

So, we come today to our last sermon on the Book of Job, which we've been going through this fall, and I must say, I've ended up enjoying preparing these sermons much more than I thought. In fact, I never thought the word enjoyment would be associated with the study of the Book of Job, but actually, learning is always good and fun, and I've really enjoyed diving deep into the Book of Job. And he's given rise to some of the best education hours we've ever had, both some really good discussions as we've wrestled together with the important and challenging questions that the Book of Job raises for us.

And here, as we get to the end of the Book of Job, we finally hear God speaking. God, you might remember, appears very briefly in the first two chapters of the book, and then is silent for 36 chapters till we get to today's reading. Finally, God addresses Job, and He addresses him out of the whirlwind.

However, even though the passage that we heard read is full of God speaking, I want to focus in this sermon on the person of Job, because it's Job and his character that's at the heart of this long book. The Book of Job is about Job's character and how he's transformed throughout the course of the book. The last thing we hear Job say before God addresses him in this way is in chapter 31, where Job says, "Oh that I had someone to hear me." Job's been troubled and frustrated, we've heard in previous weeks, by God's apparent silence, in fact, His absence. He's constantly expressed his frustration that God doesn't seem to be listening to him or paying him any attention. "I just want someone to hear me," Job is crying out. That's his last desperate cry before God answers, and all his frustrations have been distilled into that cry.

His desires have been honed. He doesn't want answers like his friends do. He doesn't even seem to want to have his burdens lifted. He doesn't hanker after the life that he once had. "I just want to be heard," he says. And Job's suffering has meant that his desires have been refined. The book is all about how Job's soul is refined by his experience. He has the experience common to

many that his suffering brings his life into sharp relief. He sees things more clearly. He comes to know what he really wants, and what are the desires that are lurking in the deep recesses of his heart. And in chapter 38, he finally gets the response from God for which he's been craving, though not, I'm sure, in the form that he was expecting. God addresses Job out of the whirlwind and bombards him with questions.

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" God says. "Have you entered into the springs of the sea? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Where is the way to the dwelling of light?" And the questions carry on for several chapters after our reading finishes. No answers, just more questions. And yet, we discover that Job is satisfied with God's response. Remember, Job's desire is for someone to hear him, not to answer his questions. And in this fearsome encounter, Job's relationship with God is restored. At the end of God's questioning of Job, He says, "Now my eye has seen you." Job's friends, who've done so much talking in the book, have disappeared. They wouldn't be satisfied with God's response. They wanted answers, not a relationship. They wanted to tie up all the theological loose ends and have everything explained. Job just wanted to know God. He wanted that sense of an encounter with God.

And that perhaps is a difference between religion and faith. Religion gives answers, faith encourages relationship. Job didn't get his questions answered, but his desires were met. He knew God heard him, and he knew that God was with him.

And I want to mention just two ways that Job was transformed by this encounter. First, Job is given a new perspective. He stops seeing life from his own perspective and he starts to see his life and the world from God's perspective. He's pushed off center. He realizes that the world doesn't revolve around him. God is the creator; he is a creature. He doesn't reduce God to his own understanding. He doesn't box God in. He comes to recognize that the starting point for an understanding of the world, an understanding of ourselves and who we are begins

with God. The most important thing we can say about ourselves is that we are created by God.

So, Job let go of his sense of himself as self-contained, as of an autonomous self. He gave up asking, "Who am I?" He was asking, "Who am I in God?" That's where He was being pushed. Job's spiritual journey, which is what the Book of Job is all about, is a tale of pruning and a loss of autonomy. All the things that might be used to construct a sense of identity are stripped away. Job is left with nothing except his relationship with God. And that's the very thing which allows him to find his true self, to understand who he truly is. And I think that this is the process Jesus was talking about when He said that we need to lose our life to find it. We need to lose the sense of self that we have created and developed. We need to let go of that to find our true selves in God.

And the second element in Job's transformation that I'll mention is that God's response to him was enough. He was content with not knowing everything. What he knew was enough. We read in chapter 40 that then Job answered the Lord, "See I am of small account. What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer. Twice, but will proceed no further."

I was out walking on the Moors once in England and I saw a sign that said, "Beware, sinking sand." And I was intrigued by the sign. Where do you put a sign warning you of sinking sand? Because you can't presumably put it anywhere near the sinking sand or it would indeed sink. So, you have to place it around the edges of where the sinking sand is.

And so it is with God. We can't put a marker directly on God. The best we can do is to put markers around and point to "over there". God is somewhere over there beyond our understanding, but we know He's there. We can point to Him from the edges just beyond our understanding. And Job came to learn that this was enough. Job learned he couldn't pin God down, but he came to know that there was a God who had heard him with whom he could be in relationship and union. That was enough. And that can be enough for all of us.

I'm pleased that we've taken our time going through the Book of Job. I've never read it slowly before. So, it's only now that I'm realizing that the Book of Job is about a process, a process of spiritual transformation, the transformation of Job's soul.

And this didn't happen overnight. It took time. There was much hardship along the way, as well as detours and the unhelpful advice of his friends. But we can see the transformation. He gets there in the end. And the lesson I want to leave you with as we close this series on Job is that we, like Job, can be transformed.

St. Paul speaks in the New Testament of that promise of transformation when he says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The process of transformation is ongoing as we open ourselves up to the work of God's spirit. It's never too late to be transformed. Every stage of life has its challenges and its opportunities, and we can embrace death as part of that process of transformation. We don't aspire to be made perfect this side of eternity. But we have that hope that one glorious day the process of our soul's transformation will be complete, and we'll be ready to sing with the saints in glory.

Amen.