

Children's Sabbaths Faith Expression

When Will Things Get Better?

Job 38:1-7, (34-41) New Revised Standard Version

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? 35 Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? 36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? 37 Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, 38 when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? 39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, 40 when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? 41 Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?

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In the popular children's book, Winnie The Pooh, the honey-loving bear has a group of friends that join him on adventures. Whether it is playing, foraging for food, or just relaxing on a gloomy day, Pooh and his friends make the adjustment to whatever is happening – that is, all of them except for a blue, floppy-eared donkey named Eeyore. Perhaps you have seen the memes on social media platforms of Eeyore surrounded by Pooh and Piglet, two of his best friends, who regardless of what the situation is, have determined that they will sit with Eeyore and simply be present with him in, though, and until things get better.

It sounds simple enough and it might even sound like a rose-colored lens to explore this very complex passage in Job, but the truth is, if we are going to explore this sacred text through the child-like wonder of a child and consider how gloomy situations like hunger, poverty, war, bullying at school, and being a child “in the system” who does not have access to someone who cares deeply and advocates for them, at the simplest level, where joy is on hiatus and real-lived experiences are the order of the day, for a child the question is: when will things get better?

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According to the World Health Organization, in 2022 an estimated 1 billion children around the globe were maltreated. Let us not underestimate the impact that experiences can have on our children. In *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Resmaa Manakem reminds us that trauma happens in the body. "It is a spontaneous protective mechanism used by the body to stop or thwart further (or future) potential damage." We must begin to have more trauma-informed conversations and pay attention to what our children are saying and not saying. The reality is that adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are sources of stress that affect children not just now, but also later in life because there will be situations that cause triggers – that is, a jarring experience that takes them back to something that interrupted what is supposed to be the ease of childhood. It sounds heavy because it is heavy; yet it is something that we must address, sit in the tension with, and access the resources that are available to us. "Such adverse childhood experiences include multiple types of abuse; neglect; violence between parents or caregivers; other kinds of serious household dysfunction such as alcohol and substance abuse; and peer, community and collective violence."

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We often talk about the resiliency of children without talking about the effects of their real-lived experiences and how that shapes their future and the ways in which they show up in the world. We cannot afford to keep silencing the cries of our children nor can we smooth it over by telling them to get over it. God has entrusted their care to us and we have a God-given responsibility to take care of God's most precious and vulnerable gifts.

On any day, including today as we celebrate Children's Sabbaths, there are a multitude of situations happening for which children are asking that question in their own, child-like language. The truth is, as adults we find ourselves asking the same thing as we hear news of war, earthquakes, job layoffs, reduction in the workforce, social security benefits at risk, healthcare woes and "more month" than money at the end of 31-day cycles, and hope seems elusive. We cry out to God, asking when will things get better?

And after what seems to be repeated patterns of the same and nothing changing, out of the whirlwind, God answers. And the answer that God gives does not seem to match the question that we have been asking.

For those who know the story of Job, he is a man without fault. He is upright and righteous and blameless before God. He is the ideal neighbor, friend, spouse, co-worker, yet through no fault of his own, Job is subjected to the most horrendous and unimaginable situation. Satan, or The Adversary, seeks permission from God to take everything that Job has, and he does. In many ways, this Job story will forever be one of more questions than answers; of a wagon full of "whys" and yet each time we encounter this narrative, there is perhaps some new nugget of wisdom that we had not considered before.

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With all the devastation and destruction that was unleashed on Job, when God finally answers Job, God begins with a series of peculiar questions as if to question Job. There are no less than ten questions that God directs to Job, and of note is verse 4 where God begins a multi-part question that starts with, “where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding, followed by, asking Job, “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?”

The omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God boldly asked these questions – not because God did not know the answers, but because God is the answer to the questions. As part of the mystery of things that happen that are beyond our understanding, we find ourselves yielding to not knowing. And then there are things that are happening, some of which are rhetorical questions that perhaps we find ourselves wrestling with the truth of the answers. Poverty does not happen on its own. More than one million children in Texas are not food insecure on their own nor or their parents scrimping and scraping just to make ends meet out of some desire for it to be that way. Wars do not happen on their own. Lack of funding for our schools does not stop or get directed elsewhere on its own. Discrimination based on familial background, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status does not just happen. These social calamities interrupt the lives of us and our children because systems have been calibrated to make it so. Yes, people like you and me who are made in the image of God, who are declared fearfully and wonderfully made, have unleashed things that are antithetical to joy, antithetical to flourishing and antithetical to the thriving of God's children.

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And the questions for all of us are these: how will we advocate for things to get better? What systems will we challenge so that our children will inherit a world where equity and justice are the order of the day? Where all of God's children have access to what they need without regard to skin color, family origin, or what language they speak? When will we work together collectively across racial lines, political lines, native languages, and cultures to make things better?

Pooh and Piglet sat with Eeyore and offered the ministry of presence. Consider that God is calling us to do more than to sit with what's happening in our communities that impact our children. We must take a stand against it and advocate for the well-being of our children.

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Closing Prayer

God, in your infinite wisdom, you know the answer to questions that we have. As we lament and ask when will things get better, we lift our hearts to You and pray that You will give us the courage to walk the paths of better – better healthcare for our children, better education, better food choices, and better environments that are safe from toxins and toxic people. As we await Your answer, we are assured that You are right here in our midst, revealing Your providential plan in it all. Amen.

Reflection Questions on the Text

- If you could talk back to the sacred text, what questions do you have?
- In your faith tradition, how do you respond to the question of when will things get better?
- This passage is about God answering in the midst of Job's calamities, trials and struggles where Job has been devastated by so much loss – loss of family, property and livelihood. What devastation is your community facing? What about your neighbors? How will you respond to a child in your sphere of influence who is experiencing loss (i.e. displaced, loss of a loved one, loss of stability, etc.)?

Consider this Activity for Children:

Read aloud a Winnie-the-Pooh story and incorporate role playing. Ask the children what “why” questions each character might be asking. For instance, Piglet might ask questions about “why” the sky is blue or “why” it rains so much. Eeyore might ask “why” Pooh always eats honey.