



Roanoke, Virginia

October 20, 2024

“What story are you telling?”

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

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¹Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: ²“Who is this darkening counsel? Why are you talking without knowing what you are talking about? ³Gird up your loins. Prepare yourself like an adult. I will question you, and you will answer me.

⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you know. ⁵Who determined its size — surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶How were its footings and foundations poured, or who laid its cornerstone ⁷when the morning stars sang together in unison and all the angels shouted for joy?

³⁴“Can you shout to the clouds above, and summon a flood of waters to cover you? ³⁵Can you summon lightning bolts, and they say to you, ‘Here we are’? ³⁶Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? ³⁷Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the water barrels of the heavens, ³⁸ so dust becomes mud and clods of dirt cling together?

³⁹“Can you hunt prey for the lion, or satisfy the cravings of their cubs, ⁴⁰ as they crouch in their dens, or lie around hungry? ⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?”



Getting a child up and out the door in the morning or bathed and tucked into bed at night is no small feat. To help ease the process, I created charts to guide Camden step-by-step through his morning and nighttime routines. I even cut out a picture of Camden so he can move it from one task to task and visibly see his progress.

It is my hope that, over time, he will eventually know these routines and no longer need the charts. Repetition. Repetition. Repetition.

One of Camden's favorite parts of his nighttime routine is story time. He loves to "read" books, which, in effect, means that, as parents, we spend lots and lots of time lying on the floor or on the couch reading to him—and often, it's the same book over and over again. There are a couple of books we've read so many times, I can recite them without even looking at the pages.

What was your favorite book to read as a child?

For me, one favorite was *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. My brother and I would shout those words at the top of our lungs each time we got to that part. Now, my mom reads it with Camden, and he shouts just as loudly!

Another favorite of mine was *The Giving Tree*: "Once there was a tree and she loved a boy." This beloved bestselling children's book by Shel Silverstein's turns 60 next year. It is an endearing tale about the beauty of generosity, and the power of giving. But its meaning has changed for me, and for many adults, over time. Some see it as a tale about a life of longing as time inevitably passes by. Some interpret the book as an irresponsible tale that glorifies maternal selflessness, or even a tale that speaks to the dangers of co-dependence. Stories change depending on the perspective we bring to them or when read at different stages of life. Now, I see *The Giving Tree* as a story about how love and tragedy are irrevocably intertwined.

Stories shape our understanding of the world. From ancient folklore passed down through generations to bedtime stories we share with our children, storytelling has long been part of human culture. Stories foster connection, meaning, and belonging. Stories help us make sense of the world and navigate life's complexities. Stories have the power to change the way we see our lives and the world in which we live.

By the time we get to chapter 38, Job is exhausted by his own story. He had been through it all, and he had lost it all—from his house and family to his self-respect and his health. He had lost everything! Job had a few friends left, if you could call them that, and they showed up to pay a visit. They were kind and caring, at first, sitting with him in the silence of his pain for 3 days. But then they opened their mouths, which oftentimes is when things go wrong. All they did was place responsibility for every sorrow and suffering at Job's feet.



And beyond all of this—beyond all the pain and sorrow and suffering and misery, beyond the ill-timed and misguided words of his “friends”—God was hiding. The God who had been so close and intimate, the God who had been such an important part of Job’s life, the God whom Job built his very purpose around was nowhere to be found.

Job had been told a story, a story of a God who dishes out reward and punishment based on our actions. And, when we hear a story enough times, well, we begin to believe it, don’t we?

As he sat on a pile of ashes, scraping the sores on his body with a broken piece of pottery, Job cried out to God weeping over the most hurtful thing—the absence of God.

Yet, Job still defended his innocence, and he still defended God’s goodness. But one day, enough was enough. Job demanded a meeting with God!

And then God showed up... and God finally speaks...not words of comfort or easy answers...but of a bigger story.

God thunders out of the whirlwind to remind Job what he forgot...the story of who God is.

I am sure most of us have experienced times in our lives when we feel as if God is hiding. There may be some of us who feel as if God has never truly been present.

And like Job, in those moments we may get angry, we yell and cry out to God WHY! Why is this happening to me?

As a parent, and as a youth ministry, I know how our children test us, pushing our buttons in every way. Camden certainly does. I mean, the reason I created the morning and bedtime routine charts is because he will throw a tantrum resisting a bath and then moments right before bedtime, throw another tantrum because I forgot to give him a bath!

It’s easy to get frustrated, but no matter how hard these moments are, we don’t stop loving our children.

We love them through it.

That is the same with God. God is not outside our suffering, our anger, our misfortune. God is not immune to our pain. God is right beside us, right there with us in the pain, anger, or misfortune, loving us through it.

Remember church, we worship a God, who came to earth and entered our human story. In Jesus Christ, God dwelt among us—he is Immanuel, God with us. And we know this because of the stories of our faith, those passed down through the generations; the stories written in scripture; the stories taught in Sunday School classes, in preschool classes, and read at bedsides... the stories of Noah and Jonah, the stories of judges like Deborah and the stories of King David, the stories of prophets and of Holy Wisdom; the story of a baby born in a manger, the story of feeding a multitude, the story of a woman healed and restored, the story of parables like the mustard seed,



the lost sheep, and the prodigal son, the story of Jesus Christ crying out from the cross, “Why God? Why have you forsaken me?”... the story of life and death, and the story of resurrection. Stories in which we find our own story within and remember that there is indeed a big and active God always at work, even when our little stories seem insignificant or lead us to believe God is hiding.

When all Job could feel was God’s absence, God appeared in a whirlwind, not to scold him, but to remind him of a story:

“Who made the foundations of the earth?” God asked, “Do you remember the story?”

“Who laid the footings of the universe and laid the cornerstone of the earth while the morning stars sang in unison and the angels shouted for joy?”

“Who gave birth to the sea and showed us its boundaries?”

“Who commands the sun to rise and knows where all light dwells?”

“Who tilts the barrels of the heavens to bring rain to the earth?”

“Who has bestowed wisdom and given understanding to the mind?”

“Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?”

“Who, Job? Do you remember? Remember the stories of my creative power, my providential care, my divine dominion? Do you remember?”

And suddenly, even though his pain didn’t go away, Job began to understand.

He had heard over and over again since the day he was born, stories about a God who had spun the universe into existence, who had planted every tree and created every living thing, who had counted every star in the sky, every grain of sand on the earth, and every hair on every head.

When he was reminded of this story, Job began to see his story a little more clearly.

Job was not just a suffering man who felt abandoned... but a beautiful creation of God.

Job was finally able to look up from the pile of ashes on which he sat, look through the pain and suffering that consumed him, and see God. Job was able to see that God was right there with him, and God had been all along.

That is the power of the story.

At baptism, it is our prayer that those being baptized will come to know the truth about who they are based on whose they are. And after we charge the parents and the congregation to nurture that child and to remind them of that day, telling them the stories of faith.

What might that story be...

Friends, it is the same story God told Job...it’s the same story I tell each of you now...



For you, yes each and every one of you...

For you, the Spirit of God moved over the waters at creation, and the Lord God made covenants with God's people. It was for you that the Word of God became flesh in Christ Jesus and lived among us, full of grace and truth. For you he suffered death on the cross. For you Christ Jesus rose in newness of life and ascended into heaven. All of this was done for you, though you do not know any of this yet. **But we will continue to tell you the story of this good news until it becomes your own.**

So, what story are you telling? To your children? To yourself?

Beloved, may the story you tell be one of God's vast and mysterious love, a love that has been with you and has held you since the beginning of time!

And may you believe the story of God's love to be true for you as well.
Amen.

