

Job: Meeting God In Dust And Ashes

Recently I've been reading the classic *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis with my youngest daughter. It is about a group of children who wander into a wardrobe and on the other side is a magical kingdom called Narnia where it is always winter, but never Christmas. There is this character, the White Witch who is ruling in a dark, ominous way, and is responsible for keeping it always winter, but never Christmas.

They meet this couple, Mr. And Mrs. Beaver. Mr. Beaver starts guiding the children through the country as they're trying to make sense of all of this, but it's very secretive. Mr. And Mrs. Beaver live hidden off to the side. They don't want to be revealed to the White Witch. The beavers begin to tell these children about this character who will come save the day. His name is Aslan, and he is a fierce lion. Beaver speaks of him as one of hope, power, and strength. Their hope for the whole country of Narnia is that one day, Aslan would come and make things right. At this moment, Lucy, the sweet and daring little girl, asks if he is a man. To which Mr. Beaver replies, "Aslan, a man? Certainly not. I tell you, he is king of the wood and the son of the great emperor beyond the sea. Don't you know who this king of the beast is? Aslan is a lion, the lion, the great lion."

"Ooh," said Susan. "I thought he was a man." And then Susan, the inquisitive one, asked, "Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and no mistake, said Miss Beaver. If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're braver than most or just silly." "Then is he safe," said Lucy, the youngest one. "Is he safe? Safe" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Miss Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's the king."

Sounds awfully familiar to some of the questions we've been asking through the Book of Job. See, at its core, the four children are wandering through this strange, beautiful land, and rather than explanations, what they're invited into is if they trust this powerful Aslan. Can they trust him? Is he safe? Of course he's not. But he's good.

One of the things that's beneath the surface of the story of Job is us questioning or pondering the very character of God. This has been the accusation of Job that God is not being just, not living up to who he says he is. Job is questioning the character of God. Because, as we've talked about, this story of Job invites us to trust God at the core for his wisdom and character. The trust is not a flippant one, but rather we're trusting God with some of the deepest parts of who we are. We are trusting God with our wounds, our hurts, and our pains.

It's a story that's asking those deep human questions that are difficult to hand over to God. It's the vulnerable spaces of who we are because

we've learned and we've recognized the inevitability of suffering. It is not something that we escape. It is not something that any human will escape without experiencing it on some level.

I've had conversations with some of you through this series who feel almost timid about talking about your suffering because it doesn't match up with that of Job. But I'd like to remind you that's not the point of the story. Whatever the suffering you experience, whether you dictate it as large or small, is not the point. Victor Frankl, in his beautiful book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, who was an Auschwitz survivor, has this image of suffering. He says it's like vapor from a gas in a room. It equally distributes itself throughout the entire room. It's not about the intensity of it but the reality that all of us experience suffering. So, I would encourage you not to diminish the suffering you experience, however large or small you think it is. As your pastor, let me tell you, it is hurting and it is painful. And it is okay.

As you bring that before God, you begin to ask questions similar to those four children. Is God safe? Can I trust him with these wounds? Where do we go for understanding? One of the chapters that we skipped over that I'm returning back to is Job 28. We come across this interlude in which the narrator seems to break into their writing. Where we've seen the friends of Job make their arguments, here comes the narrator. The narrator has what's become known as the Wisdom Hymn, in which it's talking about the ingenuity of humanity. It also says that humans can dive to the greatest depths of the ground. They can bring out all these minerals and fashion them into great things. They can go to the heights of the world and can soar above that.

It's this imagery that humans are capable of quite a bit. God has endowed us with the ability to search for all sorts of things. What's happening in Job 28 is this search for wisdom. It's the narrator saying, can you make sense of this? Job's friends couldn't. Job can't. Elihu, who comes after this chapter, can't. It's the narrator pausing for you and me to lean in and ask if we make sense of it. Can humans understand it? In 28:12, it says, "*Where does understanding dwell?*" This has been part of the questioning along this journey in Job's life: Where can we find the wisdom to make sense out of all of this mess of life, this pain of the world? Where do we go to make sense of this?

