Text: Job 38:4-18

**Introduction**

If any of you might happen to be Neil Gaiman fans or Dr. Who fans maybe you’ve seen it. Gaiman is a writer – a screenplay writer and a novelist – whose works all seem to get TV shows made of them. And for my money he might be the best working Theologian alive. Not a theologian in the dogmatic strain. He’s not conventionally religious as far as I know although you can tell he’s had basic Sunday school from somewhere. No, he’s a theologian of the existential kind. Everybody has basic questions in certain areas, and Gaiman’s works put forward certain answers that have a rare wisdom. His most recent work is on Amazon Prime – Good Omens 2. It stars David Tennant – the 10th Dr. Who – as the demon/angel Crowley partnered up with the angel/demon Aziraphael. And one of its scenes is literally about our Old Testament Reading today. Crowley has been tasked or allowed by God to torment Job. Aziraphael is something of Job’s guardian angel at first trying to stop Crowley. But then the demon pulls out the scroll that holds his permission and the Angel is struck dumb. God can’t really mean this. This is Job, his favorite. Which is a much deeper question than the Angel or the show really wants to contemplate.

Because it’s a comedy, it gets out of the trouble of God killing Job’s kids, but later replacing them with different ones, with the farce of a demon allowed to kill them but trying to fake their deaths – such that the Archangel Gabriel believes God’s Word has been carried out and Hell thinks it has its full pound of flesh – but return them to Job. But in the midst of the comedy of Angel and Demon working together to fool the bureaucracies of both Heaven and Hell for such human purposes – there is the picture of Job caught up in a great light. And Crowley and Aziraphael staring dumbfounded at it. The demon asking, “Is that actually Him?” And the angel responding, “It appears yes.” And the angel asking the demon, “Is he – Job – getting any answers?” And the demon responding, “Well, no, but the fact that it’s HIM talking…”.

God owes us nothing. The fact that he does talk is rapturous. The fact that we might even get some answers if we are willing to hear, sublime.

**Three Big Questions**

I’m cribbing from another author – David Bentley Hart – here, but in all the world there are really only three deep questions.

1. Why is there something rather than nothing? – Call that the question of being.
2. Why do we seem to share the same existence? - Call that the question consciousness.
3. Why do we seem to be directed toward something? – Call that the question of bliss or more Christian of love.

I don’t know if you have ever sat down and read the entirety of Job. Most of us don’t. We read chapters 1 to 3, which are the set up of the council in Heaven, Job losing everything because of this bet between God and Satan, and Job’s seemingly fair complaint. And then we skip to maybe chapter 38 to the end. We skip the long-winded speeches by three of Job’s friends. The three more or less represent the natural answer to suffering. “Job, you may not remember it, but you must have done something to deserve this. You get what you deserve.” They all have their twists on it, but that’s it. And their pleas fail with Job. They fail so much that a fourth friend appears and has a more robust argument. His argument is not so much about Job, but about God. That the greatness of God is so much greater than any human, that whatever we are sent, if it is from God, we should rejoice. Job, you may not understand why all your kids are dead and everything you had is gone, but if you understand it from God, you should praise him because this is a good thing.

This is a hard saying.

But it does bare an element of Truth that Job has already admitted. “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the LORD.” But Job still holds that he deserves an answer. That God needs to justify his deeds.

And that brings us back to those three basic questions and Gaiman’s angels and demons. Because if God really was so far above us that we are nothing, He absolutely should not answer. God owes us nothing. Crowly’s, “But its HIM” is profound.

**The Question of Being**

Why is there something rather than nothing? “The LORD said to Job, ‘were you there when I laid the foundation of the earth?...Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know!’”

Everything that is was made by and is sustained by God who is wholly other. There is only one ground of all being and we all owe what we are – our essence – and our very existence to Him. And the moment He would withdraw his providence, we would no longer be. This is the greatest part of the truth of Job’s fourth friend. And it is the first purpose of God’s questioning. God is completely beyond us and owes us nothing. Whatever we have should be met with praise.

Luther’s catechism explanation to the first article tracks this in the first sentence. I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them.

But if that is the case, and it is, why has God answered at all? The Elephant takes no notice of the ant. The mere fact that we continue to be to ask the question should be answer enough. Why does God deign to answer?

Something of the wonder of Crowley – “but the fact that it’s HIM talking…”

**The Question of Consciousness**

The second big question is one that the Philosophers have been intensely contemplating in modern times dating back to Descartes’ “I think therefor I am.” The fact that we are conscious is a question, and even more so why do we seem to share the same space. Even if I think and I am, why are you here?

In our day of AI’s – large language models – that seemingly can now converse with us like a real person. What the philosophers have been contemplating has been made real. Is there a consciousness behind these programs that seem to think? And if we say no, does that have any implications for our own consciousness? After all, they do the things we do, maybe better than we ourselves. And the entire modern sweater – which bases rights, even the right to existence, off of consciousness – starts to unravel. Maybe we aren’t, and don’t deserve to be here. Maybe there is a reason medically assisted death and abortion are our nihilist leaders great causes. They don’t think most of us are conscious or deserve to be here.

God’s questioning of Job helps us here. “Have you entered into the springs of the sea?...Have the gates of death been revealed to you?...Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?” The first immediate answer is no. These things have not been given us in our being. But we can think about them. And we can strive for them. Sometimes in stupid ways – like a submersible controlled by a PS4 joystick. But also in more intelligent ways, like supercolliders and James Webb telescopes that see the extent of the universe. Have we gone all the way to the ends? No. Will we ever? Probably not. Every time we get to what we think is the end, the universe seems to grow. Strange how that is. But even just thinking about it, and thinking about it together, is amazing. And we can do this because God “has commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place…from the wicked their light is withheld and their uplifted arm is broken.”

It is not so much that we are conscious, but that God has included us in His. Same as our being, our understanding is given and bounded by God.

When God says, “Declare, if you know all this.” We ultimately must be mute. It is not we who know. It is God who has shared with us. And this is another part of the truth of Job’s 4th friend’s argument.

But again, why is he talking? “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. (Prov. 25:2 ESV)” And yet God talks.

**Love**

The story of Job only carries us so far. Yes, we owe everything to God. But is God really “a kid with an ant farm?” Would God really turn on a dime and without reason strike his favorite? The question that Gaiman brings up and quickly retreats from in his comedy.

Job repents and admits that “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” The LORD accepts his repentance and prayers for his friends and restores Job. Although not as in Gaiman’s comedy with his original children.

Because this is about that third question. Why do we seem to be directed toward something? Why does God answer? Why does God attempt to justify himself? And how does he do it?

Ultimately God does strike his favorite. He was crucified for our transgressions. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

The cold and distance God might cause fear and wonder, but not love. Nobody would run toward that. Even Gaiman’s angels are more than content to stare at Job in the light in fear and wonder. It is Job himself that concludes “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.”

And now all our eyes have seen HIM. We have seen HIM not merely in being and thought, but in Word and Deed. We have seen Him not in glory, but full of grace and truth. We have seen Him in the love poured out on the cross. A love that calls all to Him. And all that come, he will never turn away. We are drawn toward love. God’s self-justification is right there.

Job professes deep in that section that we don’t read, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, (Job 19:25 ESV)” He professes this through the sight of faith. To us we have seen it

Job knew that whatever was taken, was only taken for a time. Because we are drawn towards love. And in the love of God, all things will be made full. Anything taken, restored. The questions we so long to ask, made nothing.

God has spoken to us through his son, that we might know his love. And no longer stand at a distance in wonder, but draw near in his love. Owing us nothing, he has given us everything.