

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "Making sense of suffering."
 Scripture: Job (sundry readings)
 Rev. Steve Fiyk
 November 2, 2025
 Opener: Be Still, My Soul 749
 Choruses: Blessed Be Your Name, Refiners Fire
 Communion Hymn: Here Is Bread Here Is Wine #546
 Closer: For all the saints (selected verses) 611
 All Saints Sunday & Communion

This past August tragedy struck at a Vancouver Island campground:
 a young mother and her five-month-old son killed by a falling tree.
 The 26 year-old mom died at the scene
 while the baby later died in hospital.

At a memorial the husband and father shared these words:
 "Last June, when you told me we were having a baby,
 I could see the excitement in your eyes...
 Finally, something you always wanted to be, a mama of your own...
 [And] when Elias was born, it was the best day of our lives."

He then lamented "My heart feels like a hollow shell,
 losing the loves of my life in one day."
 Press, T. C. (2025, August 7). Family "heartbroken" after B.C. mother and ^{baby} killed by falling tree. Retrieved November 1, 2025, from CTVNews website: [https://www.ctvnews.ca/vancouver/article/family-heartbroken-after-bc-mother-and-baby-killed-by-falling-tree/](https://www.ctvnews.ca/vancouver/article/family-heartbroken-after-bc-mother-and-baby-killed-by-falling-tree/11329884)
 Judd, A. (2025, August 11). "My heart feels like a hollow shell": B.C. man honours wife, baby killed by fallen tree. Retrieved October 31, 2025, from Global News website: <https://globalnews.ca/news/11329884/heart-bc-father-honours-wife-baby-killed-fallen-tree/>

When we hear stories like this, our hearts ache —
 even if we've never faced something quite like it.
 Most of us know what it's like to have the world stop for a moment,
 to feel the weight of loss,
 or to ask, 'Where is God in this?'"

So why is life filled with such happenings?
 The Bible offers a variety of reasons
 and explanations for human suffering.
 And today's readings from the Book of Job
 offers its own contribution to the conversation.

PAUSE

The Job is from that group of Biblical texts

Known as wisdom literature.

While at first glance it may strike you as historical narrative,
 I would argue that it should be approached as a parable.
 like one of those sundry stories Jesus told:
 "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho..." OR
 "A farmer went out to sow his seed."
 Today's parable begins,
 "In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job"
 Of course if you read through the entire book
 You will read that the parable forms the bookends
 For a work that otherwise consists of extended speeches.

Scholars contend that Job's legendary story is being used
 To "frame the poetic core of the book,
 the meditation on innocent suffering."

Commentary on Job 1:1-22 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary. (2020, November 11). Retrieved October 28, 2025, from Working Preacher from Luther Seminary website: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/preaching-series-on-job-8/commentary-on-job-11-22-3>

PAUSE

So what is that story, that parable,
 That serves as 'grist for the mill'
 That provides opportunity for the conversation about suffering?

We are introduced to a man described as being "blameless and upright",
 One who "feared God and shunned evil."
 Job is the archetype of a righteous man.
 And this righteous man suffers calamity.

In one day he endures a series of disasters that
 Wipes out his wealth and destroys all his children.
 In what wasn't read, he subsequently loses his health.
 Job the righteous man suffers incredible loss.
 This is a problematic situation
 For anyone who lived in the time of the book's writing.

In ancient Israel most people believed

that good things happen to good people,
and bad things happen to bad people.
If you were rich or healthy, it meant God was pleased with you.
If you suffered, people assumed you must have done something wrong.

That sounds familiar, doesn't it?
We still hear echoes of that thinking today."

The Biblical book of Proverbs exemplifies this sort of thinking:
"The righteous person is rescued from trouble,
and it falls on the wicked instead." Proverbs 11:8 NIV

For this type of thinking Job's story offers a conundrum.
If the world is ruled by this sort of order
Where the righteous are blessed and the wicked are punished,
Then how do we understand the situation of Job or any other person
Who seems to be righteous
and yet has suffered such devastating loss?

As the story develops.
Job is joined by his friends,
Who first meet him in his grief, but then engage
him in a theological discussion probing the nature of the world
and the catastrophe of Job's life.
These friends are proponents of the conventional thinking,
They uphold that retributive principle
Which holds that Job must have done something wrong,
To deserve his pain.

You heard some of this already this morning.
Eliphaz the Temanite argues:
"Who, being innocent, has ever perished?
Where were the upright ever destroyed?
As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.
At the breath of God they perish;
at the blast of his anger they are no more." Job 4:7-9
For his part, Job doesn't accept this accusation.

