

Blind Mice
October 17, 2021

Once upon a time, there were seven blind mice who lived together. And one day, they discovered that a large object, a great Something had come into their midst, but none of the 7 mice knew what it was. And they all ran and hid.

The next day, the first mouse went out to explore the Something and felt around, and came back to the other mice, and said, "It's a pillar, standing tall and firm." But the others didn't believe him.

The next day, a 2nd mouse went out and explored the object, and felt around, and then came back to the other mice. The second mouse reported, "It's not a pillar; it's a huge cliff, standing high and mighty." But the others didn't believe him.

The next day, a 3rd mouse went out and explored the Something and felt around, and then came back. The third mouse said, "It's not a cliff; it's a giant fan, waving back and forth." But the others didn't believe her.

The next day, a 4th mouse went out and explored the Something and felt around, and then came back. The fourth mouse said, "It's not a fan; it's a spear, sharp and dangerous." But the others didn't believe him.

The next day, a 5th mouse went out and explored the Something and felt around, and then came back. The fifth mouse said, "It's not a spear; it's just a plain old rope, hanging limply, with its end frayed." But the others didn't believe her.

The next day, a 6th mouse went out and explored the Something and felt around, and then came back. The sixth mouse said, "It's not a rope; it's a snake that coils and moves around, never stopping." But the others didn't believe him.

And those 6 mice began to argue. "It's a spear!" "It's a cliff!" "A pillar!" "A fan!"

Finally, the 7th and last mouse, who was the wisest of the bunch, had to go and explore the Something for herself. So she snuck off and explored the object for a long time, making sure to feel and smell and listen, and try to picture what this object could be. After a long time, the 7th mouse came back to the other mice, who were still arguing, and began to speak. She said, "I've explored the Something. Parts of it are sturdy and pillar-like, while other parts are as gentle and soft as a fan. Some parts are dangerous, like a cliff's edge or a spear-point or even a snake, and some parts are unexciting, like an old, frayed rope.

"And after exploring this Something, I've discovered what it is. It's an elephant." The other mice then went and explored the Something more fully and discovered that the 7th mouse was right; it was in fact an elephant.

Ed Young. *Seven Blind Mice*. New York: Philomel, 1992.

This children's story by Ed Young is a good starting point for looking at our lessons today. Because in both our passage from Job and our Gospel, there are characters who channel those blind mice.

Let's begin with the Gospel, with the disciples James and John. Immediately prior to this story, Jesus has just predicted his death and resurrection. The response of these two disciples is to ask Jesus if they can sit in the positions of power in heaven, at Jesus' left and right hands. Jesus answers, "You don't understand what you are asking."

Part of the issue is that James and John are treating Jesus like he is a wishing well, existing to grant their desires of fame and recognition, even in heaven. And to be fair, Jesus does invite his disciples to ask for things (and they will receive). But to follow Jesus is to have demands made of us too: "Die to yourself, take up your cross, and follow me."

I'd compare asking Jesus for favors to making suggestions at church committee meetings. It's great to speak up, but you're also going to be asked to do something. "Why don't we have a clean-up day?" "Great idea; you're in charge of it."

The other issue with these disciples is that they don't get the mission of Jesus. They are two blind mice, and at this point, Jesus is playing the role of the 7th wise mouse, trying to explain the elephant to them, but they are convinced it's a rope. The elephant is the kingdom of God, but the disciples only hear the word "king" and wonder how to get recognition in this new kingdom. "What's in it for me?"

So those are the blind mice disciples. We see Job in a similar struggle, as Job questions God about his place in the world. We've been hearing sections from the Book of Job for the past couple weeks. At its heart, the story of Job tries to answer the big question, "Why do good, faithful, God-loving people suffer?" But the way the book explores this question is... problematic.

The story, in a nutshell, goes something like this. God and all the heavenly beings are gathered in heaven, and God starts bragging to Satan, "Have you seen my servant Job? There is no one as faithful as he is!"

But Satan says, "He's only faithful because he has a good life. I bet that if he suffers, he'll turn from his ways and curse you, his God! Let me test him."

God says, "Okay. Do whatever you want to him, as long as he stays alive." And now you can see the issues that arise. Divinely allowed torment does not seem exactly loving.

So Satan strikes Job with lots of afflictions. Job's children are killed in a tragic accident; all his livestock die; his home collapses; and Job finds himself covered with painful, itchy boils all over his body. All through the book, Job and his three neighbors talk about these afflictions and why this is happening. Finally, Job cries out, "Where are you, God? At the very least, I wish I could plead my case to you, but you won't even listen!"

Today, we hear God's response. "Job, where were you when I created the universe? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" And this goes on for two chapters. God says, "Do you know where rain or lightning or snow come from? Do you see when deer give birth? Do you know the source of horses' strength?"

And it seems like God might be saying, "Who are you, Job, to challenge me, your God and creator? You are a tiny speck in all of Creation. You do not see the whole picture. You are a blind mouse, experiencing one part of the elephant and asking why the spear hurts. But I see the whole of creation."

That might be what God is saying. "Mind your own business, because I'm greater than you could ever imagine!" But there's another possibility I'd like to consider.

I wonder if God is saying (in this passage and in the next 2 chapters), "Here are some of the powerful and terrifying and beautiful parts of creation: the earth, the seas, the rain and sun, the animals giving birth and growing old, the majestic creatures and the terrifying sea monsters.

I wonder if God is saying, "In this world, there is breath-taking beauty... and there is hideous, stomach-churning ugliness. There are some moments in your life when your heart is so full of joy that it might burst... and other times you can barely breathe for how gut-wrenchingly sad you are.

"There are moments where you feel utterly lost and isolated, and times when you sigh in relief and say, 'I belong here. I am at peace.'"

And God knows it all.

It's not that God is the wise blind mouse who can see the elephant; God IS the elephant. God IS the snake and the pillar and the spear and the cliff. And we see it all and we say like Job, "Why does it hurt?" or "What is this majestic beauty?" And God is in it all, underneath it all, speaking to us through it all.

God isn't telling Job to mind his own business because God knows better. Maybe God is inviting Job to consider all the pain and all the joy that is simply a part of our universe... and to remind Job that God has experienced it all.

And that'll preach for us. There is no perfect explanation for why good people suffer. Both pain and joy are a part of our lives. And the promise isn't that God spares his chosen people from pain. The promise is that God is with us through it all.

Amen.