

**“Living in the Chaos of Creation”
2007 Bishop’s Convocation
New England Synod, ELCA**

Job’s Alternative View of Creation
By Dr. Diane Jacobson – October 24, 2007

Note: Both of Dr. Jacobson’s presentations at the 2007 Bishop’s Convocation were given as part of a Power Point presentation. The slides are copyrighted and, therefore, cannot be included in this document.

[Slide #1 Title] Good morning. Let us begin again with a word of prayer:
God of Gods, we struggle to understand ourselves, to understand the world, to understand you. We live with pain and suffering, evil and sin, chaos and mystery all around us. Show us, we implore you, your vision of creation. Guide our steps and open our eyes. Grant us understanding, transformation, and the hope of your promise. This we ask in the name of Christ, your son. Amen

Yesterday, we surveyed 10 portraits of creation we find in the bible. Today, I want to take a different tack and concentrate on how creation is pictured in one specific book, in this case the book of Job. I do this for several reasons. One, I want to make clear something that was implicit in yesterday’s talk. Different visions of creation sometimes give rise to vastly different moral systems. Old Testament scholar William Brown notes that **[Slide #2 Brown Quote]** “The way in which creation is configured has as much to do with how the moral community structures itself as with the way the natural world is ordered.”¹ Hopefully you saw this in my remarks yesterday. But one need only listen to contemporary conversations (to say nothing of ancient conversations) about both ecology and sexuality. Folks base their ethics, at least in part, on their understanding of God’s natural order revealed in creation. For many the nature of God’s natural order as revealed in scripture is clear. They read Genesis 1 or maybe Genesis 1-3 and that is it. But I actually think that part of the genius, power, strength, and spiritual invitation of the bible lies in its complex counterbalances. And I believe that one of the most significant counterbalances to the vision of creation we read in Genesis is found in the book of Job. Further, this Jobian vision has profound implications for the specific moral vision we find implicit within creation.

We in fact find a variety of images of God as Creator throughout the Book of Job.

[Slide #3 Friends] When Job’s friends look at creation, say Zophar in Chapter.11, they see there an assurance that the world is ordered in such a way that the good are rewarded and the bad are punished. In Job 8:11-13, Bildad sees reflected in the growing and dying of plants the cosmic pattern of deserving and undeserving.

¹¹ "Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?

Can reeds flourish where there is no water?

¹² While yet in flower and not cut down, they wither before any other plant.

¹³ Such are the paths of all who forget God;
the hope of the godless shall perish.

Similarly, Eliphaz insists in Job 4:8-11 that lions, because they are violent beasts, are punished for their iniquities: **[Slide #4 Lions]**

⁸As I have seen, those who plow iniquity
and sow trouble reap the same.

- ⁹By the breath of God they perish,
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.
- ¹⁰The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion,
and the teeth of the young lions are broken.
- ¹¹The strong lion perishes for lack of prey,
and the whelps of the lioness are scattered.

[Slide #5 Fields and Text] And in Chapter 5, Eliphaz ties watering the fields to lifting up the lowly.

- ⁸As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause.
- ⁹He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.
- ¹⁰He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields;
- ¹¹he sets on high those who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety. (Job 5:8-11)

Do you hear the logic of these passages? As they understand their tradition, God has ordered the world justly. They conclude that because Job is suffering, he must have sinned and thus deserves the righteous punishment of God.

Job, for his part, shares with his so-called comforters the conviction that God ought to run the world justly so that the good are rewarded and the bad punished. But Job's experience convinces him that God causes destruction and disorder rather than justice and peace.

[Slide #6 Lament] Job's initial lengthy lament in chapter 3 is filled with illusions to creation. Job experiences his own suffering to be so chaotic, so disordered, that he calls the entire order of creation into question. His lament contains what Michael Fishbane calls a counter-cosmic incantation,² in which he pleads for his own "unbirth" through invoking the reversal of the very days of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Job concentrates on those days that deal with light and time. The major clue is found in Job 3:4 when Job cries out, "That day – let it be darkness!," linguistically the very opposite of God's first creation command in Genesis 1:3, "Let there be light!"³ Job invites the darkness. He also invites the reversal of the fourth day of creation in 3:6 and 9, pleading that his day of birth not "rejoice in the days of the year" nor "come into the number of months." He asks that the very stars be dark. Note also verse 8:

- ⁸Let those who curse the day/sea, curse it
those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.

