

OPENING:

A few years back, a Christian media group put the entire Bible out on Audio Book, Seventy Nine CDs worth, the whole thing, King James Version.

A variety of A-list, and B-list, celebrities supplied the voice work: Richard Dreyfuss was Moses, Jon Voigt was Abraham, Marisa Tomei was Mary Magdalene. Luke Perry was Judas.

Job was played by the actor Stacey Keach who also supplied the voice for Paul. Fittingly the most loquacious and wordy figure from the Old Testament and the most loquacious and wordy figure in the New Testament was voiced by the same person.¹

Keep that thought in mind as we close out our time, one last sermon from the Book of Job— this time the 42nd and final chapter:

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job...and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.... After this Job lived for 140 years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

So a book that began with “Once upon a time,” ends with “They lived ‘Happily Ever after.’”²

Today we come not only to the end of the Book of Job, and we are getting closer to the end of our Stewardship Season, and, more importantly (*maybe!*), we are getting closer to the end of our Election cycle.

What does Job have to teach about endings, and about our relationship with God? I am going to preach today that the ending of Job is not really the end, and that the most important thing is for us to be like Job, and like Paul, and to keep talking and talking to God and talking to one another through it all, all the way to the end and through it.

¹ [The Word of Promise Audio Bible: New King James Version: Amari, Carl, Cerny, JoBe, Mainetti, Stefano: 9780718024130: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000000000)

² Gary W. Charles “Pastoral Perspective” (Job 42:1–6, 10–17) in Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor. 2011. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.* (Year B, Volume 2.) Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 194, 196.

BIBLICAL TEXT:

As a reminder, a refresher from the last 3 weeks, Job is a story about a man who was “perfect and blameless” in every way.

For some reason, God decides to test him by implanting a series of miseries upon him, including the death of his children.

The whole book is him asking: “Why?” to his friends and to himself: 40 some chapters of Job and his friends talking and talking and philosophizing and theologizing into the void... until... all of the sudden God speaks.

God shows up and answers Job by dressing him down in some of the most marvelous prose and poetry in the Old Testament.

Job is silenced, kind of, and then the Lord “restores his fortunes.”

The story is over, but only in the sense that there are no more words left on the page.

Questions abound:

Does it really “restore your fortune” to have replacement children given to you?

Would you really stop grieving the ones that died?

AND was not the whole point of the book that you DON'T get what you deserve?

If so, when Job repents... why does he gets rewarded?

We want more answers to this ending, even if the book has finished and Job is finally silent.

CANON:

One possible explanation comes from the physical Bible itself:

if you turn from the last page and the ending of Job, next you get the Psalms.

The Psalms are 150 chapters of all sorts of attempts at answering: “how do we live in this world?” There are songs to God, prayers to God, laments, thanksgivings, and everything in between.

So, in the Biblical canon, Job rests, right before the Psalms, as a way of beckoning us into life's problems.

And when we are sufficiently bewildered from reading about them, the Bible answers by giving us the Psalms, this litany of language trying to make sense of it. So, far from being the final word on suffering or the meaning of life, the Book of Job actually starts the conversation. Along those lines, some scholars suggested that Job is better suited as FIRST book of the Bible. That since it was written back at the time when Genesis was written and, because Job shows right off the bat how hard life can be, it might as well be first.³

³ DeVries, Mark. 2008. *Sustainable Youth Ministry*. IVP Books. 112.

ENDINGS:

In fact, I am not sure if Job actually provides an ending. What we read today is just too good to be true.

I am not sure that the Bible provides any ending elsewhere

When do anything actually “end”?

I have preached too many to count about how the Book of Mark ends, or does not end, with the empty tomb, and the fearful women, and no resurrection. It does not provide an easy answer to our questions, but rather an opportunity to begin.

In Scripture and in Life, we keep seeking God, looking for God our lives, searching for evidence, railing against God, questioning the existence of God, and then falling into God’s arms. In so doing, we keep providing our own testaments, our own contributions to Biblical story.

Sometimes it’s Dostoevsky who does this, sometimes it’s Albert Camus, or a Coen Brother movie... sometimes it’s you or me.

In the end of the book of Job, I think that Job gets rewarded, not for his righteousness but the fact that he just keeps talking, keeps up the dialogue, keeps the conversation going.

You know in a movie, where anytime the hero gets wounded in the movie and the hospital is impossibly far off, and they are always told “to stay with me, keep talking” perhaps only as a means of self-survival.. That’s maybe what Job, and Humanity ourselves, are like. Just keep moving your lips and engaging, and that means you will stay alive

BURIAL OFFICE

Interestingly, Job in our liturgical lives and death, gets the last word.

In our Burial office, in the opening Anthems, the priest proclaims

I am the Resurrection and the Life. (that’s from John) but then the priest says:

*I know that my Redeemer liveth,
and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth;
and though this body be destroyed, yet shall I see God;
whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold,
and not as a stranger.*

As Anglicans, we have been saying those words for 500 years and it’s always a powerful moment in a Funeral, because after the tears of grief, and all the back and forth conversation among relatives, Job’s words pierce the air and say “God: I see you, I hear you, and I know you. This hurts... so bad... but it’s okay because of who you are in relationship to me.”

You can't say it any better than Job does.

In fact, I notice at funerals, people get quiet for that, uniquely.

The answer that Job gets in the Book of Job, is the same one that Paul receives at Damascus, is the one that I pray you or I get at the end of our rope, at the bottom of the glass, at the doctor's office or wherever we think is the conclusion.

We see God, and then and only then do we finally shut up for a second.

And thank God, that after that Job and Paul continued to talk because they have given us language to make sense of everything that is happening in that moment.

STEWARDSHIP/ ELECTION:

Getting back to the Audio Version of the Bible that I opened with. One criticism of it was that it did not leave enough space for Silence. It's so dense with language that there is no room for... nothing. That God can indeed communicate with us through God's silence and we can communicate right on back in that way.

NO greater authorities than Todd and my wife are always suggesting to me to appreciate silence in our worship lives. Point taken.

That having been said, at this particular moment in our political and religious life, we need to stay close, and we need to keep talking.

With our Stewardship Campaign, that is an easy one. I guarantee that I will keep talking with you about returning your pledge card, about how giving is important to this church, and that it's okay not to give as well.

With our election, this election season has stretched for, seemingly, Biblical lengths. Will it ever end?

Could anything more be said about it?

In a sense it will be over in 10 days.

This Election will not afford us any easy answers, not to mention a Messiah, or any sort of messianic answer about our own goodness or our national goodness.

And, after that, we will need to keep talking. Not just about the election and the result. I am sure that will happen. We need to keep talking about all the things that plague us in our relationship with God and with one another.

There will still be the poor, we still have estranged family, still have to get up and go sell widgets and deal with your children. Tables will still need to go up and down in Henry Hall. Coffee Hours volunteers will be needed

People will get sick, they will need phone calls and visits, and on and on

So we return to Job, and to Paul, our Patron's Patron, and their insistence on talking and talking and talking, not because we will get an answer that satisfies us, but that God will be there regardless of what that answer is.

AMEN