When I was baptized at the age of 15 my grandmother wrote these words in front of the bible she gave me, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”, a passage taken from Psalm 119:10. My grandmother believed that the bible was her voice of reason to questions she could not answer in regard to her own life. Why was her marriage so difficult? Why did her husband become physically and emotionally abusive when he drank too much? Why did she need to suffer? Why?

I suspect my grandmother was not given any specific answers to her plight in life, though, I know she read the book of Job often. As a young kid I made a quick judgement about my grandfather. I came to the conclusion he was a man who couldn’t handle alcohol. And while my judgement was clouded by watching my grandmother suffer, I gradually came to know my grandfather was a person who also suffered knowing he was a man who could not control his anger when he drank too much. Alcoholism destroyed his marriage.

Yet, my grandmother would still pray for her husband to be healed of his addiction to alcohol. She prayed to an unspeakable God; a God who gave her no precise answers or relief from the emotional and physical pain she suffered throughout her life. I have come to some conclusions about God through this experience of my grandmother’s. I realize that God doesn’t come the way we want God to come; God comes how and when God wants to come! God may come in a whirlwind, a tempest, to get Job’s attention after all of the talking he and his friends do during his many losses. This is a divinity whom we do not master even though we hand out master of divinity degrees at college; this is a divinity we should allow to master us! And God gives Job a master class in what it means to be divinity by asking Job the rhetorical question, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”

Walter Brueggemann says this about God in the Psalms, but his conclusions are also true in Job: He says, “God acts in ways that systematic theology doesn’t allow. That is because God is free and wild and beautiful and untamable. We like easy answers and Job and his friends have been operating out of their simple, traditional mentality, thinking that obedience leads to blessing and disobedience leads to punishment, thinking that the spiritual life is that clear and easy to understand. But God cannot be tamed or tied down to our small world views.” God, the divine, you might say, works outside all boxes of human expectation and understanding. It’s almost as if God is speaking a different language than Job or his friends are speaking.

This unknown writer of Job comes to the only conclusion one can when speaking of the divine, humans cannot fully comprehend God or control God. The divine is beyond human interpretation, although, through our prayers, our commentaries, and our constant studying about God, we certainly bring a huge effort to knowing God. So, we have a God who does not allow us to become mired down in a tit for tat relationship, he/she/her, encourages us to examine the expanse of the heavens for us to gain a glimpse of God. We are to stop navel-gazing, and gaze upon the wonders of heaven. We are to worship God without expectations.

I say this with some trepidation, because the story of Job is difficult to read or comprehend. Why, even, tell the story of God when the divine seems so very absent in responding to Job’s pleas for help? This is where we come face to face in understanding the book of Job, “We are to respond to God, in spite of God meeting our needs.” Perhaps, that is why the author gets rather firm with Job by saying, “Gird up your loins like a man.” In the words of an Old Testament professor I had in seminary, “Suck it up. Life is hard and then you die.”

Yet, God does respond to Job by showing him how to find the essence of God through wonder, the unexplainable, the beauty of creation and the wonders of the solar system. Jesus, in our Gospel lesson today, tries to do the same for his disciples. The disciples are concerned with their own lives; surely, now that Jesus will have his own kingdom, their lives will become easier, after all, even if Jesus needs to suffer, the outcome will be a win-win for them. I don’t believe the disciples were embarrassed at all when they asked Jesus, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking.’” The disciples want their world to change for their own personal gain, and Jesus is the man to make that happen, at least, this is what the disciples think Jesus means by living in God’s kingdom.

Allow me to use this quote from Debie Thomas to explain what the book of Job was trying say, and how Jesus, himself, was striving to redirect the disciples’ attention to something beyond their own personal expectations: Debi says,

Perhaps this is the point. Not to be pleased or satisfied,

but to be baffled into wonder. Startled into humility.

Disoriented into praise. To ponder the unknowable is to

be silenced into a newer, wider kind of attentiveness to

God and all that God has made. Yes, suffering remains,

and so do the questions that must arise from it. But the

story of Job reminds us that we ask these questions in

the context of a universe securely held, ordered, protected,

and cherished by God. In knowing this much, we might find rest.

Do you see why we need this kind of God’s glory. A glory that does not depend upon human innovation, but relies in a God that cannot be explained or figured out or manipulated. The kind of glory Jesus refers to is that of becoming the servant. Jesus says, “*Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many*.”

You may be at a loss for words in the face of God’s glory. I know that I often lack words to talk about God. The word glory is such a ‘churchy’ word, but nothing can hide the obvious requests of fame, prestige, praise, and success as the disciples share their hopeful dreams with Christ. The disciples want a better life, and their hope is that Jesus can give that kind of life to them and for others. Jesus, though, sets them straight. Jesus says, “We are to be servants.”

I suppose this is the bottom line to suffering. God simply tells us that suffering and beauty will be part of our lives, and if we can’t lean into both, then we will turn to other ways to numb our pain. Perhaps, we will hide our pain by consuming alcohol or drugs. Maybe the pursuit of money and prestige will dull the pain. But we will seek to cover our pain.

And perhaps the real takeaway from our Job and Gospel lesson is this, in the midst of suffering will we still claim God as God. Perhaps less words and more sublime worship of God will make us better servants. I know I need God’sWord. And, I need God, as my grandmother needed God. I would watch as my grandmother would pluck the dead blooms from her roses, and I would see her smile softly to herself. Where did she find God; she reached for beauty in her flowerbed and yard. Beauty fed her, just as God was reaching down deep inside of her to say, “Look and you will find me among the unexplanable.” Amen.