[Slide #7 Lament 2] In Job 3:11ff, Job enters into a complex denial of the seventh day of sabbath rest, a promise as we saw yesterday inherent in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Job, in his lament, proclaims that only the uncreated rest of his unbirth, of the dismantlement of creation, provides equality and justice for kings and prisoners, slave and master. For Job, only had he been still born could he say "Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep; then I would be at rest." (Job 3:13) Job thus couches his initial challenge to God in language that calls the cosmic and moral order of Genesis 1:1-2:3 into question. His lament then sets the stage both for the ensuing dialogue and for God's final speeches.

When Job sings creation hymns in chapters 9 and 12, they serve to blame rather than to praise God.

[Slide #8 Job 12:7] In 12:7, Job says

- "Ask the beasts (behemoth), and they will teach you;
the birds of the air and they will tell you.
Ask the plants of the earth; they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you."

And these beasts, birds, plants, and fish all teach, Job continues, that God is capriciously violent, that God withholds water, thus creating drought, and unleashes water, thereby creating floods. Earlier in chapter 7, Job quotes ironically from Ps.8:5 “What is `adam, man, humanity, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, 18 visit them every morning, test them every moment?”

[Slide #9 Job 7:12] In both the opening lament and in Chapter 7, Job compares himself to the sea to the chaos monster: Job 7:12 Am I the Sea, or the Dragon, that you set a guard over me?

He assumes that these creatures, like him, are God’s enemies, outside of the created order. He assumes that God in creation has set boundaries that exclude the unclean and the chaotic. And he finds himself strangely allied with both. In 30:29, Job says, “I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches.” He says this as a complaint, but he is soon to discover that this is true in ways he has failed to grasp. The issue of the place of humans within nature, among the beasts, in the whole scope of creation is thus explicitly and ironically set forth.

Song, *Nobody knows de trouble I see*

Nobody knows but Jesus. Nobody knows de trouble I see ... Glory, hallelujah!

Sometimes I’m up, sometimes I’m down --- Oh, yes, Lord

Sometimes I’m almost to de groun’ --- Oh, yes, Lord

Although you see me goin’ ‘long so --- Oh, yes, Lord

I have my trials here below --- Oh, yes, Lord

Nobody knows de trouble I see

Nobody knows but Jesus

Nobody knows de trouble I see ... Glory, hallelujah!

[Slide #10 Whirlwind] The most dramatic vision of God as creator comes, of course, from God’s own lips as God addresses Job from the midst of the whirlwind. We, like Job, have great expectations for this address. We want answers to our questions: why we suffer, we want to be justified and perhaps even comforted. We want to understand God’s justice, and we want to know where humanity stands. We want order in our chaos, light in our darkness.

What we get is a most bizarre vision of creation. And while many speak of creation in the abstract containing a response to Job’s lament and questions, I would hold that we are instructed precisely by the details of the text, by the specifics of the images. God addresses Job and us with an onslaught of questions that let us know that we were not there when the world was created and do not know its deep order.

⁴Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?...

⁵Who determined its measurements – surely you know!....

⁶On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone ...?

⁷when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted. (Job 38)

Then immediately God turns to the sea. [Slide #11 Job 38:8-11] Look at the details of Job 38:8-11.

Who shut or hedged in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb? –
when I made clouds its garment,

and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far you shall come, and no farther;
here shall your proud, majestic waves shall be stopped'?

