

May the words of my mouth
And the meditations of each heart
Be acceptable to you, O Lord,
Our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I grew up right outside Chicago
Right next to O'Hare, one of the busiest airports in the world.
You wouldn't expect such a place to have large stretches of
Untouched wilderness, but we do.
A series of forest preserves stretch out across the Chicago area,
Interrupting the shopping malls and the highways
With 68,000 acres,
That's two hundred seventy five square kilometers,
Of preserved American wilderness.
There are dense forest with giant oaks and maples,
fields of prairie with tall grasses and wildflowers,
And the occasional dirt path for walking or biking through it.
When I was a kid, about 9 years old,
One of my favorite things in the world was to ride bicycles
In the forest preserve with my dad.
One day we were riding on a path
That was wide and well-marked
But dark because of the tall canopy of trees.
Suddenly my Dad signaled a left—I couldn't see the path, but I followed

And soon we were in a clearing.

The sun shone through the break in the trees,

And we stopped, standing for awhile to look out over the DesPlaines River,

Suddenly visible rushing below us:

The perfect overlook spot.

I was thrilled by the beauty of the place and also very impressed with my dad:

How did he know about this place?

At that stage of my childhood development,

it was very difficult for me to imagine

How people knew about things that I didn't know about.

How my dad might have discovered that spot while biking on his own one day.

Or how he might have found it just then using his previous years of experience

With the wilderness:

Looking for a break in the trees to show a clearing was ahead

Seeing the small path I had overlooked

Hearing the rush of the river I hadn't heard.

As I slowly grew out of the most self-centered stage of childhood

I began to realize that my dad's perspective was different and greater than my own,

That he had a life outside of how he related to me.

I thought I knew what he *knew*, what he was good at;

Then we went to the Art Institute of Chicago together

and he dazzled me with his knowledge of Art History.

I realized that we had the same great taste in music ...

And that he'd been listening to that music for years before I was born.

Most shocking of all, I found the scrapbook his mother made and kept for him
When he was growing up
And I realized fully for the first time
That my Dad had, at one point, been my age.
He had a whole life before I came along, and
According to other photo evidence I found,
The same was true of my Mom.
These realizations took place for me over the course of many years.
Can you imagine it happening all at once, in the form of a talking whirlwind?

That's what happened to Job.
After losing his home,
His children
His reputation and his health,
Job accuses God of micromanaging,
Of spending all God's time and resources on personally punishing Job.
For the next 5 chapters, God responds to Job through the whirlwind
Taking him on a virtual tour of all of creation
From crocodiles to deer,
From the constellations of stars
To the changing seasons.
God invites Job into the wilderness to see
That creation is both more orderly and interconnected than Job had realized
And more wild, dangerous and free than Job had hoped.

In our first lesson today,
We heard God answer Job from the whirlwind,
Describing a flash flood in the dessert
Rain falling in a land where no human lives
And yet, there is life
And that life is precious to God.
God is described as both the father and the mother of the rain,
The parent of a world where all things are interconnected.
Creation, and God's relationship to it, is much more complicated than Job imagined.
When I was a child, I slowly grew to realize that my parents were not *just* my parents:
They had interests and responsibilities apart from me.
Through the whirlwind, Job realizes that God is not just *his* parent,
God is the father of rain in the dessert,
The mother of the snow on the mountains,
Parent to both the deer and the crocodile,
The one who set the boundaries of the ocean,
And also the one who allows it to ebb, flow, roll and rage within those boundaries.

And that's cool, and everything,
But it's not immediately comforting.
Job goes to God for answers, asking: "Why am I suffering?"
And God says "Can you send forth lightning? I can! And I made the Lion as well."
But God isn't just bragging, here.
God is showing Job that he has a place in this wide, wild creation.

If the deer, the crocodile, the sea and the rain
Are free to be themselves within the boundaries God has set.
So is Job.
Just like the ocean is free to rage against its boundaries,
Job was made free, to rage,
Even to question and to accuse God.
God will not micromanage Job's pain or his choices:
But rather offer God's presence
And a reminder of Job's real hope for the future.
Job is set free to re-imagine his own future
Suddenly, he has possibilities again.
Even when hope for the future is obscured by suffering, it is there:
God promises that to Job and to all of us.
At the same time, God promises that
In this sometimes dangerous wilderness,
Job will never be alone.
Job, and all of us, are connected to each other,
To the rest of God's creation,
And to God,
By precious and unbreakable bonds.

Our Gospel reading today gives us another example
Of how God is with us in the wilderness,
Seeing us safely through the storm.

God set the boundaries of the waters,
But that doesn't mean the waters are always a safe place to be.
As the storm blew in over the Sea of Galilee,
The waves crashing in on their boat,
The disciples had good reason to be afraid.
When Jesus wakes up and calms the storm,
The disciples are even more afraid.
They thought they knew Jesus, or were starting to get to know him
They thought they knew what he *knew*, what he was good at.
As a child, over time I realized my parents had knowledge and abilities
Beyond mine and beyond my expectations.
Imagine what it was like for the disciples to realize that Jesus,
The healer, teacher and parable-teller,
Could tell the winds to cease
And waves to calm.
They might even have said to him,
"That's cool, and everything ...
And thank you for saving our lives ...
But it's also not very comforting."
The disciples were thrown into a situation where their expertise
Was not enough
Even after years at sea as professional fishermen
They wouldn't have been able to manage that storm alone.
Those situations aren't comforting, they aren't comfortable.

They can take the definitions we have of ourselves
As competent, intelligent, put-together people,
And throw everything we thought we knew about ourselves into question.
The comfort, then, comes not from our own expertise,
Not from faith in and knowledge of ourselves,
But from the faith in God that comes to us from the Holy Spirit,
and the knowledge that God is there, with us, in the storm,
There, with us, in the wilderness.
In times of suffering, sorrow and loss,
We can all relate to and say words like these:
I thought I was the kind of person who could weather the storm
I realized I am a person who needs God
I thought I was the kind of person who never lets anyone down
I realized I am a person who needs God
I thought I was the kind of person who can stand on my own
I realized I need God and I need God's family, the Body of Christ, to hold me up.

No one chooses to suffer
And I am not asking you to gladly welcome
Life's most terrible storms for the sake of personal or spiritual growth.
But in this wild, wonderful, dangerous world,
There are crocodiles and lions
There are storms at sea,
And we will cross paths with these dangers.

And sometimes the storm is inside ourselves.

The danger comes from us.

Like Job and the disciples, I take comfort in the promise

That God is in the wilderness

God is in the storm.

In these weeks after Pentecost,

We remember and celebrate that Christ did not abandon us,

But God sent the Holy Spirit to protect us

Inspire us,

Pray for us,

And surround us in God's love and care.

It is not immediately comforting to realize that our parents are more complicated...

That there is more going on with them than we first realized.

As I've figured this out, though, my relationship with my parents has gotten stronger.

God and God's relationship with creation

Is more complicated than we would have guessed.

God invites into a deeper relationship:

With God, with each other as fellow creatures,

And with all of creation ... a deeper understanding of our role

As stewards of creation.

Also, like a loving parent, God encourages us to go out into the world

Into the wilderness, the storm, the unknown.

God says,

"This is MY world,

Take the risk to love your neighbor

Take the risk to love your enemy

Take the risk to love and serve me with your whole self.

It is wild and dangerous out there,

But do not be afraid,

I am with you in the wilderness

I will lead you through the storm.”

Amen.

