How would we feel if we, in one of our questioning moods, should receive the replies, (there are two), that Job did? To be questioned about our ability to control the functions of the natural world and then again challenged about our dispensing of justice. And all formed in a series of questions. Daunting to say the least, but would our reply echo Job’s?

To admit that we do not have all the answers is humbling but it does open us up to learn. And so it is with Job.

“I have indeed spoken about things I didn’t understand, wonders beyond my comprehension.”

By asking questions, God shows us that asking questions is a key toward growth especially if we stay to hear the answers. Some we may not understand but we can trust that God knows what He is doing. Job comes to know this.

But it seems it is not so with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, for the Lord singles them out for criticism. But how did they “not speak what is right” of the Lord? I believe it is more the presumptions that underlie their speeches that condemns them. They have God “in a box”. The knowledge of God that is known to each varies but they are sure that Job has sinned because he is being punished. That is the way God works. There is no question in their minds.

Job see through the falseness of this position from the beginning knowing the limitations they represent. But, in a way, Job’s view of God was not so much different than that of his comforters. We see that he is cautious concerning his children and their actions, (Job 1:4-5), so he offers sacrifices to ward off God’s wrath. So he accepts the “good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad” idea. But through the following chapters we see him move from acquiescence to anger till he crosses over into self-righteousness. So what was so different about Job that set him apart from those around him?

We have often heard of the “patience of Job”. In fact, James refers to it in his letter (Jas 5:11). But as we read the book of Job, we encounter a very different person from the one we expect. He curses the day he was born, challenges God to kill him and end his misery, rages at the injustice he feels. Did James get it wrong? No. The word James uses is better translated as “persistence”.

Jesus gives us a parable about persistence (Luke 18:1-8) which gives us the key to Job’s character. We have but to read Job’s replies to realize that he carries his complaint, his doubts, his questions, everything to God. He doesn’t let up. He doesn’t let himself or his comforters have pat answers. He searches, seeking answers from God and, indeed, seeking God himself.

And finally God answers. And what an answer: questions and more questions. I have heard that when scientists find an answer to some problem they are researching, they frequently are confronted with a myriad of new questions. So it seems with Job. Perhaps this is one of the ways God does, indeed, act. More questions: so that we continually seek his replies and, ultimately, him.

This can leave us puzzled or disappointed with the answers as Job discovers. Verse six of Chapter 42 is usually translated as:

 “Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (NIV)

But many scholars believe a better translation to be:

 “Therefore, I relent and find comfort on dust and ashes.” (CEB)

In other words, Job accepts that there will not or cannot be an answer for his suffering. But he can trust that God is in charge since he now knows God by experience. (See Verse 42:5)

The finale of the chapter is Job’s restoration. But first Job must act as a priest for his erring friends. (NOTE: Elihu is omitted from the group. His views are simple, [see 35:9-16] but closer to the truth. He is sure that God has heard Job, [see 36:5].) Each is individually required give a substantial gift from their livestock. But this must have been difficult for Job considering that “cold comfort” his friends had given. Still, God does not restore Job’s fortunes until Job has forgiven them by acting in their behalf. (See 42:10)

For me, the lesson of Job is that faith is not a static list of beliefs but rather a dynamic seeking to know more of God; constantly seeking Him; trusting Him more and more. I believe that God sometimes challenges us through trials so that we destroy the comfortable, smug images of God that block his access to our hearts and minds. Remember, faith is a journey. (Isaiah 55:6)

So it is with Job. He is restored with twice as much as he had before and blessed with seven sons and three daughters. (He must have had to forgive his unsupportive wife too.)

It is of interest to note that his daughters are named but not his sons. Not only that but they are each granted a portion of the inheritance, something unheard of at this time. And Job saw four generations of his children, again from a time when most people did not know their grandparents. And so he died “old and satisfied”.

So I hope it may be for us all.