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## Yearning for Real Answers

By The Rev. Sam Sheridan

I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,  
but now my eye sees you - Job 42:5

I've never met anyone with a true lack of curiosity. We're the most reflective, and only articulate, sapient being we've encountered in the universe. Human beings are irrevocably destined to look out at the universe and wonder "why?!"

When everything is going well, the question of "why" can be a fun enlightenment-oriented exercise about deeper truths and spiritual oneness. That is valuable. Many people have devoted their lives to chasing that kind of "why." We are blessed with saints, teachers, and monastics who have given us centuries of prayers and poems about the love that is the beating heart of our universe – the beating heart of the living Christ.

But for most of us, we have more immediate "whys" crowding our day-to-day curiosity. Why does the world seem unfair? Why do people go hungry? Why

did I yell at dad? Most people live in this equally blessed kind of curiosity – and it is a blessing. We would never work to make the world fair, start feeding people, or stop yelling if we didn't ask that kind of question.

Still, we yearn for real *answers*. Faith can motivate us to be better people. But motivation can't be all there is. We want answers. This is where the saints and sages meet us. We inherit the wisdom books of scripture, which wrestle with all the down-to-earth "whys." And we inherit the wisdom literature as a set which needs to be read together.

The first wisdom book is Proverbs which posits that everything happens for a reason; everything that befalls us is somehow deserved. If something good or bad happens to you, it is understandable.

The second book of wisdom is Ecclesiastes which says everything is meaningless, literally smoke, and nothing is lasting or matters. You can't explain anything. You can't understand anything. It is folly to try. Just go about your life.

Then the third book of wisdom, Job, seems to acknowledge both impulses. Job and his friends argue points from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It is a very normal rabbinical debate until Job finally snaps and demands God answer for the state of the world. God responds saying something like, "Your tiny human mind can't fathom the totality of what I, as the Creator, must account for as I act." Job doesn't get an answer to his question, but he is duly chastened for thinking the universe should be both understandable and answerable *to Job*.

We need the wisdom literature. When we take these books together, we can be comforted by the sure knowledge that sometimes good will be rewarded, sometimes bad will be defeated. We can be equally comforted by knowing that thousands of years of faithful children of God have despaired because of the world's cruelty and violence. They believed in a loving God even though they knew real pain, and that gives all of us liberty to be in real pain and not have it ruin our belief or witness.

And we need the comfort and reminder that we are small enough that the universe doesn't actually revolve around us. As individuals, we should be

able to expect some basic dignity and kindness, but we don't actually get to have the universe explained to our satisfaction.

At least, not in answers, not in logic.

Job didn't understand when he had only heard of God, but when he encountered God, he found something deeper than knowing. The answer to "why" wasn't a puzzle, a thought experiment, or even being told to stop asking. The answer was a relationship.

Like Job, we have heard of God, and that has been very good in our lives. But if we seek answers to all the "whys" of the world, we need to know and *encounter* God. We need to be in relationship with God. We need to see God's face.

And we know Christ. There is nowhere to see God's face more clearly than in Jesus Christ. And Jesus has told us that he can be found in how we treat the least of all the people we encounter.

Yes, we yearn for real answers. We don't always get them as *answers*. But we are here on this earth, able to reflect and choose how to treat one another. Our lives will be more, and mean more, if we wonder "why" and offer our answer in how we treat the other people God loves.