

‘The Book of Job’ Zoom Performance Encourages Faith During Times of Turmoil

Schools have moved to “virtual classrooms” and churches learned how to stream their services in various online formats. Certainly, any organization operating in 2020 is no stranger to Zoom meetings of some sort. Amidst the backdrop of social distancing, it’s common knowledge that organizations have had to pivot their well-thought-out plans in favor of more online-friendly endeavors. However, COVID-19 has pummeled the arts community, and many theater lovers say in some ways it will never recover.

A bright spot in an otherwise grim historic moment for the arts, with Broadway continuing to remain dark until at least spring of 2021, is the emergence of online theater performances. Central Florida theaters have gotten creative, performing virtual cabarets. And now a Missouri-based theater company has performed an online reading of an eerily appropriate biblical text: the book of Job.

Theater of War held its first Job reading in Joplin, Missouri, a year after a tornado killed more than 160 there in 2011, The Guardian reports. Since then, the theatrical production has been presented around the world in response to major events in New York City (Hurricane Sandy), to Pascagoula, Mississippi (10-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina), to Japan (Fukushima).

This most recent performance was directed toward Knox County, an hour outside of Columbus, Ohio. Artistic director Bryan Doerries is an alumnus of Kenyon College in Knox County and chose the area to focus on bridging rifts opened by the election, according to the Associated Press.

The performance featured the talents of *Groundhog Day* actor Bill Murray, who portrayed Job, and Mount Vernon Mayor Matthew Starr, who played Job's accuser.

As a way to create an atmosphere of dialogue, audience members were invited to participate in a virtual discussion following the Zoom performance: an effort the theater company strives to include in each of its endeavors.

In what Starr said was the perfect time for "what the country is going through, between the pandemic, the heated election and racial justice protests," the reading reminded viewers of God's faithfulness even, and especially, during times of turmoil. In an effort to encourage intentional listening, Starr says, "A good story like that of Job can do so more effectively than a new law or a new directive, by changing people's hearts."

And it seems as though the performance created a ripple effect, inspiring this actor to share a "Shakespearean-esque" monologue from the perspective of Job's friend, Zophar.

When we're suffering, what we really want is advice. And Zophar is here to provide that, for his friend Job.
#Monologos

– Jolly Old Saint Eunucholas (@BenDanielParman) December 7, 2020

"God does not say that bad things aren't going to happen, but He does tell us, when they do, we're not alone," Starr told The AP. "That's the hope for me, is that we get a chance to lean into our faith, we get a chance to lean into our neighbors, we get a chance to lean into each other, our family, a little bit more." {eo}