

# But, WHY?

Job 38:1-11; Mark 4:35-41

## Slide: Why is the sky blue?

I just love it when children become old enough to wonder about God's world and they ask the magical question "why". It can cause adults to lose a little patience sometimes, but it is indeed very cute.

I can remember a time, way back when now, when my nephew Jeffrey, who is almost 17, he and I were having a "why" conversation. We were eating a sandwich and just hanging out in a park and he asked:

"Why is all that yellow stuff coming from the trees?"

I said, "Because the tree wants to grow more trees and that's its way of doing it."

"Why?" Jeffrey asked.

"Well, God created it to be that way."

"Why?"

"Because God loves trees."

"Why?"

"Because God loves everything God made."

"Why?"

"Good question, Jeffrey. Let's eat now."

"Ok."

Why? Very early on, we are curious. We want to know why, and it is because of why that we learn about the world and want to be a part of the world. But, asking "why" doesn't stop when we are five. We continue to ask that question on a regular basis and sometimes we have good answers and other times we don't.

## Slide: Flame

The famous actor Alan Alda, who starred as Hawkeye in the TV classic show MASH, once asked as an eleven year old "what is a flame or why does a flame look blue and orange and red" but his teacher didn't really answer the question for him. She said, "Oxidation" but since he was 11, he didn't even know what that was. What is oxidation? And the answer was so above his comprehension, that in memorizing the answer, he still didn't understand it.

So, after his acting career about 15 years ago, Alda became an advocate for clear communication of science, and helped found the Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science at Stony Brook University. He never stopped being curious, and he never forgot how disappointing that non-answer was for him from his teacher. So, when he founded this institute at Stony

Brook, he challenged the scientific community to come up with the answer to why is a flame a flame? The answer had to be easily explained to an eleven year old. Recently, some of the questions for this same competition were asking scientists to explain: what is color? What is sound? And, the most recent, what is energy? You can Google those to find the answers.

### **Slide: But, Why?**

The point is that many things around us can be explained as to why they happen and what they are. For many things, we know why or how. But, sometimes we don't have the answer...or at least, we don't have a good answer. There are a great many things we did not know about Covid-19 at first. Now we know a great deal more, but there still is a lot to know.

And, I could have tried to explain tree pollen to my nephew Jeffrey, but if he had asked some other question about suffering or illness, or even natural disasters, I would not necessarily have an answer that was good. Being a pastor does not give me the magical answers to the world's problems. In fact, it may just give me more questions.

Here are some questions I often hear: "Why, pastor, am I struggling with this cancer? Is God trying to teach me something?"

"Why was I the one to be downsized at work? Is God trying to test me?"

"Why did my mother have a stroke? Why is God doing this to me?"

"Why did my perfectly healthy son die in his sleep at age 25?" - This particular tragedy just recently happened to one from our St. John's family and of course, I had no answer. At least, as I stated at the funeral, I had no good one other than the love and embrace of God for them.

Why...it is a question not only for five year olds. And, it is a question of the many faithful in the face of suffering.

### **Slide: Some Friends**

In today's bible reading, we hear about a man who asked "why". This man's name was Job and Job was one who really knew suffering. We hear only a tidbit of Job's story in today's reading, but let's look a bit further back in the reading. Job is suffering. He has lost his family, his livelihood, and

his health. And, at some point in this story, Job's friends, or at least they are supposed to be, come by to talk to him one by one. In fact, his friends even try to answer the "why" it is that Job lost his family, his crops, his livestock, and his health.

His first friend named Eliphaz suggests that Job's suffering is because God is trying to teach him a lesson. Today, this kind of friend might say it this way: "This is all God's will. God has a reason for this, since there is a reason for everything."

Job's second friend named Bildad suggests to Job that if he were more pure and a better guy that God would reward him with prosperity. A lot of Christians still today tragically think that this is true, too, even though it is really a misguided way of answering the "why" question. For, we all know that even people who do evil deeds and choose to live in evil ways can prosper.

Lastly, Job's friend Zophar, goes on the attack with his friend and tells him that Job is simply not faithful. Job should be more faithful and things will get better for him.

All in all, the answers Job's friends give him fall short. None of

them are very good answers to the "why" because the intention of the story of Job is not to answer the question "why". The point of the story of Job is to answer a different question and probably the question we should all be asking instead of "why".

For, when God finally speaks to Job, God changes the subject. God does not answer the question "why". In fact, the hope in this story and the good result in this story is that Job doesn't find out why. Instead Job is rewarded with the answer to the question "WHO". God tells Job who it is that created all things, and in the amazing experience of God's answer, Job finds healing and eventually restoration. Listen to God's response to Job:

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who stretched the line upon it? Who laid its cornerstone? Who can tilt the waterskins of heaven... who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food? Who?*

Now, we could interpret this response of God as an angry response or a sarcastic response, but what if we heard this speech of God not as scolding, but rather as a

turning point for Job as he experiences the awe and power of the creation God created.

God offers God's response as a reminder and a promise of God's power and work in this world, even when we are asking the "why". This little speech by God helps us to remember that God not only determined the measurements of this universe, but that God also cares for all that God created and ultimately is the one to whom we place all our hope.

**Slide: Who then is this?**

In the Gospel story, the disciples of Jesus encountered the power of having the right question to ask. They found themselves buffeted by severe storm, wind, and rain, and it looked like they would die. When terrified and certain of their fate, they didn't ask "why". Instead, they went to the "who" in this story:

"Don't you care that we are going to die?" And, in his great power, Jesus stretched out his hand and told the waves to be still...and they were. As God showed Job the power that God has in creating order out of chaos, so Jesus shows us he has the same power. In the calming of the storm, the disciples actually ask the best question to ask:

"Who is this who even commands the waves to be still?"

**Slide: Child of God**

A little girl named Mary heard these words of power, love, and hope at her baptism. She had an alcoholic parent and her other parent spent most days depressed and angry. Angry words, judgment and abuse were the companions for this little eight year old girl.

But, when Mary's parents finally gave in to the pressure from grandparents to baptize their daughter, Mary listened intently as the pastor described the amazing gift that God gives from the common gift of water, about how she was precious to God, about God's love for her and about how this saving water along with God's word would give her so many gifts from God. The pastor spoke about Jesus and his love and the special tenderness Jesus had for children, and that we should never hinder them from coming to him. This pastor told her that there was nothing she could ever do that would ultimately separate her from God.

Then came the water, the coolness of the tracing of that cross on her forehead. She was given new life, a new hope for a future, a

future where God would lead her and love her. But, this story did not answer her “why”, why did she endure such abuse. It didn’t stop her from having difficulty and struggle. But, the story of God’s love did tell her “who”, who was walking with her, who had the power to heal her, and who did grant her new life.

God’s grace comes to each of us this day, to fill us with the hope and promises we need. It’s only natural that we want the answer to the “why” in our lives, but God is the one who gives us the “who”, who comes to us on a cross, who comes to us in Jesus, who is with us as the crucified and the risen one. And, this is the lens for which we experience our “why” in suffering, through the same one **who** suffered for us, and through whom all things were created.

Amen.