



COMMUNITY OF “JOBS”

JOB 4:3–4

*Look, you have instructed many,
and made firm their feeble hands.
Your words have upheld the stumbler;
you have strengthened faltering knees.*

These are the words of Job's friend Eliphaz, as spoken to Job following a disastrous series of events in which Job loses his livestock, servants, and children within one day. While any one of these calamities would be enough to shake a person's confidence in God, Job ultimately chooses to bless the name of the Lord.

Any life dedicated to serving God will be filled with struggles and tribulations, teaching of course not excluded. Teaching is extremely demanding of one's emotional, mental, and physical capacities. I have discovered, however, that being surrounded by a community of “Jobs” has helped me find the ability to persevere each day. The strength formed in a group of friends committed to a common goal—especially a spiritual one—is one of the most inspiring and powerful blessings I have received. Friends bring us to

completeness by helping us recognize and rise above our shortcomings.

Throughout our lives we experience moments when we need the perspective and support of a “Job” and moments when we are called to be a “Job” for others. As a teacher, I have found this to be particularly true. God calls us to see Christ in our students and to support them in their times of despair, which can range from failing a test to being denied admission to a college to the loss of a parent or loved one. A ministry of presence is an easily missed aspect of our vocation, drowned out by the chaos of lesson planning, grading papers, and disciplining students. But this ministry is central to our mission.

Today, let us be thankful for those in our lives who are a source of strength for us and for those for whom we are called to be sources of strength. Let us be thankful for Job and bless the name of the Lord.

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KNOWLEDGE AND WONDER AND AWE

JOB 26:7–10

*[The LORD] stretches out Zaphon over the void,
and suspends the earth over nothing at all;*

*[The LORD] binds up the waters in the clouds,
yet the cloud is not split by their weight.*

*[The LORD] holds back the appearance of the full
moon*

by spreading clouds before it.

*[The LORD] has marked out a circle on the sur-
face of the deep
as the boundary of light and darkness.*

A few years back, I was amazed by the trick of a street magician in which the card I had picked somehow ended up in my pocket. Baffled and curious, I searched the Internet that night to unveil the trick's secret. I found a detailed description of the illusion and, like the card in the magician's hand, my initial sense of wonder slipped through my fingers, replaced by a deflated feeling of disenchantment.

People in the time of Job had myriad explanations, mostly based on myth and tradition, for how

the earth stayed in place, why the moon waxed and waned, and what formed the clouds. It was not until many centuries later that many of these stories were replaced conclusively by evidence-based, scientific explanations. For some people, unfortunately, these explanations eclipsed their amazement at God's creation.

But for me, knowing nature's secrets differs dramatically from uncovering the magician's sleight of hand. Gravity, this constant and measurable attraction that holds planets and moons together in a system, or the earth's water cycle, which forms billowing clouds that are nothing more than vapor—these become even more marvelous when understood.

Using science and math to predict the exact phases of the moon or to learn what lies at the horizon need not lead us to disenchantment with God. No, science and math even more deeply reveal to us, and instill within us, the wonder of creation and its Creator.

As a teacher of science and of science teachers, I often look to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in which knowledge and wonder and awe stand together (Is 11:2–3). The gift of knowledge—about the Big Bang, evolution, how the earth orbits the sun—belongs with the gifts of wonder and awe. Our ability both to

make sense of the world and to find inspiration in this knowledge is but one more reflection of the grandeur of God.

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GOD ON TRIAL

JOB 38:1-5

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm
and said:*

*Who is this who darkens counsel
with words of ignorance?*

*Gird up your loins now like a man;
I will question you, and you tell me the
answers!*

*Where were you when I founded the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.*

*Who determined its size? Surely you know?
Who stretched out the measuring line for it?*

At the end of their entrance interviews, many new teachers ask whether there is a greatest challenge that beginning teachers typically experience. “I think there is,” I have come to reply, “and it results from falling in love.”

I go on to explain to surprised faces that this challenge has nothing to do with navigating romantic love and everything to do with the healthy love that teachers develop for their students. Of course, vexing parents, defiant students, and piles of grading can require the patience of Job. But what most unsettles

and even enrages teachers is to learn from the depth of their love for their students that so many suffer profoundly—even at a tender age—from grief, abuse, neglect, poverty, or sickness.

