

September 6, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 20 Job 33-38

Dearly Beloved;

You are God's people, Jesus flock, and whether you see it with the clarity that I do, HIS Holy Spirit has been upon you and with you throughout this time in the wilderness. I used that phrase during the communion service I was a part of with my daughter, Rev. Rebekah. It became part of a mega series of sermons she has been preaching for her congregation in Etobicoke throughout the closure of churches. And for me as well, it has been a descriptive phrase of this season in which we have not been able safely, to gather and worship as we used to do. I keep reminding myself, and you in this pastoral letter that worship will be very different when we return to the sanctuary, hopefully in two weeks from now. The reason we are removing hymn books and praise materials from the pews is not just because we cannot sing as we have been accustomed to doing. Covid-19 spreads by droplets from the act of breathing. As a result materials we would normally handle can become contaminated. That is also why we are not using bulletins or copies of the message. Before they ever get touched by you they would be touched by me, and the person who distributes them, and potentially by the person who prints them. And of course we breathe as we do these simple tasks. Therein lies the danger. And that is why we will all be wearing face masks, as a safety measure to guard us to some degree as to what we breathe in, but most of all, to prevent us from sharing droplets carried by our breathing out. Please listen to those who greet

you and assist you to follow the protocols under which we will be operating. Your safety is our greatest concern.

The message for this morning is taken from the Book of Job. And it does not have a single text but a number of texts taken from chapters 33-38 of that Book in the Bible. We usually turn to Job, to study something that is part of the theme of suffering. Job suffers. He suffers the loss of his wealth, the loss of his children and his wife, and then the loss of his health. The cause of his suffering, and this is what makes Job so instructive to us, is not his sin. He is not wrestling with God under judgement. He is the victim of Satan who is trying to break Job to prove to the Lord that the only reason Job is a man of faith is because God has given him so much to enjoy in his daily life.

There is a phrase, Job's counsellors, which describes Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. In good times, Job's former life, before Satan's onslaught, they were friends. They come to visit and talk with Job in his new estate. He suffers, and he asks the question, why is this happening to me? Most of us have at some time or another tasted that bitter cup. In the movie City of Angels, the heart surgeon, a woman, loses a patient during surgery. She knows the case was text book. She did everything right. And yet she lost the man who was under her care. As she weeps on the stairway in the hospital, she cries out. "I was so big. How did I get so small?" At the top of her game, she blames herself, for her failure. She tastes

despair. The only thing that saves her is the visit of an angel...Seth. Well, Job's counsellors are not angels.

They accuse him of great sin. They urge him to name it and repent. It is obvious to them that Job is under the judgement of the Holy God. In fact Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar add to Job's burden a layer of suffering that tortures his mind and weighs down his soul.

Job is visited by a fourth friend, Elihu. Elihu is young (chapter 32:6). He is angry at the three older friends for their failure to answer Job's questions, and their ability to create greater pain as a burden that threatens to break Job. In chapter 33 Elihu pleads to Job to listen to what he is going to say (33:1) and he begins by stating his qualifications. He does not have the wisdom that comes with the passing of years. He comes to Job aware of a simple truth, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (33:4) How would we say that in this particular time? I think it would be something like this: "I come to you in the Spirit of God." He promises to be gentle. He promises to be caring. "No fear of me should alarm you." (32:7)

In chapter 36 Elihu makes a concrete proposal. He says to Job what amounts to, let's just look at the sky! "(God) draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams." (36:27) I was born in Port Arthur, Ontario, which together with Fort William became the city of Thunder Bay. Down through the heart of Port Arthur babbles McVicars Creek. That Creek also flowed through the neighbourhood in which

our family home was located. My father and I were working in the garden as I remember, when he suddenly asked me, “Do you want to go fishing?” We had been turning the ground in preparation for planting. I had not noticed but he had captured several worms and put them in a tin can. And off we went to the Creek.