After the narrator goes through this journey of the human capability, it's a beautiful image of what humans are capable of, but he ultimately comes to this conclusion in verse 28. "*And he said to the human race, 'The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'*" See, the narrator is dropping a little breadcrumb for us on this journey. Before God speaks to say that the wisdom you search begins with the fear of the Lord.

Now, let's talk about this fear. It doesn't necessarily mean run and hide. It's similar to the emotion that the four children felt when they asked if Aslan was safe. It's a reverence. It's a recognition of the power of God. It's a recognition of the power of Aslan. So fear is more of a proper understanding of the other being, which to fear that is not so much to run and hide. It's not that God wants us to be in a fearful relationship with him. It's more of, do we recognize the power of the being with which we are in front of?

So the invitation is, do you fear God? Do you recognize it's the power and the beauty of God? Now, we finally have reached the place where God will chime in and add his words to this argument of why suffering occurs. To answer the question of why do the righteous suffer? My gut tells me it's going to be an answer that may be helpful but a little less satisfactory than what you and I tend to desire. But it's an answer.

We come to this text in Job 38, where God speaks, and I want us to hold this idea that our confidence is not that there is an explanation to all the suffering but rather the invitation to trust in the character and the wisdom of God. That is ultimately what God will invite us into. It's to trust that Aslan is good. Even though he may not be "safe," he's good. We're summarizing God's speeches here. He gives two dialogues to Job in which Job speaks at the end of each one. We're going to summarize. It's worth your time to read the entire section. I opted to teach just a few of them to make sure we had time.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Job 38:1-3

Harsh words to begin with. God, in these two dialogues, the first one will be a reprimand. It'll be very strong towards Job. The second dialogue is focused more on the instruction of helping Job to come to that knowledge of which he doesn't have. But God is speaking very fiercely here, and it is challenging if you consider what Job has gone through and how God responds with this intensity. But I want us to recognize that God is speaking out of the storm. It's in the midst of it. It's God in the storm in the metaphoric sense of what Job has been going through in his life. God has not been absent.

He's in the middle of that storm, and he's speaking out from within it. Don't think God is distant and removed. God is speaking from the very circumstances in which Job is experiencing. And his accusation to begin is, who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Remember how God spoke of Job in chapter 1. He's blameless, and he's upright. He has still not questioned Job's integrity, but he's questioning the argument. He says you're speaking without knowledge of things you don't understand. You don't have the wisdom, as the narrator referenced in 28, that would help you to understand this.

The roles have switched, haven't they? We've watched Job be the questioner of God, but now God is going to be the questioner of Job. It's a harsh thing. He says, brace yourself like a man, gird your loins. I'm going to speak now. And he goes on in verse 4,

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footing set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy. Job 38:4-7

God looks at him and begins to ask more than 50 questions of Job. He begins to question whether Job was there when God founded the earth. He's telling Job that he is asking questions about the very existence and ontological truth of the universe. But was Job there when it was constructed? Did he know how it was built?

That's what Job has been explaining. Remember the retribution principle? Job and his friends were saying that the world operates; at its core, the universe functions where the righteous always prosper and the wicked always suffer. That was their understanding of how the universe works. And so God asks Job if he saw God lay the foundation and set it up on its cornerstones. Did he see when the angels were rejoicing in joy at the world God created?

Job's accusations with God were that he had fallen asleep in his role within the world, within the cosmos. But God's response was that he had not been asleep. He has been actively working within this particular world. Where was Job when God laid the foundation? It's all of this meticulousness of God in which he designed and created this world with care for all of its nuances.

Here's where we begin to see the knowledge that Job lacks, that God has. Job assumes the retribution principle and embraces the belief that the world operates according to justice. What God will present is that the world does not run on justice. It's important you get that. We'll unpack that more, but I want to leave that there as we work through this.

God is claiming that it is not the core foundational element of the universe. And Job is struggling with that. But we see this all over scripture, don't we? Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount? He is talking about all these things. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. There are things in the universe that do not run according to justice. Rain in the ancient world was the symbol of fertility, gift, and blessing. We understand that in California. What a blessing the past two winters have been. God sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. That is unjust. If the retribution principle were true, wouldn't rain just go to the righteous?

Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no one lives, an uninhabited desert, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass? Job 38:25-27

God says that there are areas that aren't even inhabited by humans, and yet he cares for them. He offers rain to the desolate wasteland. He still sends the blessing there. Is that just? Is that unjust? Job was speaking of things he didn't quite understand.

Consider gravity. None of us consider gravity in moral terms. We don't think of gravity distinguishing or deciphering between just and unjust. It's not like we think that somehow gravity's endowed with this ability to think like I'm going to make it work here, but not in this circumstance. I'll suspend gravity here, but I'll give it here. God created gravity as a natural force in this world that's given to all of us to allow the flourishing of creation to happen. Does gravity operate off justice? Of course not. And none of us would accuse God of being unjust when gravity wreaks its havoc. And at times it does. Does it not? At times, we experience the sting of gravity. Even though it's been given to the righteous and the unrighteous alike. See, we tend to import and impose on God our view of how the world should work.

That's been the struggle with Job. Job is saying that this is how the world should operate. The story of us believing we know better than God is as ancient as Adam and Eve. We believe we understand what is right for the world. And it just so happens that usually, that image of how the world works operates in our favor without much regard for others. It's harsh; it's difficult, particularly in a season of suffering, to recognize the world doesn't run off justice. We want it to. Believe me, we do. There are pains and hurts, wounds that you have experienced that were flat unjust. It was not okay what happened to you. God grieves over those things.

But we get into this space where we project an image of the universe on God. And rather than seeing the grieving crucified Jesus, we project our anger, and he can take that. It's a healthy thing to lament. That's what we've learned in Joel. But I wonder if God wants us to also see the grief he's endured. Jesus wept multiple times. Jesus bled. He was whipped. He understands the pain.

So, Job's logic is undermined. God is saying it is not so much that the world runs on justice. It's something else. We reach the climax of that particular speech of God. *"The Lord said to Job, 'Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!'"* (Job 40:1-2).

It's a little bit of, "I rest my case." Now it is Job's turn. *"Then Job answered the Lord: 'I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more'"* (Job 40:4-5). Which, as we've been walking through Job, that's a big statement. He's been a little long-winded at times, hasn't he? Notice the brevity of his response. It feels a little bit like "message received." It's him saying, "I'm speechless." It's coming to the recognition that Aslan is more powerful than I anticipated.

But why, then, when Job seems contrite and repents, does God give the second dialogue? If the message was received, why would God continue on? Why not end the dialogue here? Job seems to understand. It's a good question for us to ask, and it has to do with God not wanting to end with a reprimand, but rather, he wants to also instruct Job. He wants to give a little bit more window into what's happening behind the universe. And so the tone shifts here with God. I'm reading a little bit into the text. It doesn't say it anywhere, but it's just what I intuit that

God is now moving from "Don't forget who I am" to "Now let me teach you a little."

And so we get into this second dialogue, and let me just warn you, it gets a little wild. We meet Behemoth and Leviathan. Many scholars just call them chaos dragons, which I think is awesome. So we're going to talk about chaos dragons in a second. It's a fascinating portrayal. And remember it's epic poetry, so it will be different and unique. We arrive where God is now instructing Job further.

Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God's and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Job 40:6-10

God is speaking about if Job wants to run the world; if he thinks he knows how, go ahead and try it for a day.

Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength it has in its loins, what power in its muscles of its belly! Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit. Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron. It ranks first among the works of God, yet its Maker can approach it with a sword. The hills bring it their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby. Under the lotus plants it lies, hidden among the reeds and the marsh. The lotuses conceal it in their shadow; the poplars by the streams surround it. A raging river does not alarm it; it is secure, though the Jordan should surge against its mouth. Can anyone capture it by the eyes, or trap it and pierce its nose? Job 40:15-24

So we meet this character, Behemoth. Notice as he describes Behemoth and Leviathan that nowhere along the way does God speak ill of these characters. In fact, God seems quite proud of these characters. He says Behemoth ranks first among his works. It's mighty; it's strong, and its tail is like a cedar tree. There have been all sorts of attempts to identify what the Behemoth is in zoological studies, and the most common one is a hippopotamus. But you run into trouble with the tail as a hippo's tail is quite small. But maybe that image helps. Let's move on and meet his friend, Leviathan.

"Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down its tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through its nose or pierce its jaw with a hook? Will it keep begging you for mercy? Will it speak to you with gentle words? Will it make an agreement with you for you to take it as your slave for life? Can you make it a pet of it like a bird or put it on a leash for the young women in your house? Job 41:1-5

Can you make it and walk it like little Winston, my golden doodle? He asks if you can domesticate Leviathan. Can you tame this creature? *"If you lay a hand on it, you will remember the struggle and never do it again!"*

(Job 41:8). Don't put your hand there. It's going to hurt. God speaks of this Leviathan character, this wild, undomesticated creature never as bad or the consequence of sin. It's rather this figure, this image of chaos, and it's right there within creation.

God says "At times, Job, you're going to reach out and touch that thing, and you'll never forget it." It'll sting at times. The world is filled with Leviathan. We've talked about sin, and sin is a source of suffering, no doubt, like without question. God's judgment, at times, is a source of suffering, but there are other times when it's just suffering. It's just Leviathan, and it hurts, and you can't explain it. It's simply like encountering a chaos dragon, a giant dangerous beast that lives in isolation from humanity. It's in the deep oceans, but it's still there. You encounter this creature.

Now the reason I told you to remember the sea imagery at the beginning is because the ocean was the source of chaos in biblical times. It was quite fearful. They didn't know how to control the oceans, which, just a foreshadow to when Jesus calms the sea, he's speaking of calming creatures like Leviathan. He is saying that he can control chaos. Flashback to Genesis 1 and the first two lines. "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and void.*"

Notice that's after God creates heaven and earth. And then it's formless and void, which again is the Hebrew term *Tohu Va-Vohu*, which means chaos or formlessness. So the image we get from Genesis 1 isn't that creation is perfect in the sense that it has no suffering. It's functional. It's God taking all the chaos and the void and carving out a space of order, which is a garden, like taking the raw wilderness in your backyard and bringing order to it to allow it to flourish. This is the Garden of Eden. He carves out from the chaos, the formless, and the void, the *Tohu Va-Vohu* from the Leviathan and the Behemoth, and he carves it out, then places the humans in the order.

He gives them a task. You are image bearers. Which means we are from the very beginning of the scriptures, given the power, the sovereignty and the ability, the free will and agency to partner with God. Not an ultimate sovereignty like God, that's different. The task for them is to fill that the earth and subdue it. It is to extend the borders of the Garden of Eden. It's to push back the *Tohu Va-Vohu*.

So when you're doing that work, when you're gardening your rose bushes, sometimes you bump up against Leviathan, you bump up against the chaos, but is it just or unjust? It's not the point. The point is that in this world, we are partnering with God to extend what the Hebrews would call shalom, the flourishing of creation. So you and I are given a task. And what's so tragic is Adam and Eve said they know what Shalom is. They take of the apple and say they know what's right and wrong, and they will determine how to do this. But at that moment, what they do is not partner with God but with Leviathan. They create chaos, pain, and hurt. They create suffering. Is it God who caused that? No.

Jesus, in the New Testament, whenever he was mad, never projects like Job does on the character of God. Who's he angry at? That serpent in

Genesis 3, the accuser. He's angry there because they're agents of evil, ones who would rather partner with than with the Shalom. And God says, "I've carved out a space for you to exist. Is it safe? Of course, it's not. But I'm good. And I will walk with you in the cool of the day." The imagery of God in the Garden of Eden is not that it's safe. It's that he was there with them, and he is good. He was empowering them. He was not leaving them alone. He is with us in the valley of the shadow of death, in the green pastures and the gentle waters, and in all seasons of life. Yes, these super chaos dragon beasts are there, and you'll bump up into them.

But remember, God is the one who could pierce that Leviathan with its sword. It's Maker can. So, at times, God breaks in and interacts in that way and pushes back that chaos. I don't know why he does that in some circumstances and not others. But I do know that the fundamental organizing principle of the world is not justice. If it isn't that, what is it?

It's wisdom. It's the wisdom of God. It's God saying, "Were you there when I founded creation?" The world is complex. Behemoth and Leviathan are difficult to understand. And one action there has all these ripple effects here. If it was on justice, none of us could stand. We're all sinful. We all have received the need for justice. And ultimately, if God ran the world on a harsh vision of justice, you and I wouldn't be here. We would cease to exist.

