

The reason God is answering Job out of a whirlwind in our reading today is because Job's been having an utterly miserable time and asking some completely reasonable questions about his suffering. Job's friends have been worse than unhelpful, telling him that it's probably because he sinned and needs to get his life right before God. Job knows enough about himself and about God to know that sin is not the problem here – the real issue is that life is fundamentally unjust and he demands an answer. Why has my good life not protected me from loss and calamity and suffering? Why has God not stepped in to prevent or heal the deaths of my children, the loss of my home and livelihood, and the disease that's taken over my body? Where is the tidy calculus of 'good behaviour=blessing' and 'evil living=curses' that we read about in Deuteronomy and Proverbs?

And God's response? "Where were you, Job, when I made the earth?"

It's easy to read this as God shaming Job, taunting him and saying "What about the stars, Job, huh? You made them? Nope, that was me. What about the ocean depths Job, you ever been down there? Didn't think so. I have. I'm bigger than you are Job, don't even try to question me."

But I don't think that's what God is doing. I think that's getting the tone wrong on the sheer delight and exuberance that comes through the speech from the whirlwind, that we heard only a small part of this morning.

The thing is, many of the questions that we humans ask about our lives can't be answered on the terms that we ask them. We are trapped in patterns of thinking and understanding that limit our grasp of who we are, what our lives mean, and what we can expect from this life. And when we're in pain, those mental patterns shrink even further, and all we can see and feel is our victimhood.

Martin Shaw says that this passage from Job is about opening our 'Wonder Eye'. Basically, the two physical eyes that we use to do our normal seeing only reinforce and re-create the reality that our limited minds already know about and can understand. To grow, to find a wider patch of ground to stand on, to find solace, requires a different eye to be opened. Our 'wonder eye' is what we use to take in myth and story, it's what opens in us when we stand under a thundering waterfall, or take in the view from the top of a mountain. It's what opens when we watch a baby being born, or we hear a piece of music so piercingly beautiful we are moved to tears.

The incredible poetry of Job is not trying to describe anything literal about creation. We can look back on it with our 21<sup>st</sup> century arrogance and think “oh, they only wrote like that about the earth because they didn’t know better. They literally believed that God made doors to hold in the sea, or that death is a place with gates that you can go to. These ancient people believed in God because they didn’t have science.” Rubbish. The poet who crafted this part of Job describes the divine origin of creation with these astonishing metaphors because there are dimensions of reality, experiences of awe and wonder that far exceed any scientific explanation of the world no matter how accurate. These are insights that we have largely lost. It is us, now, who are impoverished and lacking, not those who lived in a pre-scientific age.

The picture of God as a master-worker, laying a cornerstone while the morning stars sang together – the stars, singing! – this is a picture of delight, of rapture, of utterly joyful purpose, not a technical description of how God made the earth.

The image of the sea “bursting out from the womb” and then being wrapped in clouds and darkness as its baby clothes, this isn’t ignorance from someone who didn’t understand the water cycle, but poetry to show us that God’s tender power and delight birthed the cosmos.

God, by means of this extraordinary imagery is “blowing Job’s mind” by showing him the “huge...unabashed, divine ground” of all life and being.  
(Martin Shaw)

The universe is awake, it is enchanted, it has a dynamism and a presence that is connected with the divine spark inside us. Creation has the power to lift our spirits and grant us a knowing beyond what our calculating brains can ever grasp. And only this wonder and wisdom can bring us ease when confronted with the unanswerable, unresolvable questions of life’s pain and struggle.

When we give ourselves to experiences of song, poetry and myth, of worship, of being in nature, we can glimpse the vastness of God and our place in the universe and find comfort even while our life might remain difficult and sad. This is because we’re being fed in a deeper place within ourselves, met in our truest identity by the divine source of being who delights in us along with all else in creation.

So much of what ails our society is what the machine age has done to our brains. We have closed our wonder-eye and look only with our left-brains, our fragmenting, pull-it-apart-and-find-out-what-it's-made-of brains, our extractive "how can I use this...better yet, how can I make money from this" brains. To the point where, when we look at the living, breathing, world, we can only see resources, things, and biochemical systems. And because we can build machines that work better than the human mind *as machines*, we start to think of humans as just an inferior kind of computer, best replaced by something that can do the job better.

We devalue everything else that myth and poetry used to tell us about ourselves and the world: what it means to love, to be faithful, to be virtuous, to be in relationship with God and deeply connected to one another and all life. These things can't be measured or tested, so we stop talking about them. And so, harmony disappears from the cosmos and the stars stop singing and the sea breaks its doors and starts to wash over our civilised lands.

You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus is still saying this to the church, but too often, we in the church are trying to talk with the same language as the world around us. We have forgotten the story that is ours to tell, the myth by which we live that can only be accessed in prayer and wonder. Our saltiness, our light, only comes from having our "wonder eye" opened over and over again, having our "minds blown" by the sheer strangeness, the grandeur, the wildness of God.

Our deep contemplative prayer and ritual, our pressing into the wilderness experience of the saints, our willingness to dwell in the desert or the wild places both literally and metaphorically – these are the stuff of salt and light in our comfortable, mediated, technological age. The salvation of the earth and humankind will not come from building better machines and eventually colonising another planet. It will come from learning to live in the fullness of who we are, as image-bearers of the divine Creator. Only prayer, poetry, story, song and the wildness of earth will shape this in us. Then, our salt will be salty again and the world will be blessed by the light that shines through us from the Christ of the cosmos.