

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Philip A. Jackson Transcript**

“When We Behold God Face to Face”

“In the face of the infinite, all questions, doubts, and puzzles melt away into nothingness.” Today we encounter Job’s conversation with God, “perhaps one of the most profound, deep, and mysterious passages in all of scripture,” preaches the Rev. Phillip Jackson. Father Phil invites us to reflect on a moment in our own lives where we have encountered the awesome, inexplicable presence of God. “Nobody who has experienced it is likely to think it an illusion.” The readings are Job 42:1–6, 10–17; Psalm 34:1–8; Hebrews 7:23–28; and Mark 10:46–52.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Please be seated, everyone.

Good morning. Good Morning. Good to see everyone. I want to pick up a little bit on where Mother Beth took us last week in the Book of Job. First, a small quote, "The finiteness of the creature is crushed at the sudden onset of the creators identity." That is what I'm going to try to get at today. These are things that are big, and weighty, and important. Let's spend just a little bit of time looking first at the three, perhaps, maybe four levels of Job. You may recall the setup, the Satan, it's always "the Satan," not Satan, it means the adversary Satan is our adversary. The Satan is roaming around the Earth and he goes back up to the heavens, to the heavenly throne room, and God says to him, "Satan, what have you been up to?" He says, "Just roaming around, trying to see if your people are exactly who they say they are. I have doubts," he says. God says, "Well, have you considered my servant Job? He's a righteous man. He's a good man. Have you considered him?" Satan says, "Well, yes, he is a good man. But does Job fear you for not or is your relationship with him transactional?" We'll come back to this in a minute. God says, "Have at it." So Satan takes everything from Job. He takes everything he has. He takes his family, he takes his children, he takes all of his stuff. He takes his health, and he leaves him there in destitution. Job's three friends come and they seek to console him. They use that old-timey method of consolation, they blame him. They say, "You know, Job, you must have done something wrong. It must have been something you did that caused God to do this to you. Why didn't you just admit it? What was it?" Job says, "No, I've done nothing wrong. I've done absolutely nothing wrong, and I would tell God that to his face.

If I could just get a shot, I would tell him." They keep saying, "Well, but what did you really do wrong?" He says, "No", and he insists, "No. I've done nothing wrong." This goes on and on between them until his mother, -Beth said my favorite passage in the scriptures. I say that every time, don't I? Okay, but this is a really good one. It's a really good one. In Chapter 38 of Job, who shows up? Bam, in the whirlwind, who? I can't hear you, your masks. Come on. God shows up. God shows up. In one of the great dialogues, which is really a monologue, God opens by saying, "Who is this that darkens counsel without understanding?" Which is a biblical way of saying, who is this that's talking about things he don't know anything about? He says, "Gird up your loins like a man. You want to talk to me? Okay, let's talk. What

you've got to say? You have anything to say?" Then he goes on for four chapters outlining what God does and has done, and contrasts that really somewhat unfairly with what Job has done. He says, "Were you there when the seas were created? Were you there when I raised the mountains to their highest? Were you there when the animals were created?" All throughout that is God saying of course, the answer is what? No. No, Job was not there when any of the great act of creation were done. God implicitly saying, what you got to say? Notice he doesn't answer Job's question directly. He answers it through nature. We'll come back to that. There are three levels of Job going on. The first level is the question of the suffering of the innocent. Job says, "Why me? I've done nothing wrong, I'm innocent. Why am I suffering?"

That question is a question people ask even to this probably very minute. Why me? Why must I suffer? The second level, a little deeper is the Satan's question, which is, "Does Job fear you for naught or does he fear you because he's getting something?" Now to understand exactly what that's getting at, just think for a second about your relationship with God. Have you ever had a transactional moment with God where you say, "Lord, if you'd just get me out of this mess, I'm coming back to church," or, "Lord, if you just get me that Lincoln." Really? Have you ever had a transactional relationship where you say, if you Lord, will just give me this, I will do that. In other words, your relationship is not completely disinterested. It's to get something back. What the Satan is saying is, "Look at all the stuff you've given Job. Look at what you blessed him with. Does he fear?" Fear again, in the Old Testament is awe. "Is he in awe of you, respect you because of what you've given him? What if you took it all away, would he still be in awe of you?" The third and most profound level of this book of Job is what's next and is what is in the Chapter 42, Verses 1-6, which we just heard read this morning. It's this question. The ways and being and very nature of God in whose presence the ego is annihilated. It's heavy. On this level, we explore the ways and being and very nature of God in whose presence the ego is annihilated. Let's unpack that just a little bit. Let's look at, if you would, because the syntax and the way they've laid it out is somewhat confusing. But if you would look at the reading in your program please. Just look at the reading, I'm going to walk you through it. Just Verses 1-6.