The sun was setting. We had only brought one fishing rod. Dad baited the hook, cast it out into a quiet pool and handed it to me. Within minutes the slack line suddenly tightened. “You’ve got a bite. Let him take it.” It was hard to be patient, but I followed his every suggestion. The line began to run off the reel. I tugged and set the hook. Fifteen minutes later I had caught my first fish ever, speckled trout. The whole experience for me, was mystical in nature. The Lord made the rain which made and refreshed the creek, home to fish, and HE delivered one to me as the sun when down that evening in late May of early June.

Elihu brings something to Job in that conversation that he has not known since tragedy struck and his world, life as he had known it, literally dissolved. Elihu brings Job a small bowl of peace, as they look at the sky and remember what God does. “Who can understand how HE spreads the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion?” (36:29) Thunder Bay (the body of water) got its name from a local phenomenon. A peninsula of land juts out into Lake Superior forming a huge bay and what our forebears could see was a natural harbor. Because of the lay of the land, thunder storms

never just last an hour and go away. They tend to get trapped between the land occupied by Port Arthur-Fort William, and the sleeping giant. They tend to bounce back and forth between the land forms and stay all night. There is a rugged beauty to thunder storms over Thunder Bay. The thunder is loud. The display of lightening is spectacular. I was impressed as a child, that there was more to it than science could explain. When the thunder boomed and the glass rattled in the windows, it seemed God was close, and awesome in HIS power.

Elihu reminds Job of winter. “He says to the snow ‘Fall on the earth,’ and to the rain shower, ‘Be a mighty downpour.’” As a boy I was familiar with winter in Northwestern Ontario. My cousin lived next door to us and we were close. On school nights in the winter we would work to get our homework done before dinner, in order that our parents would let us go out and play after dinner in the cold dark nights. There was a great sliding hill near McVicars Creek in our neighbourhood. We would get permission to go out with our toboggans. The last thing that would happen before I left, was my father would take his pocket watch and tie it to a belt loop of my trousers with a shoe lace. He would remind me I was being given a privilege, and that with privilege there was responsibility. My responsibility was to make sure I and my cousin were back home by 8:30 pm. That meant I had to time the walk to the hill so that we would leave in time to be home on schedule.

I wanted to do something in addition to sliding. It was a cold clear night. I announced to my cousin that we were making our last runs on the toboggans in order to get home on time. But I had given us an extra 10 minutes. We left for home. We crossed a field. Before we got on the road to complete our return home, I suggested we lay down on our backs in the snow. There were no street lights in the area. The sky was a sea of stars. The moon would light our way when we started to complete the journey home. The formation of my character really began laying on the snow looking at the sky. I wrote a piece for my English class, that my teacher shared with my parents when they participated (as they always did) in parents night. Apparently I wrote about seeing the handiwork of God lying on my back in the snow under a sky filled with stars.

In verse 22 of chapter 37 Elihu shares with Job, “Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty.” It is in chapter 38 that the Lord answers Job out of the storm, or as the KJV puts it, “out of the whirlwind.” What I see in these chapters is that Elihu does not so much argue with Job, as he invites him to look up at the sky and taste what he has always known....that God is a redeeming power who creates and saves. And as God created Job, HE now saves him from all the threats to which he has been exposed. And Job discovers a new level of relationship with the God to whom he has been faithful, and yet before whom he repents in dust and ashes.

My dear, dear friends, you have witnessed the beauty of the sky. The wonder of sunshine on your cheek, on a hot summer day. The sound of frost under foot when the ground is covered with snow. A sky full of stars, and the moon lighting the way home after dark in season after season after season. And you, like me, like Job before us, have felt the reality of a Holy redeeming presence in the midst of the wonders of the world outside our doorsteps. We have seen the local creek, heard it babbling over the stones at the covered bridge, and seen children and adults playing shinny on the pond frozen to the first and best sheet of ice in town. And you have witnessed the moment in which you simply smiled and shook your head at the obvious truth that God is real and at hand, sheltering us from danger, and comforting us in danger's midst. I remind you once again....we are witnesses, because of what we have seen, and what we have heard.

Let us pray:

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the world thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed, then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee, how great thou art! How great thou art! To you belongs our praise. To you we offer our service, our worship, our gifts, treasure and talents. Amen