

Sermon: Now My Eye Sees

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles Ottawa, Oct 27, 2024)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Who doesn't love a happy ending, a satisfying, positive, upbeat, conclusion? Who doesn't love that? I know I do. I love going to theatres ending with feel-good musicals; I love watching movies ending with ceremonies or a celebrations. Happy ending is what dreams are made of, what most people hope for.

So I think we all have the editor of Job to thank for the happy ending of this book, which many equate with suffering. Thank you for the epilogue in chapter 42, for such a happy ending. Thank you for letting us know that Job was made whole, that the Lord had restored his fortune, and gave him twice as much as he had before. His three friends were put to shame by the Lord for they had not spoken what is right as compared to Job. They were thus required to bring burnt offerings, and to have Job pray over them.

All his close kin, brothers and sisters and all who had known Job also came. They had previously shun Job at the depth of his sufferings, but have now all come. They broke bread with him, comforted him and even gave him parts of their wealth. Not that Job needed it for the Lord blessed Job with double the amount of sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. The Lord gave him another seven sons and three daughters—replacing the ones Job had lost. Pity that wife of Job, yes the same one who had earlier counselled her husband to 'curse God and die', who by now bore him more children than one could count with both hands. Twenty if you count them all and not a peep more out of her.

But I digress, for the focus is not on Job's wife, it's on the three beautiful daughters of Job. All named, in contrast to the nameless sons. Their names are indicative of their great beauty: Jemimah means "turtledove"; Keziah or "cassia" is probably an aromatic plant like cinnamon; and Keren-Happuch means "a jar of eye paint"—all precious in substances, and all precious to their father. Not only were they named, they were granted an inheritance, an unusual gesture in the patriarchal culture of Ancient Near East when sons are readily available.

And to top off this grace upon grace from God, Job lived one hundred and forty years—representing two life times, and saw his children and his children’s children for four generations (one more than the righteous Joseph enjoyed in his life time, in the book of Genesis). And Job died, old and full of days—a rare description of honour in the Old Testament, accorded only to Abraham, Isaac and David. In short, what a happy ending!

I should love such a folktale, beginning with ‘once upon a time’ and ending with ‘they lived happily ever after’, but I don’t. For such a happy ending is unrealistic, and it reinforces a false theology, and most of all it distracts us from the central question asked by the book: “Why do people worship God?” Do we worship the Lord God, the creator of the heavens and earth, for the goodies that God could bestow? Or do we worship the Abba Father in Heaven for another reason, a high purpose all together?

The answer lies in Job’s response to God, in chapter 42, verse 1-6, our first reading today. But it requires a bit of unpacking, for in his response, Job also quoted God three times in verse 3 and 4, while intermixing with his immediate answer. Perhaps the best way is to read this passage through the Message Version of the Bible, containing a contemporary and dynamic translation by Eugene Peterson. Listen to this response by Job to God: *“I’m convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans. You asked, ‘Who is this muddying the water, ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purposes?’ I admit it. I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me, made small talk about wonders way over my head. You told me, ‘Listen, and let me do the talking. Let me ask the questions. You give the answers.’ I admit I once lived by rumours of you; now I have it all firsthand—from my own eyes and ears! I’m sorry—forgive me. I’ll never do that again, I promise! I’ll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumour.”*

Crusts of hearsay and crumbs of rumour, that represent the sum total of all of Job’s and his three friends’ inept theological reflection on the nature of God. They thought to dissect God, to explain God’s way, to understand the nature of divine justice and righteousness. They sought to explain suffering, the cause of it, the path out of it.

Now, Job was more right in his speech than his three friends, as deemed by God, but he nevertheless, lamented, complained, shouted his discontent, shook his fist at the God he believed to be his enemy, to be attacking him. More than once did Job ask for die, for death would be more

welcomed than the miserable life of the suffering Job. Yet, in the midst of his dark night, in that valley of shadow of death, he dared to tell the truth of his life to his Creator, and demanded God to account for God's actions. In short, Job kept his relationship with God alive.

To be sure, God never explain to Job the true nature of Job's suffering—a key piece of information that only God and the Accuser and us the readers know. Rather, as I reflected in last week's message, God spoke about the vastness of creation, with knowledge, power that we could not fully comprehend. Yes God did speak to Job. In so speaking, God attempted to reorient Job from his own suffering to the much larger awareness of God's creation. In response, instead of succumbing to crusts of hearsay, or crumbs of rumour of God, Job utters a profound statement of faith in verse 5, "*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.*" Now my eye sees you. That is all Job really asks for, and he is finally getting from God.

Last week, I had the pleasure of attending the Synod of Quebec and Eastern Ontario. The business of the Synod was mostly routine, but it did have Carey Nieuwhof as the keynote speaker. I first came across Carey when he was invited as a speaker to the Knox College Chapel in 2006. At the time, he was the lead minister of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Barrie, ON, a sort of an early and only mega church of the denomination. I've follow his career since then, from his attempt to plant satellite churches, his departure from the PCC, the starting of Connexus Church, to his ongoing speaking tour, his online presence. I've always thought of him as a bit of visionary, a bit too ahead of the time.

I won't burden you with all that he had said during the Synod, but do want to highlight a particular trend that Carry has observed on how Christians are finding and rediscovering faith, through the movement from immanence towards transcendence. In theological parlance, to say that God is transcendent is to say that God is exalted, above all else, and certainly beyond us. To say that God is immanent is to say that God is present in time and space, and that he is near to us.

The way Carey explained it, he has always been an immanence type of guy in his pastoral ministry. In his preaching, due to his previous training as a lawyer, he is always trying to explain God, to make God understandable to the masses, something that I could totally relate.

However, Carey went on to challenge a room full of ministers and elders that what if, what if that approach is all wrong, out of date, no longer

speaking to the post-modern world. What if what people really want, what they really need is not to have God explained to them, but for them to experience God. To experience the transcendence of God as the totally beyond, as the Holy other. How might that have change our approach to pastoral ministry?

I think that is precisely what Job wants. Facing an unjust suffering of an unimaginable proportion, Job enters the theological ring with God, and will not be silenced by God's silence. He calls God out of hiding in heaven to make sense of the oldest problem on earth and in heavens, the problem of theodicy—that is if God is all powerful and all loving, why then does suffering still exist in every part of human reality?

In the storm of his own life, Job meets God in-breaking from storms in heaven, and upon hearing and seeing his Creator, all Job's bitterness, anger, discontent, all that negativity simply melts away. From Job's viewpoint, that encounter with God overwhelms and honours him, and transforms his life. Hearing about God and finally seeing God transforms Job and calls him to a new kind of theological understanding; It calls Job beyond himself to a renewed and heightened sense of divine presence in his life and in the world—the transcendence of God now made immanent. Job finally gets it, God is his friend. With that, Job repents in dust and ashes—an expression to denote the changing of view, way and life in totality to completion.

Just like Job, I too want to see God. I don't need to see God while expecting an overflowing cup of happy ending. I also don't need to see God in order to believe. I already believe! I believe in God, in his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, my redeemer and my friend. I already believe in God the Spirit, whom calls forth the Church and gathers us to worship in truth and in spirit. I just want to see God. I do have a list of questions to ask the Almighty. I think I have it right here, or somewhere else, I am not quite sure. I suspect, the moment I do see God, all my questions, my doubts, my discontent will simply melt away. My heart will be satisfied, my half-broken body will be made whole, my soul will be stilled. I will probably still need to repent. I don't mind that, it's good for me anyway, as long as my eye sees the Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**