Now, since Chapter 38, God has been throwing out the statements to Job. Were you there when this? Were you present when that? Did you make to this? Did you create to the that? The answer is no, no, no, no, no, of course not. Then finally in Chapter 42, Verse 1, notice it starts like this. Job answered the Lord. Job speaks now and he says, "I know that you can do all things, I've been listening, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." Now what happens next is not Job speaking, it's Job remembering the first line that God said. Remember back at the beginning, God says, "Who is this that hides council without knowledge." He's remembering that. Who is this that speaks about things he doesn't know? Then comes Job's response to that remembrance. He says, "Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. I didn't know all that you've done," he says. "I was not aware how wonderful the creation you put together is. So I talked about things I knew nothing about." Job evidences what? Humility, deep humility. Next, he remembers God speaking again. He remembers God saying, "Here and I will speak. I will question you, Job, and you declare to me, you answer me." He remembers him saying. Now Job speaks again. This is perhaps one of the most profound, deep, rich, mysterious passages in all of scripture. Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of my ear. But now my eye sees you." What does that mean? Well, right now let me tell you what you're doing. You're hearing me talk about God. You're hearing me talk to you about God. Job says, "That's what I've been doing. I've heard of you, I've heard people talk about you, but since you show up in the whirlwind, I now see you."

By seeing, we don't mean eyes, we mean he now has experienced the totality of the infinite that is God. I had heard about you, but now I see you. Look at what the conclusion he reaches is. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. I've been told that the Hebrew actually sounds more like this. Therefore, I melt into nothingness. My ego, myself before you melts into nothingness. I repent, I repent, I repent. In the face of the infinite, the only response is repentance. In the face of God's infinite being, all questions, all doubts, all puzzles melt away into nothingness, because you are then in the presence of that which is being itself. That's heavy. That's heavy. Anybody ever been there? I have. I've been there. I've had that experience of God for just a hot couple of minutes, a couple times, where everything else melts away into nothingness and feeling doesn't even get at it. The recognition of the presence of God and the reality of God, where you can't say no. Now, the fourth level, and that's for us today. The fourth level of what might be going on is that you might be saying, "Phil, that's all crazy talk. You crazy talk. That's just crazy talk." Let me read you something from a book called *The Soul of the World* by Roger Scruton. He says we rightly think that there is something mysterious and perhaps inexplicable about the real presence of God. Now listen to this because this is true. But nobody who has the experience of that thing is likely to think it to be simply an illusion.

It comes to us with a self verifying character that silences skepticism even if it also calls out for interpretation. Such was the "Nuit de Feu" of Blaise Pascal, the philosopher, on the night of 23rd November, 1654, when for two hours, he experienced the total certainty that he was in the presence of God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, not the God of the philosophers and the wise men. In other words, a personal God intimately revealed, not conjured by abstract argument. Pascal wrote these words. I'm going to try them in French. It will be bad, I apologize to anyone who speaks. But he wrote these words on a piece of paper during this happening. He simply wrote on a piece of scrap paper, "Père juste, le monde ne t'a point connu, mais je t'ai connu." In other words, he wrote down the words of John 17:25. With a little bit of a twist, he wrote, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but me, I know you." He wrote that down on a scrap of paper while he was going through this. You may in your life have experienced something similar. God, I hope you did. You have, you will. You may have tasted for, even just a second, the reality of the infinite, of God. You may have. You're not crazy, you did. Because this God who is the God who created all things, who says, were you there when the mountains were made? Were you there when the deserts were laid? Were you there? The same God answers us personally to let us know that with Him, really the answer is always "yes".

Amen.