But somehow in all that *Tohu Va-Vohu*, whether we created it or not, which we do create it, That's sin. We partner with the formless and void sometimes more than God. In that God says, "I'm carving out a space to allow humanity to function and let's build a world together that's beautiful, that's flourishing. We should bring justice where we stand up for the vulnerable, but it's not the core organizing principle.

God says that just like these beasts, they're dangerous, and sometimes you stick your hand out and you get bit, but know that I have a sword that can pierce that. They're not rival gods. They're not even on the same par as God. They're not nearly as powerful. That's God's point. He created them. He created them, and he can restrain them. He can bring them in on a fishhook. Job needed to understand his finitude. That was not his role. It was not his task. God can bring them in.

Then we reach the end of this talk, and we see in Job 42 that Job replied to the Lord, "*I know that you can do all things.*" Just pause for a moment. Oftentimes, when suffering, we pray that prayer, "God, you can do all things, so why not do this?" It's a different posture with Job here. I know you can do all things. Aslan is a strong lion and God.

Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:1-6

It's in the middle of the storm that God has spoken to Job, who has come to the place where he recognizes that God can do all things. He sees it now. God's plans cannot be thwarted. What God is doing, the wisdom in which he is ruling the world, Job could now see it. He asked God to forgive him. He repented in dust and ashes.

Job seems to have come to a place in which he says, "God is not safe, but he's good." Job says that his ears had heard of God through second-hand experience. Job had heard of this God, but now, Job saw him and repented in dust and ashes. This is the story of Job, a man intimate with suffering. One who knows deep, deep pain and anguish and meets God in dust and ashes. He comes to a first-hand experience that was new and different because he bumped up against Leviathan and Behemoth. He experienced the freshness.

Now, let's talk about the idea that the world doesn't run on justice. It's a hard concept for us to grasp. To do so, I want to bring in people smarter than me. We're going to look at a scholar we've used a few times in this series, John Walton. There are a few long quotes, but he says, "God's answer to Job's contention is not to explain when or why righteous people suffer. The cosmos is not designed to protect righteous people from suffering" (Walton)

Most of us assume that of the universe. If I just prayed more, God, I'd get out of this situation. If I just prayed more, I'd get that promotion. God must be angry. I don't read my Bible as much as I should. Kevin wants me to Sabbath and I can't get near that. I don't want to. Fasting is hard. I can't do that. So God must be angry. He must be angry. Most of us operate on that retribution principle. We would never say that. We're too Christian to say it. That's part of the problem. We believe it at our core. It says the cosmos was not designed to protect righteous people from suffering.

"Suffering is inevitable in a world where order has not been finally and fully established. A complete state of order cannot exist in a world where sin (one manifestation of disorder) is present at any level. Like Job, we may think that it is bad policy for righteous people to suffer, but we would, I suggest, be equally dissatisfied with the alternatives. The divine policy we need to understand is not how God's justice is reflected in the operation of the cosmos, but that he has brought sufficient order into the cosmos for it to be functional for our existence as his creatures, and at the same time has allowed sufficient disorder to accommodate the continued existence of sinful humanity—one of the forms that disorder takes. John Walton

He said, God allows a certain modicum of disorder as to not wipe the slate clean. Think about that. It changes the perspective on this, doesn't it? To understand God's wisdom, to trust that he's making the right calls. Calls we'll never understand. We won't understand when he directly pushes Leviathan back or when he allows that chaos to happen, but we can understand that there has to be a level of disorder that's allowed for us to exist.

What are the wages of sin? It's death. It's brokenness. And so, for sinful humanity to exist, there needs to be this carved-out space where God is restraining utter chaos but also allowing a form of disorder as he is wooing us back, which gives meaning and purpose to our work. We are to bring about the grace and beauty of God. We're to proclaim that this God isn't the angry God you think; he is good. This is the gospel that God is bringing about the new creation in which chaos will be totally eradicated. That is the hope we hold. That's the moment of resurrection where it breaks through in a radical new way. We experience the new creation in the very person of Jesus in such a way that we begin to proclaim it's coming; Aslan's on the move; it's happening. You can enter into that life now, but yes, you'll experience Leviathan and Behemoth.

