem*, Greg Olson (1995)

difference between asking “Why is this happening?” and asking “How did we get here?” I don’t think that there is. Job’s question is, perhaps, a little more personal in nature and little more pointed, while Jesus has a point of view that has the benefit of a little deeper perspective and involvement in a community. But I don’t think that, substantively, there is much difference here.

And the stories of Job and Jesus lead us to an important truth: it is ok to ask questions of God.

When I was seventeen, I was a busboy at the Longhorn Ranch, a big old steakhouse near my home. When I worked the closing shift, I had to wipe the rims on all of the ketchup bottles before we put them away. When I worked the opening shift, I had to wipe the rims on all of the ketchup bottles before we put them on the tables. I remember asking my supervisor, Ms. Hafley, “Since the last thing I did last night was wash these bottles, why do I have to wash them again?”

And, God bless her heart, Ms. Hafley looked at me and said, “David, ours is not to reason why; ours is but to do and die.”

Seriously? Who quotes Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *The Charge of the Light Brigade* to a seventeen-year-old boy while he’s cleaning ketchup bottles? Not only that, but she didn’t answer the question! (parenthetically, for some reason I will say that if you ever dine at my place, I expect you to comment on the cleanliness of the necks on my condiment bottles...)

But isn’t that the way that much of the church and all of Job’s friends treat our questions of and about God? “What are you, crazy? You shouldn’t ever, ever, question God. What, do you want to be hit by lightning? Sit there. Suffer in silence. Have some dignity, for God’s sake. But do not question the Lord or your fate. Do, and die.”

Thanks be to God, beloved, that the lives of Job and Jesus point to a different reality. The introduction to the book of Job and the story of the incarnation of Jesus both point to a reality in which the Creator is willing and able to enter into relationship with the creation – a relationship based on love, risk, trust, and vulnerability. In the context of a relationship like that, then, we are free to cry out. We are free to ask questions.

Remember that, my friends: do not let me or anyone else ever shame you for asking questions of or about the Lord. If God loves you, and he does; and if God is all-powerful, which he is; then surely in the context of that relationship God can handle a few questions from the likes of you and me.

But having said that, we do well to remember that if we are in a relationship in which it is permissible for us to *ask* questions, we are obliged to *hear* them from time to time as well, are we not? A relationship that permits questioning only from one party is not really a relationship at all, is it?

Whether we cry, with Job, *Why is this happening?*, or we sit with Jesus and wonder, *How in the world did we get to this point?*, the responding question of the Divine is the same: *Now that you are here, what will you do?* Look, this horrible pain is happening. This suffering is upon us. This thing that we have feared is imminent. *What will we do?*

Let's go back to the split screen. In Job, we see a reality that is twisted by the one called *Ha-Satan* – “the accuser”. Although he is only active in the first two chapters of the book, he causes great damage. When we meet him, he is parading in front of God, trying to incite God to doubt the reality of Job's love for God. Talk about *chutzpah* – you've got nerve when you set out to sow doubt in the mind of the Almighty! But that's what the Accuser does...and then he leaves God's presence and comes to afflict Job with all manner of pain and suffering and grief in the

hopes of sowing doubt and distrust in Job's life and in that of his community.

Scripture  
verse

And it works. For weeks, I've asked you to pay attention to the language of creation that shows up in Job. Look at what happens in the reading from this morning: Job not only curses the day of his birth – he wishes that that day were nothing but darkness. Go all the way back to page one of creation: what is the first thing that the Creator ever says? "Let there be light." In his soliloquy, what is the first thing that Job says? "Let there be dark."

Scripture  
verse

And if you think I'm stretching it, then remember the end of the creation story. What is the last thing God does when he's creating? He rests, and he gives rest to the creation. And how does Job end his soliloquy here in chapter 3? By saying that there is no such thing as rest. I suggest that Job chapter 3 is a reversal of creation – that the accuser has sought to undo the work of the Creator in Job's life. And for the next 35 chapters, the story of Job and his friends is one of a community moving more and more deeply into this alternate reality whereby the grace of God is not enough to reach into Job's life; there is neither light nor rest for that which God has made, and everything is all wrong.

The Accuser – *Ha-Satan* – wants Job and his wife and his friends to believe that the goodness of creation is a lie. The Accuser seeks to re-write the story of who and whose we are.



Look at Luke. In our reading from today, the religious leaders – the very people who ought to be speaking the truth *of* God and surely truth *about* God – the religious leaders find themselves in the position of shushing the Divine. They are

afraid of the praise of the Lord. They have lived into fear, into pride, into self-preservation... They have lived into the lies of the Accuser.

Listen to this: when Jesus sat on the back of that donkey on the first Palm Sunday, he faced the same question as did Job and as do you and me. The question before us each and every day is *which story will we choose to believe? Who will we trust?*

The Accuser told Job and his friends, he told Jesus and the religious leaders on Palm Sunday, and he tells us that it's all up to us because we are fundamentally alone in the universe and therefore we are each ultimately and uniquely responsible for making our own meaning in the world.

And the Creator – the One who knows what *does* make for peace; the One who builds hedges around that which he loves; the One who brings order from chaos and who apparently enjoys the thought of singing rocks – that Creator approaches those whom he has made in love and promises to be with us in the hardest places of our lives.

The God who made you loves you enough to invite your questions. And the God who made you loves you enough to give you one of his own. It's Palm Sunday. It's a cute day to see all the little kids with their palm branches and maybe we even take a few fronds for ourselves.

But remember that today and every day we face a fundamental question of identity. This is the only Sunday in the whole year where we have both palms and ashes before us. We have the choice: whose story will we believe, and how will we show that in our lives?

It's Palm Sunday, beloved. Cry out to God, if you need to. *Where are you, God? Why is this happening?* And cry out to your community, if you can. *Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes*

*in the name of the Lord!* And this week – this week in particular – follow Jesus. All week, follow Jesus, and learn with him to dwell more deeply in the story for which you were made. Amen.