

**October 18, 2015**  
**21st Sunday after Pentecost / Proper 24 (Yr. B)**  
**Job 38:1-7, 34-41 / Psalm 104**  
**The Rev. Carenda Baker**

Where is your favorite “go to spot”? Where is the place that restores your soul, that draws your attention away from your cares and concerns, a place that invites you to look outside yourself and more deeply at the created world around you?

For some, it's when you stand with your toes in the sand, watching and listening as the waves break on the shoreline. For others, it's that shaded spot in the mountains, where you camp, where you sit outside after dark around a fire, looking up at the stars. For some, it will be in the middle of a garden, where with your eyes closed and one deep breath, you take in the perfume of roses or lilacs. For others it will be when you stand on moss covered rocks by a lush waterfall, feeling the spray and cool breeze blowing off the cascading waters. And it could be by a lake, where the water shimmers as you toss a stone, counting the skips it makes and watching the ripples that follow. Or it might just be your deck or back porch where you sit to watch the sunset or sunrise, or the birds visiting at your birdfeeder.

It's hard not to imagine there is a divine Creator behind this beauty and majesty when we take the time to look at the natural world. The abundance. The variety. The intricacy. The delicacy. The feast for the senses. The mystery. The cycle of life – death – life. The awesomeness and power of the elements of wind, water, earth and fire.

When we left Job last week it was at the point where he had been demanding an audience with God so that he could plead his case, to insist on his innocence and the injustice of all that happened to him. He was in despair because he could not find God anywhere. God just seemed to be missing in action, despite Job's begging for God to make an appearance.

Job's prayer is finally answered when God shows up out of the whirlwind, which is where today's Old Testament reading begins. Now this whirlwind is not to be confused with a tornado or hurricane. This whirlwind is a sign of God's appearing in human affairs, as a creative, life-changing force that cannot really be understood. You can't hold this God down, you can't explain this God. This God is dynamic, in motion. As human beings we would like to, and do try - to define this God and keep God in a box. But this God will not be contained by any box. This God is in the whirlwind, and has now come to meet Job.

And it does not look like God has come to comfort Job. ***“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 the earth's 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?”***

“God does not address Job’s situation or his questions about justice. God does not even acknowledge Job’s suffering. Instead, God takes Job on a whirlwind tour of creation, beginning with the foundation of the earth, and the birth of the Sea. God spends a lot of time where the wild things are, describing all kinds of untamed creatures – lions, mountain goats, deer, wild donkeys, ostriches, eagles, and two monsters of chaos from the deep, Behemoth and Leviathan” – or as we would probably call them, the whale and hippopotamus. [Kathryn Schifferdecker, commentary in Working Preacher].

So God finally makes an appearance and answers none of Job’s questions! Actually God peppers Job with question after question - 60 questions that Job listens to and cannot begin to answer. I’m imagining Job sits there in dumbfounded silence. These questions, God’s questions, totally shift the conversation to a completely different and much bigger perspective. “To our way of thinking, this is most unsatisfying. We want God to apologize for all Job’s suffering. We want God to at least be comforting. Instead, in the words of William Safire: “It’s as if God appears in a tie-dyed T-shirt emblazoned with the words ‘Because I’m God, That’s Why.’”

[Kathryn Schifferdecker, Working Preacher]

In next week’s final reading from Job we will hear Job’s humble response to God: ***“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. . . Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”***

As Old Testament seminary professor Fred Gaiser writes: “Job is not a book about divine pastoral care, but about divine perspective and human wonder. The book of Job serves to keep us honest.”

So it is then, that Job, emptied of his arguments, expectations, and fury at injustice, can now rest in his rightful place in God’s creation. He is part of the created order, and not necessarily the center of that created order.” The final answer: God is God, and Job is not.