Do you hear the imagery in this remarkable description? The sea is described as a newborn infant bursting forth from its womb. Like all newborns, it needs protection, nurture, and caring - here described with such powerful irony, a battle transformed into infant care while retaining illusion to the battle as well. (Well, perhaps any parent understands that irony.) Job, in his opening lament, joined himself to this Sea, thinking that in aligning himself with chaos he was denying God's care and overturning his birth. But chaos birthed, constrained, and swaddled with darkness is chaos which is able to contribute to life rather than deny it. God continues with images of snow and rain and dew, all substances which evolve from the controlled waters and thus able to contribute to life. Look particularly at Job 38:25-27.

²⁵“Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
²⁶to bring rain on a land
where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life,
²⁷to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?
²⁸“Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?
²⁹From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
³⁰The waters become hard like stone, and the face of the deep is frozen. (Job 38:25-30)

Here is the crux of the matter for Job and for us. In God's creation the care of the wilderness, in which humanity has no place and no stake, matters. Grass here satisfies not human farmers but only desolate wasteland. God cares, and humanity is left out of the equation. The world is much bigger than Job had imagined. Even liminal, dangerous space is precious and needy. In what follows the earth, the sea, and the sky all have a place of their own which needs God's birth, protecting, and nurturing. The imagery is explicit.

[Slide #12 Animals] God then moves to what we might call the animal kingdom. But the animals mentioned would never make it into a child's version of Old MacDonald had a farm. The collection is remarkable most particularly for its adverse relationship to humanity. We are told of the lion, mountain goat, wild ass and ox, ostrich, horse, hawk and vulture, and finally we are introduced to behemoth and leviathan.

These animals are wild, outside the human sphere, liminal and Carol Newsome quoting Othmar Keel notes that “artistic representations of the royal hunt in Egypt and Mesopotamia feature almost all these animals?” And notably, most of the creatures (all but the mountain goat, deer, and wild ox) are “unclean” or “detestable, to be shunned.”⁴

[Slide #13 Mary Douglas] To understand why this is significant, we need a little digression about the priestly vision of creation, found in Genesis 1 and in Leviticus. That the world as God orders it in Genesis One implies an ethic of dominion is clear, as we noted yesterday. Listen, if you will to the three spheres. Humans are to “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28) Less apparent to the casual reader but certainly just as true is that the world as God orders it in Genesis One finds its ethical counterpart in the Levitical law. Genesis 1:1-2:3 pictures a creation ordered by the formation and maintenance of boundaries, by the separation of spheres and

species. Light is separated from darkness, day from night, water from earth and sky. Each of the three divisions of creation – earth, sky and sea – has its own domain and its own set of living things which dwell in its sphere. Plants and animals and heavenly bodies, like humanity itself, are intended to stay in their proper domain and have their roles and places within those domains.

[Slide #13]

Animals who cross boundaries – like lobsters who live in the sea, have shells rather than fins, and then crawl on the earth or birds who do not fly or animals who eat the wrong food – are all potentially dangerous. Humans are called upon in Levitical law to contain those domains and to maintain these and other boundaries for the well being and on-going life of the community. At the heart of maintaining these boundaries lies the sacrificial system and the maintenance of holiness. Keeping the Levitical law includes recognizing the proper distinctions between animals: clean and unclean, common and abominable. Adopting the proper attitude towards the creatures of the earth, water, and sky in how they are sacrificed, eaten, and touched is very much a part of upholding the priestly vision of the cosmic and moral order of the creation.⁵

In God's answer in Job, each of the three realms of creation is, in fact, covered.

Let's just look at a few of these beasts. **[Slide #14 Lion]** Here is the lion in verses 39-40, so dangerous to humanity. Earlier Eliphaz had claimed that the lion's young would suffer broken teeth and perish for lack of prey. But here, like all the animals, the Lion is not pictured as dangerous. Indeed, here God himself hunts that prey and satisfies the appetites of the young as they crouch in their dens. Who is the prey?

[Slide #15 Animals] In the first 12 verses of Chapter 39, Job is questioned about the mountain goat, the wild ass, and the wild ox. Think of these animals? They are not tamable, not able to be used for cultivation of the fields. What are they good for? We simply stand back and admire them.

"Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer? Can you number the months that they fulfill, and do you know the time when they give birth, when they crouch to give birth to their offspring, and are delivered of their young? Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open; they go forth, and do not return to them. "Who has let the wild ass go free? Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass, to which I have given the steppe for its home, the salt land for its dwelling place? ..."Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it spend the night at your crib? (Job 39:1-9, NRS)

Notice that their continued reproduction, the care of their children, and their very freedom are here presented as valuable, as needful of protection and nurturing within the divine economy. (Verses 1-4, 5, 9)

[Slide #16 Horse] The horse in verses 19ff alone among these animals is ostensibly related to humanity and useful in warfare. But throughout scripture, the horse's great power, so vividly described here, is the subject of suspicion, promising only false salvation.

Psalm 33:17 The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

Psalm 147:10-11 His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;

Here in Job, the strength of the horse is a gift of God and a source of divine pride.

I am particularly interested in the birds. **[Slide #17 Raven]** Look, for example, at Job 38:41 where God provides food for the raven and its young.

Job 38:41 Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

Now the raven, like all the birds in this zoological parade, is declared in Leviticus and Deuteronomy to be unclean.

[Slide #18 Ostrich] The ostrich, in verses 13ff, in her stupidity and cruelty cannot care for her own offspring and thus has need of God, “for she leaves her eggs on the ground, and lets them get hot in the dust, forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that a wild beast may trample them. She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not her own.” (Job 39:14-16a).

The ostrich, though it has wings (Job 39:13,18), does not fly. The earth rather than the sky is its home, so that wild animals trample its young (Job 39:15). The ostrich crosses boundaries in a very problematic fashion.

[Slide #19 Vulture/Eagle] Finally, in verses 26-30, Job is questioned about the vulture and the eagle, again unclean beasts whose young suck up the unclean blood of the slain:

Job 39:26-30 “Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high? It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag. From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.”

God spreads the hawk's wings in freedom, searches out his prey, and provides for his young. No description of a meal and dwelling place could evoke more horror for a follower of the Levitical law than this – to eat blood and to dwell among the dead is the ultimate description of uncleanness. God here in Job takes on and calls into question the divinely given priestly understanding of the natural order of creation. God breaks down all the boundaries.

That is, according to the priestly and levitical vision of creation, these animals are disordered boundary crossers; they are “detestable, to be shunned.” Yet in God’s vision of creation, each of these wild, liminal, unclean beasts has a place within, not outside of God’s order. With each successive creature we are told that their continued reproduction and their very wildness and freedom are valuable and are needful of protection and nurturing within the divine economy. God cares for them and for their children, even to the point of feeding young vultures with the blood of the slain (39:30).

What is decidedly absent in this zoological parade is humanity. If we believe in the promises of Genesis 1 that we are God’s royal images, we feel the affront!

[Slide #20 Chaos Monsters] But instead of moving to humanity as the apex of creation, God, in Chapters 40-41, describes two other beings: Behemoth and Leviathan - part creatures, part primordial chaos monsters.

[Slide #20 Picture] The definitive earth creature in Job is, of course, Behemoth, whose very name is “beasts,” precisely the one/ones Job 12:7 bids us ask for insight.⁶

[Slide #20] In Chapter 40, verses 16-17, Behemoth's strength for reproduction is admired. "Its strength is in its loins, and its power in the muscles of its belly. It makes its tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are knit together. The mountains yield him food, the waters protect him."

[Slide #20] In verse 19, Behemoth, not humanity, is described as the first of God's works. Like the waters before him Behemoth is both constrained and admired. This beast, rather than the human creature of the earth, is called "the first of the great acts of God" (40:19)⁷ and thus deals a mighty blow to the Genesis vision of humans as the pinnacle of creation.

