

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Walk Humbly with Your God”

Rev. David K. Groth

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“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:1-4).

In the sixteenth century, the printing press was revolutionary. It put the Bible in the hands of the laity. Any literate person could become his or her own theologian. As a result, it deeply undermined the central authority of the Catholic church.

Something similar is happening today, where the internet puts all kinds of information in our hands, some of it true, some of it not. In 2020 the internet has turned many into infectious disease experts, if only in their own minds, undermining the authority of the legitimate experts. As a result, we have some in Watertown who think Covid-19 is completely overblown, maybe even a conspiracy. Others wear masks while driving alone in their cars.

Algorithms surely have something to do with it. That is, the internet tailors itself to your ideological tastes. Over time, it learns who you are, your interests, your consumer habits, your political leanings, and then feeds you an unending stream of posts that confirm your beliefs. Continuous reinforcement entrenches those beliefs more deeply, while also making them more extreme and resistant to contrary facts. It reminds me of 2 Timothy 4, “The time will come when men will not put up with sound teaching. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (v. 3).

So today, we live in our own little information bubbles. As a result, our shared sense of reality is no longer shared. It’s splintered. We cannot even agree on the existence of the facts, let alone what the facts are. We live in the era in which the phrase “my truth” is supposed to be taken seriously. When living within an information bubble, others seem misinformed or uninformed, and humility is thrown out the window. We become smug and condescending. Have you noticed how angry and arrogant people have become on the COVID topic, as if they are the only ones who really understand what’s going on?

It’s one of the things that has bedeviled mankind since the Garden of Eden. We want to be like God, having all knowledge, knowing good from evil, the authoritative voice on all truth.

Job wanted such knowledge. He wanted to know the truth about his suffering. You recall the story of Job. His perfect life disintegrates. It happens in stages. First, he loses his wealth to marauding bandits. They take everything, his oxen needed for farming, his donkeys needed for transport, his sheep. They also massacre his workers. Just like that, Job’s little financial empire lies in ruins.

Job is reeling, but nothing is so bad it can’t get worse. Job has ten children and receives this report: “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the oldest brother’s house, and behold, a great wind came and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are all dead.”

Then Job gets sick. He breaks out with disgusting sores. They ooze and stink and are painful. Even his breath turns offensive. Adults detest him. Little boys gawk at him and mock him. His own wife tells him, “Curse God and die.” Job is a broken man. It’s hard to imagine anyone falling faster and further than Job.

Three friends come to commiserate. They try to help, but they manage to say all the wrong things. They insist God must be punishing Job for some secret sin. Job disagrees. He believes he’s innocent and does not deserve his suffering.

For 38 chapters Job and his three friends do all the talking. Each is so confident in his own knowledge and wisdom. Each lacks a certain humility. Each goes on long discourses. Proverbs 10, “When words are

many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (v.19). For 38 chapters, these four men do all the talking and God is silent. For 38 chapters, the hubris is not unlike what we see today. These men are cocksure and confident on matters which they cannot possibly know or understand.

Finally, after 38 chapters, God speaks . . . and what a speech it is. It is a speech composed of questions he has for Job, lots of questions. They are questions that we should try to answer today, we who are so knowledgeable, so sure of ourselves, so smug in our judgments and opinions. So, hear the word of the Lord. “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge. Brace yourself. I will question you and you will answer me. 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 footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – when the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”

Our text consists of just a few questions, but God has merely cleared his throat. There are dozens more. “Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you give the horse his strength? Does the hawk fly by your wisdom?”

Job has no place to hide, nor do you and me. All we can do is confess our ignorance and confess our sin. All we can do is say, with Job, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3).

God knows all things. We do not. God is omniscient. We pretend we are. But this text calls for our repentance and humility.

God never answers the question of suffering. Instead, God teaches Job something about the relationship between God and man; who God is and who we are in relation to him. It is important for Job, as it is for you and me, to understand the limits to our knowledge. It’s important for us to “walk humbly with our God.” How do we do that?

1 Peter 5, “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud” (v.5).

Philippians 2, “In humility view others above yourselves” (v. 3).

Colossians 3, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones . . . compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (v. 12).

Romans 12, “Think about yourselves with sober judgement. . . Never be wise in your own sight.”

Finally, consider Jesus, who humbled himself and took on the limits of human flesh. He took up infants and children in his arms and said “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Lk. 18:17). He made himself lowly and ate with prostitutes and tax collectors and touched the unclean. He never boiled people down to a convenient narrative; he treats us as individuals.

For us who can be so smug and condescending, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death upon a cross. It is because of our Lord’s humility that our arrogance is forgiven. It is because of his humility that our unrighteous anger is pardoned. It’s because of Jesus’ humility that our ignorance does not ban us from being sheep of his flock. It’s because of Jesus’ humility that he calls you his child and has cleansed you of all sin. It’s because of his humility that he loves us despite our ill-informed opinions and half-baked ideas.

The array of opinions available online encourages the idea that there is no absolute truth, just my truth or your truth. “But here is a trustworthy saying”, wrote Paul, “that deserves full acceptance.” In other words, here is the absolute truth. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). Thanks be to God. Amen.