The problem of suffering lies at the heart of the book of Job. We all know the story—Job, faithful servant of God and richly blessed in life, loses everything as the object of a divine wager. And it turns out that Job is really not so patient after all, especially as his so-called friends blame him for his own misery. So Job demands a hearing; he puts God on trial, as it were, to explain why the innocent suffer. Does he not speak for all of us?

The book of Job, to me, offers no satisfying answer or consolation so much as raw honesty. This encounter between God and Job doesn't sugarcoat the most urgent question we face as believers: Why must the good suffer? God's answer "out of the storm" reminds Job and all of us of our puny human limitations before the all-powerful Creator.

But Job comes before Jesus, and Jesus changes everything. Scripture's final wisdom must wait until the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Only in the extraordinary lessons of the Cross, where God takes on the fullness of human pain, and in the garden outside the empty tomb, where—in contrast to the deafening

voice from the storm—Jesus tenderly calls Mary Magdalene by name, do we find the infinitely satisfying if still mysterious answer that there is mercy and joy beyond our imagining, beyond the foundations of the earth, for ourselves and those we love.

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GOD IN LITTLE WAYS

JOB 38:25-27

*Who has laid out a channel for the downpour
and a path for the thunderstorm
To bring rain to uninhabited land,
the unpeopled wilderness;
To drench the desolate wasteland
till the desert blooms with verdure?*

My mother's friend lost her young daughter to a sudden illness. Vibrant and full of life in the evening, the young girl was found dead the next morning. To support her friend, my mom wrote her a note: "Many people are probably consoling you by telling you this loss is according to God's plan or that God is using this as a trial to make you stronger. Don't listen to them. While we don't know why young innocents suffer, still we understand that God may use all the little ways God knows to give your daughter back to you."

Job laments his plight, including the loss of his own children, atop an ash heap and endures lengthy "consolations" from his friends. He demands an answer specific to his problem, but God, speaking from the storm, gives him a universal and cosmic response.

God lists many of the wonders in creation—hawks, horses, and lions combined with constellations, tidal waves, and hailstorms—to form an awe-inspiring picture of our world. In revealing such immense majesty, God helps Job realize that the components of this storm—each one a divine creation that communicates God’s presence—are in fact all around him. Job comes to understand that God is present in the world in many little ways and that Job needs only to look up from the ash heap to see the God he so desperately needs.

Perhaps there’s a lesson to be learned here for our daily trials in the classroom. We sometimes feel as though God ignores our cries for relief. But the book of Job reminds us that God is not hiding beyond the chaos of the everyday. God, instead, is in the midst of the mess, charging it with love, hoping that any piece of that maelstrom will help us recognize God’s constant presence. Often these little ways are enough to cause the desert within us to bloom with verdure. When we find God in the mayhem of our days, we, too, can proclaim with Job, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (19:25).

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TIGHTLY LACED CONTROL

JOB 42:1–3

*Then Job answered the LORD and said:
I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. . . .
I have spoken but did not understand;
things too marvelous for me, which I did not know.*

When I sit down to get ready for school in the morning, an indicator of how I feel about the day ahead is how tightly I tie my shoes. If I am anticipating a long day, or if I am particularly anxious about something on the schedule, I tie my shoes very tightly, as if—to use biblical terms—I am girding up my loins for the battle ahead. On these mornings I usually catch myself planning how I might accomplish everything that I need to do and worrying that something won't go exactly as I had planned. The tightness of my laces is a small way for me to exert control.

Inevitably, as the hours pass, the laces loosen. This happens gradually, and it accompanies a subtle release of the control that I try to maintain over the day. A coworker's unexpected knock on the door or a student's surprisingly insightful question remind

me that no matter what I had anticipated, I am ultimately not the one in charge. God has a plan for each day and works through us to accomplish it. No matter how tightly we hold on and try to accomplish the things *we* want to accomplish, we experience the spiritual reality that Job proclaimed: “No purpose of [God’s] can be hindered.” Then our grasp loosens—an act Job rightly describes as marvelous.

When I take off my shoes at the end of these tightly tied days, I feel freed from the burdens and anxieties that knotted me up in the morning, and I am filled with thanksgiving and awe. I think of the good things that happened, both big and small, anticipated and unanticipated, and wonder at all that took place.

We cannot know all the ways that God works through and around us. We cannot understand all the plans God has for us and those we are called to teach. What we call “uncertainty” is sometimes just a begrudging confession that God is ultimately in charge of this space of things we do not understand. May the Spirit grant us the grace to tie our shoes loosely and allow God’s wonderful acts to unfold!

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