

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Out of the Depths

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The first scripture readings I chose demonstrate the struggles of the biblical character Job. To give a more complete understanding of the context of those verses, I'd like to begin by reading a bit more of this story.

(Job 1:1-5, 13-19)

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. (13)

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!"

While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you."

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who escaped to tell you!" ____

In one day, Job was robbed of all of his wealth and lost ten children. All of his seven sons and three daughters—his future, his family. As if Job's suffering was not enough, he was soon after afflicted with painful sores that covered his entire body. This man of sincere and profound faith lost everything that was dear to him.

Job has several friends who come to visit and comfort him. After a week of silent grieving, Job speaks. He curses his birth and his life. Job says, "I have no peace, no quietness, no rest... only turmoil." (2:26) Unfortunately, Job's friends are lousy comforters. They begin accusing Job and saying that God must be punishing him, and that Job should turn to God for a miracle. Job's friends judge too quickly, and respond in ways that are not helpful. And

Job isn't sure what is going on, either. He is overwhelmed with pain, and struggles to see God through his suffering.

**Job's struggles with pain and loss are not unique. They represent a common aspect of human experience. I think we have each faced or will at some time face periods where we feel like Job. We feel pain or doubt or fear, brought on by various changes and events in our lives. Job's story provides a framework for us to understand these times of suffering in our own lives.

When I first came to Augie, my faith was strong and growing and I was full of joy. Not that I was always happy, but I was so sure about things. I had answers to nearly everything, and rarely questioned my beliefs. I *just knew* that God was good and powerful and God would take care of me. I felt so blessed and God felt so close.

Then things began to change. Things that I had taken for granted, things I had counted on. The very center of who I was was shaken. And I began to see the world differently. In some ways, I think I may have begun to see the world more clearly. But my view of God was distorted, and He felt more and more distant.

It didn't seem to matter how much I prayed or went to church or Bible studies. My faith as I knew it had been knocked over and spilled everywhere. I tried to grasp the pieces and put them back together, how they had been. I wanted so badly to feel sure again. But it didn't happen. In many ways, I felt like Job.

Even after a couple of years, I'm still trying to put things back together. Somewhere deep down, I believe and I know that God is good and that he cares about me. But he still feels *so far away*. I have doubts and fears and grief that have complicated things. And I still feel a lot of pain and doubt. So where do we go from here? What do we do when our faith is unsteady and it seems everything we knew was wrong?

**Let's return to Job.

Job, in his confusion, feels that God has abandoned him. But Job does have one wise friend who finally speaks up in response.

(33:12-14) "But I tell you, you are not right, for God is greater than man. Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man's words? For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it."

This friend reminds Job and the others that they cannot expect to understand the ways of God. God does speak, he says. Despite Job's feelings of loneliness, God is still present. He has not turned against Job. God may allow darkness, but He does not leave us alone in the dark.

**The letters of the apostle Paul also deal with the issue of suffering. In 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about the “thorn in his flesh” that God would not take away. No matter how much he prayed, God allowed that painful thorn to persist. But then Paul writes, “The Lord said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

When we encounter people who are struggling, we often respond like Job’s less wise friends. We don’t know what to say, and may say things that are unhelpful. Our focus is on helping them to overcome their struggles or their weaknesses. However, God sometimes allows our pain and our weakness to linger. He even embraces our weakness.

**Now, just a minute. EMBRACES my weakness? Are you kidding? Now, those of you who know me might have noticed that I can be a bit of a perfectionist. I am especially brutal to myself. I’m always trying to be better, work harder, do more. Nothing is good enough. Definitely not weakness. And if I can’t accept my own weakness, it’s quite difficult for me to believe that God can.

But He does.

He is *that* gracious. He is *that* loving. Even when we are weak. Especially when we are weak.

So why did our loving God let these devoted men suffer? I think the more important question is: How did they respond? We might learn from them. How do we respond when our lives and the lives of others are shaken by fear, doubt, grief, and suffering?

In the last chapter of the book of Job, God has finally spoken. Job answers him:

(42:1-5) I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things that I do 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.

Job recognizes that God’s reasons are beyond human understanding. Job, *while he is still grieving and suffering*, sees God’s grace through his doubt.

And what of Paul? He accepts his weakness, and says he will even boast in it, because it brings him closer to God. What great faith. But we must remember that they didn’t always feel that way. They felt lost and confused and hurt. They had questions—hard questions—and doubt. But God didn’t condemn or punish them for that. Because His grace is sufficient. When we are weak, we are strong in Him.

Pastor Paul said to me about a month ago, “God doesn’t give us answers, He gives us an answerer.” And there are still many questions unanswered. And my faith still wavers more than I’d like. But in the depths of doubt and weakness, I am grateful to know that God’s grace is enough to see me through. Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANK YOU to Nathaniel Johnson, Laura Vogt, Andrew Nielsen, Molly Truesdell, Pastor Paul, Carol LaCroix, and all the friends and professors that have challenged and encouraged me throughout my time at Augie. You continually teach me about God, life, and love, and I am forever grateful.

SERVICE LEARNING REGISTRATIONS and deposits are now being received in the Chapel Office.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

SUNDAY	Worship, 11 am - Pr. Jeff Eisele
MONDAY	Worship, 10 am - Gary Olson, History
TUESDAY	Worship, 10 am - Corey Nuffer, Senior Speaker
WEDNESDAY	MEMORIAL SERVICE for Kenzie Overlander, 10 am (Holy Communion)
FRIDAY	Worship, 10 am - Todd Manion, Senior Speaker