

The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

I speak to you today in the name of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

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Good morning, St. Timothy's!

In case we haven't met yet, I'm Ellen, and I'm a seminarian serving here this year. You might have noticed that I suddenly appeared at the start of the school year and wondered "what is that new person doing up there?"

I have the same question.

What am I doing up here? Well, sometimes I read lessons. I get to set the table for the Eucharist. I serve bread and wine at the altar rail. I pray. I don't do any of these things perfectly.

In fact, that's the entire point of being a seminarian - I'm at the altar to try, to mess up, to try again. I'm serving here: not to be perfect, but to learn.

And you know what? I don't think I'm alone in this room. Yes, to my knowledge, I'm the only seminarian here - if there's a secret seminarian hiding in the wings, I'd love to know so we could carpool. But in all seriousness, I'm here learning for my vocation as a priest - and each of you are here learning for your own vocation. Whatever God is calling you to, you try, you mess up, you try again; by God's grace, you learn.

Two Sundays ago, Fr. Charles opened up stewardship season - a time where we reflect on the gifts we bring to support our community. He preached on Job chapter one, verse one:

“There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.”

Job was, by all measurements, a perfect guy. He followed every one of God's commandments; he never gave in to temptation. Unlike me, unlike all of us, Job didn't have that "mess up" stage. He tried, he succeeded. What could he possibly need to learn?

That was the introduction of the Book of Job; today's reading is near the end, and a lot has happened in the middle.

God tested Job - with every misery imaginable. Would Job stay faithful and upright, even after losing everything? The book (which is a great read, by the way) is a gutting drama.

Job, in his affliction, is visited by three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. These three wise guys argue with Job; they are convinced that he must have done something, *something* to deserve God's punishment. Job holds firm: I have done nothing wrong!

And they go back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, until-

God breaks through in a whirlwind.

And when God speaks, we get quiet. We listen. We learn.

God answers Job out of the whirlwind: “who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” What do you know about God’s ways? Y’all mortals are busy arguing with each other about sin and righteousness, as if you have it all figured out. Tell me, says God, “who laid the cornerstone of the earth when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?”

Not Job. Not Job’s friends. Certainly not any of us here today.

Even this person, Job, who followed every commandment, who even in the depths of misery *never* cursed God - even perfect Job comes up short before the overwhelming glory of God, who makes the clouds his chariot; and rides on the wings of the wind. Even “perfect” Job is merely human. He did everything right, and he has something to learn.

We are in good company with Job and his friends. Remember a time you came up short? Maybe you thought to yourself, “how could I have messed *that* up?” “I’ve let down someone important to me” “I tried, and I failed.” Maybe you thought about other people. “He would never have messed this up,” “She’s always on top of things,”

“I wish *I* were so perfect.”

I wish I were so perfect. As if there’s a point we could reach where we’ve leveled up, achieved it all. As if we could ever stop learning. Job teaches us that there is always more to learn from God - that every challenge is an opportunity to turn to God and grow.

This is what I love about church. It’s a place where we are free to leave any claim to perfection at the door. Church is not a place for “Christians who have figured everything out” (not that they even exist). No, church is a place for people like you and me. People with Jesus’ call on our hearts and a lot to learn.

Here there is no bar to entry. Unlike so many other parts of our lives, there's no resume check, no interview, no quiz to be graded to walk through those doors. No. Instead, there is welcome.

I don't know if you've noticed, but there are a *lot* of Episcopal churches in Northern Virginia. Our list of approved internship sites has literally hundreds of parishes - many of them a stone's throw from the seminary where I and my husband live. Out of the whole list, I wanted to serve at the one 40 minutes away. I wanted to serve at St. Timothy's. Why? Because of you. Because you welcomed me, way back in the spring, when I was visiting churches, scoping out sites. At the door, in the service, at coffee hour. Because you welcomed me.

But you see, it's more than that. I felt that St. Tim's welcome, and I got excited. I thought to myself, this, *this*, is the community I want to *learn* from. The Holy Spirit is moving in this place.

Take a look at the back of your bulletin - take a look at where St. Tim's is showing up in the community. Look at how many stories are held in these events and schedules, how many imperfect people come together each week to proclaim God's glory in word and deed.

Take a moment to consider the miracle of *this* moment, here on Sunday. Where else do you see people from all walks of life, whether you're 2 months or 102 years old, online or in person, coming together? All of us human people, who try, mess up, and try again. Gathered together like Job before the glory of the Lord. None of us are perfect. All of us are learning.

There are a lot of reasons to go to church, but I believe the best one - one I hope excites you too - is to learn, bit by bit, deep in our bones, how to be a Christian.

The beauty of a God so majestic, who laid the foundations of the earth, who rebuked the Deep oceans, who is wrapped with light as with a cloak, who spread out the heavens like a curtain - the beauty of God's bigness is that we are released from any pretensions of bigness ourselves. We receive the freedom to be ourselves, warts and all. We receive room to grow and learn. And here's the mysterious, miraculous part: when we recognize our growing edges and commit to learning with God, we shine Christ's light for others to see. We welcome the stranger. We clothe the naked. We feed the hungry. We sing God's praises. We ask for forgiveness. And the whole community sees. That's the secret, right there. When we learn, we grow; and when we grow, we invite others to do the same.

So back to my original question. What am I doing up here?

I'm doing the same thing as you. Learning how to be a better Christian, one day at a time. Bringing my whole self, my flaws and my gifts, to this community and this altar. Because I know that, like Job, as one person I come up short; but together, we are the very body of Christ.

Amen.

Add invitation to  
"Choose a translation of Job that speaks to you"  
↳ go back + try again

"My husband Dan" to remind of name  
Add more context in scripture