

## **Where is God?**

Job 38: 1-11

Mark 4: 35-41

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### *Job 38: 1-11*

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?”

### *Mark 4: 35-41*

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

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“Daddy, why are there bad men?” six year old me asked my Dad when he was sworn in as a police officer. I looked at his impressive uniform, and shiny badge, but was scared to see his gun and handcuffs, knowing that he would be using those on “the bad men” to keep us all safe. My Daddy was big and strong but I was scared that the ‘bad men’ would be bigger and stronger. Why are there even any ‘bad men’?

He very gently and patiently reassured me that he knew how to take care of himself, to be safe as he kept everyone safe. He explained to me that it was now his job to protect not only our family but the whole town. He told me that sadly there would always be ‘bad men,’ that there were many reasons that people committed crimes—they might be very, very angry, or confused or sick in their mind—but to remember always that most of the people everywhere were good, loving, sweet and kind. I think that may have been the first time that I heard the cliché, ‘one bad apple doesn’t spoil the whole bunch.’

“Dad, will the Vietnam War ever end?,” I asked more than a few times in the early 70’s. Every night news stories and gruesome images showed the carnage of war, and the violence at protests that had started out so peacefully. “Why do we bomb children and villages?” We talked about the wanton violence, what a just war is and is not, and even the necessary ability for those

who serve in the military to at some point leave it behind them, just as he had to do after serving in the Air Force during the Korean War.

“Dad, how could you vote for *him*?” “Dad, how could you vote for *that*?” The teen lament questions came up many times when I disagreed with my father on politics and politicians as I wanted him to explain, to justify, his beliefs, opinions and votes. To be honest, he certainly had far more grasp of people and situations so that I ate quite a bit of crow when I was older, wiser and more aware, but in those teen years before voting age, I sought answers and insight on issues of social justice concerns, on ethical situations, and on the complexities of being a political candidate.

Questions, important questions about how life works—or does not, of how bad things happen to good people just as good things happen to bad people, of war and injustice, of things in our control and things well beyond our control. Questions raised in fear, in anger, in curiosity, and sometimes even in awe, begin early with our parents but they are a part of our lifetime faith journey as we have so many questions for God.

The childhood questions about people who do wrong things and live by bad decisions, about the horrors of war, of political differences, especially when they escalate to violent responses, become questions we ask of God. More so, we ask, ‘where is God?’

Asking where God is is as old as humanity itself. Job, the suffering servant, epitomizes the many times and ways our earliest faith ancestors questioned God’s action and presence, and we continue today.

Job is a good, blessed and prosperous family man whose life is turned to ashes as Satan --with God's permission ---inflicts horrendous disasters that take away all that Job loves and values: his children, his health, and his property. He struggles to understand his situation and begins a search for the answers to his difficulties. Despite his pain and grief he does not curse God, but rather curses the day of his birth as he decides that his miserable earthly condition is just simply God's will. Job debates with his three friends, arguing whether or not this misery was justified, and they debate solutions to his many problems. Job ultimately condemns all their counsel. In a whirlwind God then appears to Job and his friends, offering him the right to challenge the divine rule, but first God has questions for Job.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

“Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?”

God’s unexpected and impossible questions---who are you, where were you—are to lead Job into the mystery of God’s creation, of which he and his sufferings only form one part. At first, this sounds neglectful and uncaring as Job wonders where God is, and God actually does not seem any too interested in him, his questions or his losses. When Job--when anyone--asks where God is, there is an empty place within seeking to be filled with the presence of God, the comforting, reassuring, tender presence of God. Like Job we can feel that the world is, at its foundation, disordered and chaotic. Maybe no one really has the reigns and or is in charge after all. Yet the questions God asks of Job—here and in the few chapters--point to the profound order and structure in the universe. There is meaning. There is some underlying structure. There is some order, but tragedy, suffering, wrong, doesn’t always have a reason as there is also

randomness. Sometimes *bad* things happen and there is no good reason. Sometimes *good* things happen and there is no good reason.

Sometimes God is fully present in our midst yet we still question, ‘where is God? Like the disciples, a storm arises and comes in fast, strong, and we are overwhelmed. “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” “God, do you not care that we are so troubled?” Their cry—of doubt, of fear, of being abandoned—is our cry. Where is God in the midst of our suffering? When the disciples--when anyone--asks where God is, there is an empty place within seeking to be filled with the presence of God, the comforting, reassuring, tender presence of God. We wonder if God is so great and powerful a creator, if God really cares about this world, then why do events in the world and our lives go so badly. Without faith the answer is that either God has no power, or God does not care for us or the creation.

The opening page of the beloved book, ‘*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*,’ by Rabbi Harold Kushner, asks the question this way. “When our loved ones die tragically and terrible accidents befall good people in their prime—why should we turn for comfort to the same God who makes it happen?”

In part, he answers, “God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws. The painful things that happen to us are not punishments for our misbehavior, nor are they in any way part of some grand design on God’s part. Because the tragedy is not God’s will, we need not feel hurt or betrayed by God when tragedy strikes. We can turn to Him for help in overcoming it, precisely because we can tell our selves that God is as outraged by it as we are.”\*

Where is God? God is in the peace of the calmed storms, in the security of the boat in the midst of rocking waves, in the meanings we make, in the gentle and patient reassurance of a Dad.

Job had a question for God, and so did the disciples. What would your question be?  
Amen.

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