[Slide #21 Leviathan] Leviathan is the only sea creature mentioned in God's animal showcase. The seemingly most chaotic creature, roused by Job in his initial lament (3:8), is saved for last. God's exuberant praise for Leviathan centers on the inability of humans to pierce or capture it in any way. Only God can contain him. **[Slide #21]** In verses 12-17, God's boasting that this sea creature sports limbs and shields rather than the fins and scales emphasizes its Levitical status as detestable, to be avoided.⁸ The description of Leviathan ends with these verses: **[Slide #21]**

On earth it has no equal,
a creature without fear.
It surveys everything that is lofty;
it is king over all that are proud. (Job 41:33-34)

Not humanity, but this beast, this Leviathan, this creature without equal on the earth, is alone declared king. What irony; what effrontery!

So what is the implied picture of humanity that we hear in these speeches? On the surface, humans are simply absent from the equation. Humans are not present except as one challenged and then dismissed. And, of course, as food for the unclean lion and vulture. We're brutally informed that the world is not anthropocentric in the least. This discovery accounts in part for the supreme frustration we have with God's response. We desperately want to be at the center of God's concern. Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 taught us that we, not Leviathan, are the royal images of the divine creator. Our very lives are at stake.

He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the big round world in His hands
He's got the whole world in His hands
He's got the wind and the rain...

He's got the lion and the vulture

He's got the sea and its monsters

Perhaps that's all that needs to be said. What we need to learn is our place, or lack thereof, in God's cosmic scheme. But to end here would be to miss the message which lies beneath the initial scolding, the message which lies, as one would expect, in the details of the images.

I want to move in two intertwined directions as we consider these speeches of God and the final chapter of Job. **[Slide #22 Four lessons]** I want first to reflect directly on four things we learn about creation when we read God's speeches in detail. Then I want to look in greater depth at what Job learns by looking at the final chapter of the book. Then hopefully, we can bring the two together.

So first, four things we learn about creation when we read God's speeches:

[Slide #22] One, we learn that creation is much bigger than simply a human concern. We are not alone. We are not even central. We are one part of a cosmic whole, each part of which merits God's care and earns God's admiration.

[Slide #22] Two, the creation is better apprehended through admiration than judgment. God so loved the world. We might try it as well.

[Slide #22] Three, God relates to the world as cosmic parent. We see this all over the details of the divine speeches. God sires and gives birth. God provides sustenance and care. God restricts where necessary and grants freedom where appropriate. God disciplines and brags, admires and constrains. God is parent, both mother and father, to all of creation. As a parent, the relationship is not defined by law or even by justice, but by a concern which meets each need as the occasion arises. God's freedom is expressed solely within this parental relationship. Each element of creation, each creature, is treated from within this union. All parts of creation, including Job if he has ears to hear, are God's children. For Job has known all along that he might learn from the beasts.

Even and especially in comparison with the chaos monsters and the Sea, Job can see himself as God's child.

One major clue is found in Job 40: 15, "Behold Behemoth, whom I made with you." Another clue is Job's own comparison of himself with Leviathan and the Sea. Job, like the sea and like these beasts, is God's child constrained, admired, disciplined, overcome, and transformed. Job is God's child not because he is good, is rewarded, is deserving, or is superior, but Job is God's child by virtue of his birth which he cannot, through curse or lament, overcome.

The rub of course is the rub that comes to all children who learn that they have brothers and sisters. Up crops sibling rivalry, thinking you are the only child, insisting you are the only child. God, in his response, forces Job to reexamine his place within the cosmic family. He must think of all the other brothers and sisters – earth, water, sky and assorted animals – each requiring God's parental concern.

[Slide #22] And finally four, the specific configuration of creation in Job offers a critique of the priestly vision of creation found in Genesis 1 and elsewhere. This critique has at least two parts. The first and most obvious is the vision of humans having dominion is called into question, at least in so far as such vision implies power over the wild and free and leads to unbridled human hubris.

When one branches out further into the human need for holiness and to the proper maintenance of boundaries, the critique deepens. The Levitical divisions tempt a believer into believing that the distinction "between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean" (Leviticus 10:10) is a moral as well as a physical distinction. Thus those animals whom God declares unclean or detestable are perceived to be dangerous boundary crossers, not only forbidden to humans but also symbolic of all that is despicable in God's eyes.⁹ But in Job, God not only accepts such creatures but also shows them to be worthy of divine love, care, and admiration.

