

The song Casimir Pulaski Day by singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens tells the story of a young man finding out his girlfriend has leukemia and his sorrow as she dies, despite many people praying for her and her getting treatment for the cancer. The singer speaks of Jesus when he closes the song singing, “Oh the glory when He took our place, but He took my shoulders and he shook my face, and he takes and he takes and he takes.”

We live in a world of tragedies. We live in a world where there’s beauty. Both exist hand in hand.

Earlier this month we received news that our district President John Wille died after a long battle with prostate cancer. His sudden decline shocked many. The same day, I received a phone call from my dad saying he went into the doctor and they weren’t able to detect any prostate cancer. We live in a world of tragedies. We live in a world where there’s beauty. Both exist hand in hand.

It's easy to relate to the young man in the Sufjan Stevens song, “He takes and he takes and he takes.” It’s easy for us to ask God, “Why” and sometimes it seems like God takes and He takes and He takes.

Job understands what that’s like. In the Book of Job, God boasts to Satan of Job’s righteousness. Satan replies, “Well, Job wouldn’t be so upright and righteous if he didn’t have all the blessings You gave him.”

God let Satan attack Job, God said even then Job will not curse me, he will still praise me and be my servant. Satan attacks Job taking away all that Job has, yet Job said, **“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”**

The rest of the book, Job and his friends ponder why this happened. Some of his friends say Job must have done something wrong. Job maintains his innocence. Throughout these dialogues, they keep on demanding an audience with God for Him to give an account for his actions. They want him to give some answers.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I had the Sufjan Stevens song on repeat. The question the young man has is ours, “Oh the glory that he took our place, but he took my shoulders and he shook my face, and he takes and he takes, and he takes.” Yes, we know Jesus died on the cross in our place. Yes, we know sometimes the Lord answers “no” to prayers. But why is it still so difficult in these times to see how God is acting? Why does it seem in times of suffering that God takes and He takes and He takes? 3. We, like Job, can ask why God in the face of tragedies.

Job does get an answer from God, but it’s maybe not the answer he wants or expects. The thing is, God could have told Job the whole reason, right? It was essentially a sucker’s bet between Him and Satan. Essentially, God used Job to

shame Satan and prove Job's uprightness. But God never gives that real reason to Job.

In fact, God answers Job differently from the Tempest. **“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.”** This answer is terrifying. Essentially God said to Job, ‘You don't know what you're talking about. Get ready to fight!’

We have eleven verses of God's speech to Job read for us in this text today. However, God's speech continues on for four whole chapters. Chapters 38 through 41 of Job just contain God's questioning of Job. The Lord essentially takes Job on a tour of creation: “Outer space, you know I created that. The sea, I created that. The Earth? I created that. I created the animals, and I created Behemoth and Leviathan.”

Many people wonder what God has in mind when He talks about Behemoth and Leviathan, some think it's the rhino and the crocodile, but I think they are mythical creatures that keep Hebrew up at night. Behemoth may as well be a Hodag or Chupacabra and Leviathan might as well be Godzilla or the Loch Ness Monster.

The point being that God has control of even these mythical creatures as He does all of creation. God says to Job, **“Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you; he eats grass like an ox.”** The same God who created terrifying beasts created me and you. With this show of shock and awe, God stuns Job into silence and Job repents of his foolishness in questioning God.

What about us? He took our place, but He took my shoulders and He shook my face and he takes and he takes and he takes.

Sometimes we feel as though God takes and takes, but we forget all the blessings He showers upon us from the sky to the bottom of the sea. He provides for us, even when it doesn't feel like it. Yes, and we too can repent in dust in ashes as we come to this realization of the generosity of God.

Yes, the Lord may be pleased to answer us but we don't always get good answers. There's things above our paygrade. God trying to explain the why of what He does is to us as a physicist trying to explain to a toddler gravity waves. There are things that we just can't understand. 2. The Lord is pleased to answer us out of the tempest.

And indeed it is true, when He took our place throughout the Gospel, we see that God doesn't just speak from the tempest. He enters the tempest with us in the person of Jesus. As we look at our Gospel lesson, Jesus doesn't just speak from the tempest, He enters the tempest. Jesus is with the disciples as they are in the storm and he calms the wind and the waves as easily as you might turn off a television.

All throughout Job's book, he asks, "Why," but as we look at the Gospels, the question is not, "Why?" But "Who?" Jesus calms the wind and the waves. Jesus restores sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead. The question throughout our Gospel text is, "**Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**" Who is this? This is the same God who answers Job out of the Tempest, who also created the heavens and the earth, who has Leviathan on a leash, Behemoth is in His pen. This is the God who took our place.

This is the God-man who also cried out, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" And no answer was given, except the temple curtain being torn in two, the Earth quaking, and the dead were raised. It seems that He takes and He takes and He takes, but He gives and He gives, and He gives, but we often forget that.

Beyond the blessings of daily life: a beautiful sunset, beautiful weather for a picnic, you see that Job is restored in Job chapter 42. God restores Him double with what He lost. Even better than more livestock or a beautiful family, God promises us a restoration even as He raised Jesus from the grave.

"**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" Jesus is quoting Psalm 22, but the Psalm itself ends with a note of hope: "**You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.**" Even the Psalmist in Psalm 22 praises God for restoration, and so too God restores us even as He gives us forgiveness for our sins, and He promises us heaven.

Even as I still mourn the passing of supervisor and mentor President John Wille, I call to mind one of his last sermons he delivered. At Synod Convention he reflected on the glory and the blessing of the resurrection. He remarked that we will see parents, kids, grandparents in the resurrection. And President Wille smiled as he considered the fact that he will get to see the twinkle in the eye of Ed Suelflow. Ed Suelflow is a former district president who has since passed away. Just as President Wille looked forward to seeing Ed Suelflow, we too look forward to seeing him again, even as we look forward to seeing many loved ones who have died in the faith.

As we face tragedies in this life, we don't act as those who have no hope, even as the Lord takes, the Lord gives, and we have hope that even as God answers us out of the Tempest, He calms the storms. And He gives us peace, even if you don't understand. 1. The Lord is pleased to enter into the tempest with us. IN THE FACE OF WHY, THE LORD ANSWERS FROM THE TEMPEST BY ENTERING INTO IT WITH US.