

I put my hand over my mouth (Book of Job 40:4)

What with a hospital stay in early September followed by home care for a couple of weeks, just when I am about to be discharged, disaster strikes: the Great Fire, evacuation to the city, loss of power plus little things like our refrigerator door falling off upon our return – and telephone difficulties . . . What next? Nor am I unaware that others had it worse. Throughout the ordeal my mind was in constant argument with itself: why this, why that, we live in a supposedly modern, technically efficient era and I can't get my phone to work . . . manage my prescriptions . . . Back and forth – my gripes ever countered by my own rational retort of - *this is why*. Useless mental gymnastics – because it didn't change anything! We were at the mercy of nature itself, which we thought we once controlled. And so a spate of helplessness struck me. I gave up, decided to stop wearing myself out with how things ought to be and why they weren't. And I remembered the *Book of Job*.

Job was a perfect fellow (of course a fictitious character). He had obeyed God's law all his life and prospered even as the Law of Moses said he would. "If you do right you will prosper, if you do wrong you will suffer." That was the simple formula people lived by – God's quid pro quo guarantee of justice. But suddenly he lost it all – family, wealth, health and ended up scabrous, sitting naked amid ashes – and not because of sin, for he was an innocent man!! He says *I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul*. What has he done to deserve such punishment? God cannot be a just God if he brings suffering upon those who obey his Law. But his three friends (who stick to the divine quid pro quo theory) basically insist if he is suffering he must have done something wrong. "You are not the man you think you are. Accept your fate as just, old Job."

Such contradictions only intensify Job's demand for a hearing before God – a true verdict . . . until finally God himself enters the dialogue – speaking out of a storm. *Who is this who darkens counsel with words of ignorance? Gird up your loins now like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the earth? . . . who laid its cornerstone? . . . Have you ever commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place?* God then takes Job on a tour of a universe he never even imagined – from the sources of the sea to the storehouses of the hail. Until Job in awe answers: *I have spoken but did not understand; things too marvelous for me, which I did not know*. In effect God's long discourse tells both Job and his accusers that they don't know what they are talking about! Were they trying to fathom the justice of God? They are wasting their breath; they know relatively nothing about anything. The logic of *now* is always wrong; the real logic of things only emerges over time as in any detective mystery you may read. The logic of Britain opposed 1776 only to welcome American might in the 20th century. Silence, reverence, patience, a readiness to look beyond the slogans we live by is the proper way to relate to our world and others and to God.

At this point in time, like Job, I'm reduced to *putting my hand over my mouth*. All my mental agitation, my demands for an accounting of why things have gone wrong have shut down. And in the silence I'm beginning to find what Job found when he and his friends stopped their futile pro's and con's – the Book says Job *recovered everything he had lost*, family, wealth and died old and full of years! Which is a way of saying: too much mental argument, analysis of every iota of the whys and wherefores of life can distract you from what really matters: the people, friends, the marvels of nature around you. Restoration is possible if we shut up and wait – expectantly, actively.