

# Pentecost 4 (Proper 7)

## TWO KINDS OF WISDOM

Job 38:1-11

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### Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

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## DIAGNOSIS: Dead Right

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Knowing It All*

Both Job and his friends thought they knew it all. Job knew that God wasn't being fair and he wanted to hold God accountable for not being just. Job's friends just knew that Job wasn't acknowledging some fault in himself or he wouldn't be suffering. The reason they were so certain is that they knew that God must

always operate with divine justice.

We can find ourselves complaining that the world is unfair or (if we are religious like Job) that it is God's fault when we experience injustice. We can also find ourselves sounding like Job's friends when we blame others for whatever injustices they may be experiencing. ("They must be lazy or stupid or have a bad attitude.") So we blame God or we blame other people.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Relying on Our "Wisdom"*

What lies behind our blaming God when we experience injustice and our blaming others when they experience it? What else than our certainty that for God to be God, everything that happens to us should be "just." That's what our "wisdom" tells us. God must be just. How un-godlike not to be. Therefore, we just know that anything that happens to us that is undeserved must be God's fault. And the troubles of others must be their own fault. One problem with that wisdom, of course, is that it leaves us with only two options: pride, if we imagine we deserve only what we call good, or despair, if we realize that God's justice finds us undeserving.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Being Dead Right*

The even bigger problem, though, is that if we insist that justice must be God's ultimate way of dealing with us and all creation, we will never know the joy of God's mercy.

When God offers us something better than justice and we insist on relying on our rightness because we believe that, above everything else, God must be just, we put ourselves under God's critique: "If you will not receive what I want to give you, you will not have what it takes to live. You won't make it because you don't have what it takes. I am the one who 'laid the foundation of the earth...' If you will not receive my mercy, then

all you will have is your rightness. And if your rightness is all you've got, you won't survive my justice."

## **PROGNOSIS: Made Right**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Living, in Spite of Being Dead Right*

In the Book of Job, the Lord answers Job "out of the whirlwind" (38:1). God does not express anger at him for being so arrogant; rather, God shares with Job the immensity of the burden of managing the universe. That, say some commentators (cf. the Oxford Annotated Bible's introduction to Job), can be seen as an indication of God's desire to communicate with human creatures and of God's care for us.

That's as much "good news" as Job can give us, though. What's more, the encouragement to trust God blindly because God (who is Creator and therefore supreme) is benign and cares for us is not exactly news that is so good that it makes you just want to jump for joy.

What the book of Job lacks, though, has been made manifest to us in Jesus. In Jesus, we encounter the God who not only cares about us, but who has also acts to give us life. In Jesus, God becomes Job. In Jesus, God loses everything, even life itself. Jesus loses it all, not because he has done anything to justly deserve such suffering and loss – nothing, that is, except to offer us forgiveness for what we have done to justly deserve it. He offers us forgiveness, even for our relying, again and again, on our rightness. As a result, he suffers the consequences of our being "dead right." And, miracle of miracles, the One who spoke to Job from the whirlwind spoke again on the third day, voicing approval for such mercy.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Relying on God's Wisdom*

When God gets it through to us that we are so dear, not on account of our rightness or blamelessness, but simply on account of God's mercy for us through Jesus, God's "one and only," we find ourselves giving up on our wisdom about how God must operate the world. Even when our wisdom is based on God's own law, we give it up. Instead, we find ourselves trusting Jesus' promise that God values mercy even over God's own justice.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Becoming "Tell-It-Alls"***

When God changes us from trusting in our own rightness to trusting in God's mercy, we shouldn't be surprised to find changes in our behavior as well. In fact, changes are inevitable. We give up trying to blame God for our troubles or trying to blame others for their troubles. And we give up thinking we know it all with regard to how God is obliged to operate in the world.

Instead, we find ourselves rejoicing that the one who "laid the foundation of the earth" has shown such great love for us through Jesus' suffering and death for us. We find ourselves delighted and thankful that, in Jesus, such a loving God is "in the boat" with us (cf. today's Gospel reading). And we find ourselves unable to keep from telling others the "jumping-for-joy" good news of God's invitation to us through Jesus to share in the life of the One who laid the foundations of the earth.