The world depicted in God's speeches is not without distinctions and cosmic boundaries.¹⁰ But such boundaries do not negate wildness and freedom. Cosmic boundaries are ultimately unknowable and thus not automatically accessible to humans through law. Rather, God's speeches imply, one admires a world that functions with such complexity that freedom and boundaries coexist, and one fears, loves, and trusts God who created and cares for such a world.

These four things I think we, as readers, learn. Do we have any evidence that Job learns similar lessons? Well, let's see. First please remember what so many tend to forget. Given the sores with which Job has become afflicted, he is now a leper. As such he is, himself, unclean and marginalized. My contention is this:

[Slide #23 Pictures] Throughout the speeches we hear of God's concern and care for the wild, the chaotic, and the unclean. Far from being outside of God's creation, they stand at the center of God's concern. So it is with the leprous and thus unclean, lamenting, and chaotic Job who aligned himself with the jackals and ostriches and sea-monsters. Job discovers in God's speeches that he is loved and admired not because he is upright and just but because he is one with the outcast and forsaken. Job actually is not simply scolded; he is transformed. I suggest that this transformation takes place on three different levels. Each level has a tremendous lesson for us about the moral world reflected by Job's vision of creation that embraces rather than rejects chaos. First, Job learns to think differently. Second, Job is affirmed and transformed in his relationship with God. And third, Job's life and actions are transformed. Let me take these one at a time.

[Slide #24 Thinking] First, Job learns to think differently, specifically about creation. Carole Fontaine suggests that Job "has been on a shaman's quest and is now wiser." He is healed. Fontaine quotes Jeanne Achterberg, a shamanic scholar, to illustrate her point, "Health is an intuitive perception of the universe and all its inhabitants as being of one fabric ... health is not ... the absence of pain ... Health is expanding beyond one's singular state of consciousness to experience the ripples and waves of the universe" (Ibid. 82). We see that Job has changed by looking at his final response to God:

¹Then Job answered the LORD:

²I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

³"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

⁴'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.'

⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

⁶therefore... (Job 42:1-6)

Verse 6 is notoriously difficult to translate. Just look at the options: **[Slide #25 Job 42:6]**

Job 42:6

- Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (NRSV, NIV, RSV)
- Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes (NAB)
- Therefore I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes. (NJPSV, supported by Fretheim, 1999)
- Therefore I recant and repent of dust and ashes. (Habel, 1985)
- Therefore I recant and repent, a child ('ul) of dust and ashes. (Wolters, 1990)
- Therefore I despise and repent of dust and ashes. (Good, 1990)
- Therefore I recant and change my mind concerning dust and ashes. (Janzen, 1985)
- Therefore I reject and am comforted over dust and ashes. (Perdue, 1991)
- Therefore I reject and am comforted concerning dust and ashes (William Morrow, 1986; supported by Newsom, 1994)

Job certainly does not despise himself, but he does seem to learn that he was wrong about something. He seems to learn that chaos is part of God's order. So chaos, and by extension suffering, are not the opposite of order, goodness, or even righteousness. Job learns that the care and concern of God are cosmic in scope, yet still personal. The relationship is not legalistic,

automatically rewarding good and punishing evil, but more relational. He changes his mind about how the world works. But thinking differently is never sufficient for any of us nor was it for Job. Transformation only starts there.

[Slide #26 Relationship with God] Job is also affirmed and transformed in his relationship with God. One of the over-riding questions of the book of Job concerns the nature of true piety. What does pious speech look and sound like? Job's friends think that pious speech always means praise and always means defending God against the assaults of the impious. They believe they have a lock on God. Job, wails, laments, and accuses God. He speaks to God directly and personally about his own suffering and the injustice of it all.

