

“But Now My Eye Sees You”

Job 42:1-6

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Hikers along the Appalachian Trail maintain an uncanny level of communication with each other. In each of the huts, located roughly twenty miles apart, there is a log book. North bound hikers dutifully inscribe any important news they encounter along the path so that south bound hikers will know what's ahead; and, visa versa. Thus, a south bound hiker might hear about a bear and her cubs or about a rattlesnake or about a spring contaminated with giardia. On one of my hikes, headed south, I kept reading and hearing about the availability of ice cream at the Eckville Shelter, somewhere between Wind Gap and Lehigh Gap, Pennsylvania. The closer I got, the more delicious the ice cream sounded. I heard reports of Ben and Jerry's, Hagen Dazs, and even Dove Bars.

At first, I thought the north bound hikers were teasing me, playing me for the fool. Later, I found myself WANTING to believe everything I had heard about pistachio nut and almond fudge and chocolate chip cookie dough. One evening at sunset, I emerged from the deep woods, crossed a tar road, and there it was! The Eckville shelter! Before I even got inside, I could see the electric wire. Where there's electricity, there's ice cream. Sure enough! It was on the honor system. You put your money in the box and you raid the freezer. I can still taste that pint of Heath Bar Crunch. It was at that moment that I was able to say, “I had heard about this from the reports of others, but now my eye sees for itself!”

This is precisely the conclusion Job reaches in Chapter 42! Up until that moment, his faith has been based upon hearsay, upon the testimony of others, upon the reports of friends who had had encounters with the Holy. But now Job has met God face to face.

Now Job can see what he has not seen before. And he is humbled by this discovery. Now his belief rests upon his own experience with the sacred and no longer upon the experience of his parents or his preacher or his peers. Now he can state with absolute integrity, “I know my Redeemer lives! I know!”

It takes Job 42 chapters to reach this moment of affirmation. The casual reader wonders why this couldn't have been accomplished in ten chapters, why not five? The point is: it's a struggle! It's a struggle to reach that place of openness, that place of vulnerability where God can touch us and teach us and heal us and hold us.

Though I have often come upon a snake skin in the woods, I have never witnessed a snake shedding its skin in the wild. I can only imagine it. I imagine the snake resisting the idea for a long time. I imagine the snake hearing from other snakes that it's really not all that bad. I can picture the snake looking around for some help, but ultimately realizing this is a task she must do on her own. I imagine it is painful for a snake to shed its own skin. Yet it becomes even more painful to not shed the skin, for the stiff, inflexible skin is holding the snake back from growing to its full potential. It takes 42 chapters to shed a skin!

Job is that snake. Job has built up a thick skin of self-righteousness. He has been patting himself on the back for a very long time. He sees he is a light in the world, but he can't see his own shadow. He sees the suffering of others, but he can not imagine himself suffering. He sees that others have an Achilles Heal, but he thinks of himself as living behind an invisible shield. In a way, he lives as if he has no need for God. Finally, in chapter 42, God confronts him in such a way that Job sees for the first time that he can not live without God, that he can not be fully human without God. He sheds his thick skin of self-righteousness and he is humbled. Now his life can begin!

I have always been moved by the stories of people who make that leap from believing based on what others have said to believing because I have now seen for myself.

This is actually the reason why we take junior and senior high youth on mission trips. They think they are going to staff a soup kitchen or to shingle a roof; we know they are going to have an encounter with God of their own! This is actually why we send teams of volunteers to the South Park Inn and to Peter's Retreat. They think they are going to serve meatloaf. We know they are going to have their own encounter with the living Christ. This is actually why we send a worship team to Salmon Brook Convalescent Home. They think they are going to lead folks in worship. We know they are going to have a life-changing encounter with the holy. This is why we invite people to be lay readers. They think they are opening the Scripture to the community. We know they are opening themselves to the living God. In all the forms of volunteer ministry, from picking up the day old bread at Shaw's to taking communion to shut-ins, our greatest hope is for everyone to have his or her own Job-like face-to-face encounter with God. Our greatest hope is that every set of lips would share in Job's proclamation: **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.**

The counterpart story to Job in the New Testament is really the story of the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well. Like Job, she has suffered terribly. She has had a rough life. Relationships with men haven't worked out for her. The women, too, distance themselves from her. As she meets Jesus at Jacob's well, she pours out her life story to him, as if she is sitting on an analyst's couch. He listens to her as no one has ever listened to her. He cares about her as no one has ever cared about her. He loves her as no one as ever loved her. As she departs from the well, she knows she has been in the presence of God's anointed One.

She runs all the way back to her village and when she gets there she yells to everyone, “Come and meet a man who has transformed my soul.” The villagers spend a few days in Jesus’ company, experiencing his warmth, his acceptance, his wisdom, his healing. They break bread with him, pray with him, swap stories with him. After the two days, they say to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

As a parent, I pray for my children everyday. I pray for their health and their happiness. I pray for their safety and their security. And now I find myself praying that they will come to believe, not because of what their minister father has told them, but because they are having their own experiences of a risen Savior; so that they, too, will be able to say with Job and with those Samaritan villagers, ‘it’s no longer a matter of what I’ve heard from others; it’s a matter of what I have come to know through my own struggle, my own shedding of my own skin, because of my own encounter with God.

In the very end of Chapter 42, everything Job had lost is restored to him two fold. His health is restored. His family is restored. His flocks are restored. It is a hopeful ending. Indeed, it’s almost too hopeful, bordering on the fanciful. The author wants the reader to sense there is hope whenever one takes that leap from relying on the testimony of others to standing in that place of vulnerability where God is seen face to face, where one can receive the grace of God, and where one can then announce, “I know my Redeemer lives!” In the greatest of hope, Amen!