Notice Walton separates the characteristics of God as just and what has been endowed into creation. It's an important distinction theologically. It's saying God is not unjust. He is, in fact, just, but we assume that means that it has to be endowed into creation. God didn't order the world that way. It's different. The character of God can be different than the character of creation. So he says that's separate.

But we are left with the question of how a just God can tolerate the operation of a cosmos that does not bend to his nature and will at all moments. I believe that the answer is 'grace.' A cosmos totally conformed to his justice would have no room for sinners, even those whose sins stood forgiven. It is his mercy that stays his hand of justice. God is not incapable of imposing justice on humanity and the cosmos he created, but his love constrains him from doing so. John Walton

Do you see it? The holding back of *Tohu Va-Vohu* is the act of grace that quite literally sustains all of the world. Jesus is the center holding all of creation together. Grace is that which sustains you and me because it isn't justice. Grace is what allows us sinful people to come before God in repentance and meet him in dust and ashes. Grace is what gives you breath. Grace is what allows the blood in your heart to pump through your body. Grace is what allows you to continue on this week to exist in the world because the grace is holding back the *Tohu Va-Vohu*. He's carving out a space for you and me to exist. Is it any wonder that Paul opens almost all his letters with "Grace and peace to you, my friends"?

Grace is that which sustains the entire universe. And it is quite amazing, isn't it? Grace is at the heart of the universe, not justice. Grace. There will come a time when that judgment will happen, and death will be done away with, and all of the chaos will be done. But for now, it is God's grace that allows you and I to continue on. So, how do we step into that?

Accept Our Limitations

First, we have to accept our limitations. That was the invitation from God. Job, you are finite. You don't understand what you're doing. Accept your limitations. And I'll just acknowledge that it is really hard when you're suffering to recognize your limitations. But if we're to understand that grace, we accept that we're not God, that God isn't necessarily safe,

but he's good. We accept our limitations, and then we grow in that if we're going to learn to trust the wisdom of God.

We were not there when God stretched out the heavens, when he drew its dimensions and propped up the cosmos on its foundations. We were not there, but we trust the wisdom of God. We trust that Aslan is good. We trust that he is the one who is, in fact, working and making decisions that we won't understand. We trust in the wisdom of God.

Accept The Inevitability of Suffering

Secondly, and this one's difficult, we have to learn to accept the inevitability of suffering. You will bump into Leviathan. The world is not fully ordered, and it breaks my heart that you will experience pain, that I will experience pain. It breaks God's heart, too. But we have to accept the inevitability of suffering. We're allergic to that in the modern world. We believe because of all the resources that we have and the place we sit in the world, that the world is created for our comfort, but it's not. That is not the center of the universe.

We will experience suffering because the world was not designed for us to not experience suffering. Sometimes, suffering just is. Leviathan is there, that *Tohu Va-Vohu* we encounter. But as we accept that, my friends, my brothers and sisters, trust in God's grace, that the grace of God sustains us. It holds us. It is that love of God who, with arms wide open, welcomes us home.

That, my friends, is the story of Job, the very grace of God meeting Job in dust and ashes, and he's meeting you and me in dust and ashes. May we open up to that reality more and more. May we begin to organize our life around the very grace of God, who is there morning after morning. His grace is new every single day. The sun rises and reminds us God is at the center with graciousness, welcoming us into his presence in the midst of whatever it is we experience.

I want to pray the prayer of St. Patrick, which was pretty serendipitous that it landed on this particular Sunday. But St. Patrick, as I shared, went back to those who enslaved him to bring this good news of the grace of God to Ireland. That's a fearful journey. That's something I don't think I'll have to experience in my day. I don't know what it was that Patrick went with, but he penned this prayer, which is much longer than the section that I'll read, called, The Breastplate Prayer. It's one he would pray to himself as he was going into the middle of *Tohu Va-Vohu*, uncertain of what was to come after a season of suffering. The prayer of St. Patrick Briar:

I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the Threeness, through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation. I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism, through the strength of his crucifixion with his burial, through the strength of his resurrection and with his ascension, through the strength of his descent

for the judgment of doom...Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation. St. Patrick Briar

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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