Now look at God's actual final speech in the Book of Job. **[Slide #27 Job 42:7-8]**

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of (to) me what is right, as my servant Job has. . . . and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of (to) me what is right, as my servant Job has done." (Job 42:7-8)

Always pay attention when God says something twice. God's wrath is provoked by the speech of the friends with their protective theological defenses of God. But Job's speech is declared to be right, directed aright, steadfast. God embraces the laments of Job and pronounces them to be true speech. I suggest that this divine pronouncement has several aspects. First, Job spoke to God rather than about God. The relationship is key. Second, Job lamented his suffering truly, and true laments exhibit the most profound sort of faith in God. The lamenter so believes in the promises of God that when experiences of suffering seem to indicate that those promises are not being fulfilled, then the lamenter is beholden to ask question – Why, O Lord? Until when? Will you desert us forever? And the God of Scripture, far from merely graciously allowing us such speech so that we might feel better, insists that we speak so, because such speech is true.

Such laments are, to my ears, best considered under the category of the theology of the cross. **[Slide #28 Two pictures]** A theology of the cross insists that we speak the truth about life. No lies, no coverups. The theology of the cross is about telling the truth and living the truth. It is about calling things what they are, which means we are to name and lament for the suffering around us. We get to the truth through the cross, never by going around it. There is no short cut to God that bypasses the cross. Job speaks what is right of and to the Lord.

The truth is revealed in his suffering, but not as we thinkers would expect. Job does not think more clearly than his friends. He, like his friends, is stuck in believing in the theory of just retribution and in the moral rectitude of a centralized, hierarchical moral system. But the truth of his suffering forces him to throw himself, albeit reluctantly, on the mercy of God. One might even say that Job's faith, itself hidden in doubt and anger, is what "saves" him. What he screams and laments for is relationship with God. He thinks perhaps that what he wants is some abstract revelation of truth and some answers as to why he is suffering. What Job gets is a relationship with God hidden within a remarkably odd encounter with God.

Job's speaking truly cannot be separated from Job's experience of suffering. That experience both breaks down his certainty about God, and points him to a God for him, though how all this works remains hidden. As I said, the final logic of Job is not the logic of justice but rather the logic of relationship. Knowing God for Job is deeply a matter of faith through suffering within the void. Chaos is taken up into the promise of God and the only doorway is cloaked in darkness.

I wonder if, we might speak of Job, indeed of all honest lamenters, as crushed theologians (a marvelous phrase of Dr. Fred Reisz) who cannot think their way to God but who are finally grasped by the cross, engrafted by the Spirit into Christ? How does this notion of a lived theology of the cross, of accepting lament as true and pious speech, and a deepened relationship with God as the heart of transformation play out in our role as sisters and brothers to all creation?

Before we look at that question directly, we need to address one final aspect of Job's transformation. [Slide #29 Living of life] Job's life and actions are transformed. This aspect of Job's transformation is perhaps the most subtle of all. Job not only thinks differently and has an altered relationship with God, this change also has an impact on how he lives. A student of mine, Abby Pelham, once noted that the two words used to describe Job at the beginning of the book, "upright" and "blameless," are not picked up again at the end. Job has been so transformed, that even his righteousness is different.

Job's actions are tied up with his changed moral outlook. Job has learned from God to adopt the chaotic and the unclean. More than adopt, to accept as worthy of attention and consideration. Job first sees that he himself has become part of this category. He is, after all, a leper. He has become "a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches." And as such, he is affirmed in rather than denied the status of "child of God." Job's identification with the other, the outsider, is complete. As Carol Newsome has beautifully explained, prior to his experience of suffering and his encounter with God Job had assumed the world to be properly ordered when he the righteous patriarch, and others like him, sat at the gate and kept order. They ruled justly. They were kind to the poor and those below them and under their care. And they meted out judgment on wicked sinners and on the enemy. Job stood at the center of this world. You see him described perfectly as the just patriarch in the prologue, making the proper sacrifices even for his children. You see this vision of village patriarchy described by Job as he defends himself in Chapters 29-31. In his suffering Job is shamed through his loss of place, at having become one of the marginalized. So then part of his transformation is both identifying with the marginalized and treating the marginalized and the outsider very differently than before. Thus it is that we see a changed Job in the final verses of the book.

