

August 9, 2020 – Job 38:4-18

“God has a plan.” Have you ever had somebody say those words to you? Perhaps you've said them to someone else. “Don't worry, God has a plan.”

Of course, it's a true statement. God does have a plan. Always. In every circumstance. It is impossible to surprise God. To catch Him off guard. To throw Him a curveball. He has it all worked out.

And yet, saying that to someone can be a double-edged sword. Sometimes it's exactly what they need to hear. Sometimes we need to be reminded of God's sovereignty and providence. When the world is spinning out of control, it can be very comforting to hear that God isn't spinning with it.

That he is outside of our problems. Outside of our weaknesses. That even when we are completely out of control, He has everything under control. It's all in His plan.

But sometimes, it's not so comforting to hear that. Sometimes it's actually quite cruel to say those words to someone. Because they can't see the plan. They can't feel the plan. And knowing that it's there doesn't make the future any less frightening or confusing or painful. In fact, if anything, it only separates them from God's love even more.

When someone is grieving the death of a loved one, telling them that God has a plan may just make it all the more incomprehensible that God would choose to take this person from their life. When someone is burdened with financial stress and hardship, telling them that God has a plan may only make God feel cold and heartless to put them through this turmoil. When someone is in pain and suffering, telling them that God has a plan may make it feel like God is trying to hurt them.

Of course, none of that is true. But it certainly feels that way. And when you're struggling to understand and have faith in an invisible God, it's easy for your imagination to run away with you. To leave you doubting and feeling very, very alone.

Job is a classic example of this. Job undergoes tremendous suffering: physical, mental, and emotional. He is physically plagued with a painful, disfiguring disease. He is mentally strained by the loss of his business and property. He is emotional distraught over the death of his children.

And all of this leads, inevitably, to a spiritual crisis as well. As, I think, it would in any of us. There's a plan behind all of it. There's a reason why all of it is happening. But Job doesn't know it. He can't know it.

And his friends, of course, don't help. They insist that there is a reason for all this. Maybe Job committed some horrible sin and God is punishing him. No, Job isn't hiding some big, horrible sin. Well, maybe it was a bunch of little sins, the type you don't even remember. Nobody is perfect, after all. No, that's not true either.

Well, maybe God has already told you the purpose for all this and you just weren't listening closely. No, Job was listening. God hasn't said a word. Then maybe you're just not seeing the silver lining in all this. Suffering is good for you. It strengthens your faith. Well, yes, that may be the case. But Job can't believe God would kill his entire family just to make his already strong faith a little stronger.

No, Job can't see any reason for this. And that's what really drives him nuts. He has absolute, 100%, complete faith that God has a plan. But that's only making all of this worse. Because he doesn't understand what that plan could possibly be.

In our Old Testament lesson today, God responds. And he tells Job that, frankly, it's none of his business. This is God's plan. Not Job's. And when Job has the power, wisdom, and perspective to understand His creator, then God will tell Him.

When Job can understand the infinite power by which God created the heavens and the earth, then maybe God will let him in on His secret. When Job has a mind that can fathom the massive jigsaw puzzle that is the universe, then maybe God will show him a little of how he works. When Job can transcend time and space, then maybe he'll see what's going on. In other words, to fully understand God's plan, you need to be God.

It's not a very satisfying answer for Job. Because he was a righteous, faithful man, Job accepted the response and stopped asking for answers that God wasn't ever going to give. But I can't imagine it made him terribly happy to hear this. Nor has it ever satisfied mankind to accept that we are mere creatures in the hands of a creator.

And the funny thing is that I don't think it satisfied God very much either. I don't think God particularly liked telling Job to stop asking for answers. God likes to be close to us. He likes when we pray. He likes answering prayer. He likes revealing himself to us so that we understand him better. He likes providing for our every need.

When God came to Job and said, "I am God and you are not," he acknowledged the great distance that stood between Him and humanity. But a distance that He didn't put there. No, this was a distance that we put there. A distance that our sin put there.

A distance that was created when Adam and Eve first ate the fruit. When they first hid from God's presence. When they first lost that image – that understanding – of God and His will.

In our sinfulness, we create a separation between us and God. Such that we no longer fully understand what God is doing or why he is doing it. And, like Job, we go through this life always wondering why we are suffering the way that we are. And that is a situation that God simply could not leave unresolved.

So he did something about it. He sent His Son. His Son who is the fullness of God made flesh. His Son, by whom we see the Father.

You see, the incarnation of Christ is often seen as pitting God the Father and God the Son against each other. God the Father was angry with humanity. So God the Son came to take our punishment. And that's true, in a sense.

But it's more complicated than that. Because the Father and the Son are not enemies. They're one. One God, in three persons. And in the Son, we see the fullness of the Father.

Everything that we can know about God we see in Jesus Christ. Everything that God ever wanted to reveal to us about himself is revealed in that one perfect human being. Everything that God ever wanted us to understand about how he thinks and acts and loves us is understood in the words and actions of the incarnate Christ.

And everything about God's plan for us is seen in what happened to God's Son here on earth. Look at Christ and you see the fullness of God. Look at Christ and you see the fullness of his plan for you.

A plan to be born. To be called by name. To be baptized by water and the Spirit. To be given a calling and a purpose to your life. To be sent into the world with a message of repentance and good news. To love and be loved.

But also to be rejected and persecuted. To grieve. To suffer. And one day, to die. But also one day to rise again. That was God the Father's plan for His Son. But that is also God's plan for you.

And it's a good plan. Because as hard as it is to understand sometimes, it's God's plan. The same God who laid the foundations of the earth. Who determined its measurements. Who surrounded it with water and wrapped it with clouds like a garment.

That same God has a plan for your life. For your death. And for your resurrection. Revealed to us by the Son who came to earth in human flesh. Lived a life just like ours. And showed us exactly who the Father is.

Showed us that he is not cruel. Or incomprehensible. Or cold and heartless. He is not looking to hurt us or make us suffer. Quite the opposite. He sent his Son to relieve our suffering. To show us his love. To give us hope in the midst of uncertainty. And answers in the midst of questions.

And just as he prepared an earth for us, He has prepared another place for us. A place in heaven, by his side. And a place on earth. On a new earth. Where just as he came once to dwell with us for a time, so he will come again to dwell with us for all eternity. Amen.