He responds: "Teach me, and I will be quiet;
show me where I have been wrong.
How painful are honest words!
But what do your arguments prove?
Do you mean to correct what I say,
and treat my desperate words as wind?" Job 6:24-26

Now I realise some of you may be thinking.
No-one is innocent.
We have the words of Paul
To remind us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
Romans 3:23

Keep in mind that the debate of Job and his friends
predates the doctrine of original sin as defined by Augustine.
"Job's blamelessness is not absolute,
but relative to human standards." CBSB 819
This blamelessness is what keeps the plot moving.

While Job's friends think that Job is guilty,
Job protests his innocence.
Essentially Job is arguing that the retributive principle is broken,
That God's ordering of the world is flawed.
And Job wants an explanation.

"Even today my complaint is bitter;
his hand is heavy in spite of my groaning.
If only I knew where to find him;
if only I could go to his dwelling!
I would state my case before him
and fill my mouth with arguments.
I would find out what he would answer me,
and consider what he would say to me." (Job 22:2-5)

For a long time, Job sits in silence.

He cries out and hears nothing.

Maybe you've been there —
praying into what feels like an empty sky.
But then God speaks...

After a series of back and forth speeches
Between Job and his friends,
God appears and makes his own statement.
If you are going to read one portion of the book,
I would challenge you to read Job 38-41
Which is the longest God-attributed speech in the Bible.
(Yancey Where is God When It Hurts? 81)

God shows up in a whirlwind
And proceeds to describe the vast wonders of creation.
God quizzes Job, inviting Job to explain
How the universe is ordered and maintained.

Let me read to you from Job 38:1–7, 31–33 [Ask for the slide]

“Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm.
He said: Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?
Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—
while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?”...

“Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?
Can you loosen Orion's belt?
Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons
or lead out the Bear with its cubs?

Do you know the laws of the heavens?
Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?”

Creation is surveyed and God invites Job
To share his insight about these wonders.

Then God goes on to describe to Behemoth and Leviathan,
Two mighty creatures that sound like an ancient dinosaur and sea monster,
titans that have no regard for human beings.
God questions whether Job has the strength
To bring these creatures to heel.

Of course the answer is that Job
Has neither the wisdom nor the strength
To manage the vast world that God has made.

PAUSE

So is this an answer to Job's suffering?
Why does God respond to Job's questions in this way?

What God is saying, what those early writers are asserting is that
“If we, like Job, are so ignorant about the world we live in,
a world we can see and touch...
who are we to sit in judgment of God's moral government of the universe.

Until we are strong enough to make a streak of lightening—
or even a gawky ostrich—we have no grounds to sue God...
A god wise enough to rule the universe
is wise enough to watch over his son Job,
regardless of how things seem in the bleakest moments.
(Philip Yancey Where is God When It Hurts? 84)

Job responds to God's speech with humility.
The final chapter of the book closes in this way [ask for slide to be shown]
Then Job replied to the Lord:
“I know that you can do all things;

no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
 Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
 things too wonderful for me to know.
 You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
 I will question you, and you shall answer me.'
 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

We are then told that the Lord
 Was upset with Job friends, because they had mispoken about God.
 They are told to offer sacrifices and ask Job to pray for them.
 And we are told that:
 "After Job had prayed for his friends,
 the Lord restored his fortunes and
 gave him twice as much as he had before.
 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him
 before came and ate with him in his house.
 They comforted and consoled him
 over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him,
 and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.
 The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life
 more than the former part." (Job 42:10-12)

So what does this story teach us?
 What does this story say to those who are suffering?
 To those who lose a wife and child on the very same day?

Job isn't declared wrong in protesting his innocence.
 Job's friends, the ones who seemed to be protecting God's honor
 Are revealed to be the ones who have dishonored God.

We learn from this story that there are times that good people suffer,
 people who did nothing to bring this tragedy on themselves.
 Somehow in God's wisdom,
 the world doesn't always reward the righteous.
 We are left to trust that God knows

What God is doing.

For you this may not seem like a satisfactory answer.
 If you don't like it, it may help to know the rest of the Bible,
 Especially what we are told about the incarnation of Jesus.

English writer and theologian, Dorothy Sayers, noted:
 "For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is—
 limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—
 He had the honesty and courage to take His own medicine.

Whatever game He is playing with His creation,
 He has kept His own rules and played fair.

He can exact nothing from man
 that He the not exacted from himself.
 He himself has gone through the whole of human experience
 from the trivial irritations of family life
 and the cramping restrictions of hard work
 and lack of money
 to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation,
 defeat, despair, and death.
 When He was a man, He played the man.
 He was born in poverty and died in disgrace
 and thought it well worthwhile."

(as quoted in Philip Yancey Where is God When It Hurts? 161, 162)

What the story of Jesus teaches us
 Is that whenever we are suffering,
 We are never alone in it.
 The same God who formed the stars
 and faced the cross walks beside you,
 even in the darkest places.

He doesn't always give us the answers we want —
 but He always, he always gives us Himself. Prayer.