

“Who Knows More Than I?”

Job 28: 1-7

Rev. Liz Miller

October 18, 2015

My all-time favorite Bill Murray movie is Groundhog Day—the one where he has to relive the same horrible day over and over until he gets it right. It's a cynical take on déjà vu but Bill Murray's character is such a curmudgeon that you can't help laughing at his reaction every time the alarm wakes him up and the same day starts over. I experienced a minor case of Groundhog Day this week – minus the curmudgeonly Bill Murray.

You see, normally our Scripture readings and sermons follow the lectionary cycle. This means that the texts we read from the Bible follow a three-year rotation. There are some stories that appear more often because we read a different version of it, like the teachings of Jesus that appear in multiple Gospels, but if you follow this lectionary cycle, it is incredibly rare that someone would end up preaching on the same story more than once a year. It is so rare that in the time that I've been preaching, it's never happened to me – until this morning. Job 38, God's monologue spoken from the whirlwind, was a minor text within the lectionary that I chose in June, and today when it appeared as the main text, without thinking, I picked it again. When I realized I had recently preached on it, I thought about taking a poll to see if anyone remembered what I talked about the first time and just reusing the first sermon. But, where's the fun in that?

I spent a lot of this week worrying that I wouldn't have anything new to add until I realized two important things—one: we've been preaching on the same scripture texts since literally the beginning of the church. There is always something new we can find in them. That's part of the reason why we keep going back to those same familiar stories. And two, if there isn't something new worth saying or thinking about four months later, the story probably wasn't worth studying the first time.

I do think it is very peculiar that *this* reading from Job happens to be the one that appeared again so soon. After I stopped kicking myself I started to think that maybe this was a story I *needed* to dive into a second time. A lot of the stories we read in Scripture have the humans talking. We're complaining, we're confused, we're hurt, we're uncertain, and above all else—we're questioning God. We're asking God, “What do you want from me? Who am I? What's the purpose of life? What's going to happen to me? Where are you, God? Are you listening?” And if you read the scriptures, there are plenty of answers, but Job 38 is the answer to end all answers. It is God's alpha and omega of an answer. It's such a long, detailed answer that it goes on for four chapters. If I were to read the whole response we'd have to order in for lunch because we'd be here past noon. In fact, it is the longest soliloquy attributed to God in the entire Bible. Instead of wondering how we landed on this text again, my new attitude is that if God is still speaking, maybe we should keep listening.

And in Job 38, God is doing *a lot* of speaking. To rewind, God's speech has been built up after years of Job suffering and finally reaching his limits of patience and sanity. He demands that God tells him why God caused him pain, why God would allow him to lose his family, and why Job wasn't protected from all of this heartbreak. Job asks God one of my favorite theological questions: Why me?

The good news is that God has a response for Job. The bad news is that it's not what Job wants to hear. I imagine that Job wants to hear what we all do when we ask that question—we want God to say, “You're right! I'm so sorry. I'm a chump. I really dropped the ball on protecting you. Thank you for pointing that out and I'll make sure it doesn't happen again.” We want an answer that is both definitive and doesn't require any more reflection or understanding from us. We want the simple answer, the easy out.

God doesn't give that answer. Instead, God turns the table and begins questioning Job: “Who are you again? And where were you when I designed the universe? Where were you when I brought it into being? Is it you who breathes life into every creature? No? That's what I thought.” That's the Cliff's Notes version of God's response. It really is a thoughtful answer. The descriptions of creation and God's

role as creator and sustainer are incredibly beautiful. They are poetry. But when you are suffering, and when you have just cried out, “Why me, O Lord?! Why me?!” you don't want to hear about the storehouses of the snow or young lions learning how to hunt or mountain goats giving birth. In fact, mountain goats giving birth are probably the last possible things you want to hear about from God.

If you're Job, and you've demanded hard answers from the God you have been steadfast and faithful to, this response would be incredibly unsatisfying. It might even be painful to hear. If I was Job, I would be shaking my fist saying, “That's not what I wanted you to say to me!” And God would reply, “You asked for the truth, and I'm giving it to you! It's not my fault you can't understand it!” And then I would get frustrated and indignant and stomp through the fields, muttering about birthing mountain goats, until I reached my house and slammed the front door shut and refused to talk to God for the rest of the week.

If we move forward in time and space until we reach today, we still don't have a satisfying answer from God. We're still asking that same question. This summer I wasn't able to give an answer that trumped God's answer or clarified what God was saying. I don't suppose I, or any other preacher or prophet or priest, will ever be able to trump God's answer. We saw what Job received when he demanded an answer from God—I don't think I'm going to get anything better than what he got. But, maybe the point isn't in trying to make God's infuriatingly poetic answer fit our question. Maybe that's not the point of this story. Maybe the point is something different altogether. I don't know how I answered in June, but here is what God's answer to Job has me thinking about today:

Maybe what we are supposed to take away from God's answer is a combination of humility and awe. Humility because I don't have the answers to the questions that God asks of Job.

Humility because it reminds of all that I don't know. I don't know how to give a horse its strength or how to make a locust leap or how to give a trumpet the sound of its horn. And I'm not supposed to. I'm not God. I'm not the Creator of the earth. I'm not the sustainer of life. I'm not the redeemer of all humanity. I'm not God, and I don't want to be. God's response reminds me of this in a

powerful way. It also reminds me that God isn't asking us to be God. All we have to do is be our human selves. Thank goodness. I would make a lousy God. And when I read of all the things that God looks after and all the different parts of creation—it boggles my mind. It humbles me. It leaves me in awe.

The awe comes in the reminder that even though I don't understand how everything fits together or how every part of creation works, God does. The details in God's response to Job inspire awe in me because there are details in there that I have never even thought about before. One of my favorite passages of it comes later in chapter 39, God says: “Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high? It lives on the rock and makes it home on the fastness of the rocky crag. From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.” Wow! That makes me want to say, “Holy God, tell me more! I want to know about the hawk and about the eagle and about every bird in the sky. Tell me more!” It is pure awe – wonder that inspires and moves you to a deeper understanding of the infinite strength and power of God.

What if, through awe, we are able to find comfort in the fact that even though we don't always receive the answers we want to hear, or even though we don't fully understand why things happen to us, God is fully at work, weaving our story into the rest of creation, caring for us and creating life in us. What if, for awhile, we can step away from needing all the answers, and just approach God with awe and humility – grateful that we are not tasked with that immense role, and grateful that the one who is does so with compassion, care, and creativity.