In the end, it is not really answers to his questions that transform Job’s profound suffering. It is relationship with God that transforms Job’s profound suffering. This may not have been what Job expected or wanted, but it provides what he needs - what we need: the reminder that heart-breaking suffering and breath-taking beauty are both parts of every human life. “The glory of God is humanity fully alive,” said St. Irenaeus. To be fully alive is to be aware of God’s majesty *and* aware of our place as finite created beings. There is freedom here. We are freed to live into the truth that life is hard, life is good, and God is with and for us in all of it. We are invited into the deeper mystery of life, to accept our human limits and trust that God will take care of what we cannot know or do.

There is a good reason that being outdoors in the natural world restores our souls. It gets us beyond ourselves, outside our narrowly defined, limited view of life. It connects us, literally grounds us with the one thing all created matter has in common – it all comes from dust. Experiencing the natural world can give us a glimpse of how God sees all that God made, including but not only humankind. God pronounces everything good in the Genesis story. Humans tend to quickly make ourselves the center of creation, and too easily take for granted our responsibility to care for the rest of God's created world. The world belongs to God and is on loan to us. The world is the handiwork of an incredibly imaginative Holy, Divine Other.

James Weldon Johnson's poem "*The Creation*" (subtitled, "*A Negro Sermon*") gives us a beautiful and imaginative glimpse of the Divine desire at work from the beginning, from time beyond time.  
Listen to it now.

### ***The Creation***

*And God stepped out on space,  
And God looked around and said,  
"I'm lonely – I'll make me a world."  
And far as the eye of God could see  
Darkness covered everything,  
Blacker than a hundred midnights  
Down in a cypress swamp.*

*Then God smiled,  
And the light broke,  
And the darkness rolled up on one side,  
And the light stood shining on the other,  
And God said, "That's good!"*

*Then God reached out and took the light in His hands,  
And God rolled the light around in His hands  
Until He made the sun;  
And God set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.  
And the light that was left from making the sun  
God gathered it up in a shining ball  
And flung it against the darkness,  
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.  
Then down between the darkness and the light  
God hurled the world;  
And God said, "That's good!"*

*Then God himself stepped down –  
And the sun was on God's right hand,  
And the moon was on God's left;*

*The stars were clustered about God's head,  
And the earth was under His feet.  
And God walked, and where He trod  
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out  
And bulged the mountains up.*

*Then God stopped and looked and saw  
That the earth was hot and barren.  
So God stepped over to the edge of the world  
And God spat out the seven seas;  
God batted His eyes, and the lightnings flashed;  
God clapped His hands, and the thunders rolled;  
And the waters above the earth came down,  
The cooling waters came down.*

*Then the green grass sprouted,  
And the little red flowers blossomed,  
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,  
And the oak spread out his arms,  
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,  
And the rivers ran down to the sea;  
And God smiled again,  
And the rainbow appeared,  
And curled itself around God's shoulder.*

*Then God raised His arm and He waved His hand  
Over the sea and over the land,  
And God said, "Bring forth! Bring forth!"  
And quicker than God could drop His hand,  
Fishes and fowls and beasts and birds  
Swam the rivers and seas,  
Roamed the forests and the woods,  
And split the air with their wings.  
And God said, "That's good!"*

*Then God walked around,  
And God looked around  
On all that God had made.  
God looked at His sun,  
And God looked at His moon,  
And God looked at His little stars;  
God looked on His world  
With all its living things,  
And God said, "I'm lonely still."*

*Then God sat down  
On the side of a hill where He could think;  
By a deep, wide river God sat down;  
With His head in His hands,  
God thought and thought,  
Till He thought, "I'll make me a man!"*

*Up from the bed of the river  
God scooped the clay;  
And by the bank of the river  
God kneeled Him down;  
And there the great God Almighty  
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,  
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,  
Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand;  
This Great God,  
Like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Kneeled down in the dust  
Toiling over a lump of clay  
Till God shaped it in His own image;  
Then into it God blew the breath of life,  
And man became a living soul.  
Amen. Amen."*

*(James Weldon Johnson. 1871-1938.  
The Book of American Negro Poetry, 1922).*

God is God, and we are not – glory, hallelujah! So then - with awe. With wonder. With reverence. With gratitude in our hearts, God give us the grace to say – “Now that’s good!”

Amen.