"And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days. (Job 42:10-17)

The first action of his transformed reality is that he prays for, rather than judges, his enemies. Job becomes the intercessor he has prayed, and his prayer is accepted!

And then one notices that missing in the list of Job's now doubled possessions are the servants.¹¹ The servants are so invisible to us that we hardly notice this new ordering of a world without servants. And finally the three daughters mentioned, then ignored in 1:2, are now matched by three daughters who are named and given inheritance.¹² Power is shared and the old hierarchy holds no sway. And finally nowhere are we told that Job is cured. He is still, presumably, a leper.

Restoration and healing are not all that they seem. Such changes are far more significant than we first imagine. A Job that looks for all the world the same, is radically transformed.

Think then about the profound effect for transformation of the specific Jobian vision of God as Creator. We are invited to see chaos and wildness and even uncleanness as part of the creation that God admires and loves. We are invited to see relationship with God as the only “answer” to suffering. Not a relationship that denies suffering but a relationship which sees and speaks truly because of the truth of the suffering. And we are invited to see a transformed life evolving out of the encounter.

[Slide #30 Implications] Let us now sing what I think is a particularly appropriate new hymn from the ELW as we close this presentation.

ELW 703 **O God, Why Are You Silent?** (O Sacred Head Now Wounded)
Text: Marty Haugen Music: Hans Hassler; J.S. Bach
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[Slide #31] O God, why are you silent? I cannot hear your voice;
The proud and strong and violent all claims you and rejoice;
You promised you would hold me with tenderness and care.
Draw near, O Love, enfold me, and ease the pain I bear.

[Slide #32] My hope lies bruised and battered, my wounded heart is torn;
My spirit spent and shattered by life's relentless storm;
Will you not bend to hear me, my cries from deep within?
Have you no word to cheer me when night is closing in?

[Slide #33] May pain draw forth compassion, let wisdom rise from loss;
Oh, take my heart and fashion the image of your cross;
Then may I know your healing through healing that I share,
Your grace and love revealing, your tenderness and care.

¹ Brown, *Ethos*, 12.

² Michael Fishbane, “Jeremiah 4:23-26 and Job 3:3-13: A Recovered Use of Creation Pattern,” *Vetus Testamentum* 21(1971) 151-167. Note also the treatment of Job's lament by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 76-84.

³ The NRSV and other modern translations obscure this referent.

⁴ Not all of these creatures are listed by name as unclean, but when one looks in Leviticus 11 at the criteria for cleanness among land animals, these include animals who have divided hoofs (not paws as lions) and who chew the cud (unlike horses). For the distinction between “unclean” and “detestable,” see Douglas, *Leviticus*, 152ff. Douglas, 166-169, prefers the translation “to be shunned” over “detestable” or “abominable.”

⁵ Note particularly Lev. 11:46-47. The intimate connections between the different sorts of animals, clean and unclean, and the symbol system of creation was first laid out by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), and most recently reinterpreted, disavowing her original theory of pollution in Mary Douglas, *Leviticus As Literature* (New York: Oxford University, 1999). See also Brown, *Ethos*, 103-121, noting that Brown and Douglas now have different interpretations of the intended meaning of “unclean.”

⁶ In Hebrew the plural of the most general word for “animal” or “cattle” or “beast” is *behemoth*.

⁷ The word used here for “first” is the same as “beginning” in Genesis 1:1.

⁸ See Leviticus 11:9-12.

⁹ Douglas, *Leviticus*, 134-175, would question that this is a proper reading of Leviticus.

¹⁰ Note particularly the sea's “swaddling band” become “prescribed bounds” in 38:9-10.

¹¹ Compare the list in 42:12 to 1:3.

¹² The importance of the daughters is noted by both by Newsom, *Moral Sense*, 27, and Brown, *Ethos*, 379.