

Scripture Readings and Sermon

October 17, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Job 38:1-7, 34-38

Job declares his desire for an advocate and instead he gets Elihu, a young religious scholar. Elihu not only criticizes Job for complaining about what must obviously be a "just" punishment but he also criticizes Job's friends for not correctly diagnosing Job's problem. How often do we hear the "wisdom" of youth try to solve problems that society has worked on for centuries? Yet instead of struggling with the problem, they often spout their wisdom and like Elihu simply walk away. When silence finally descends and Job is left alone, the Lord speaks. Instead of pointing out Job's unworthiness to ask the question Job asked, God questions Job's ability to understand the answer. While pain and suffering tends to narrow our perspective on the world, God challenges Job to expand his perspective. When Job can see all of space and time in an instance and the part that Job's life plays in that infinite tapestry, then God will explain why Job has suffered. The entirety of God's response is simply, God is God and we are not. Or as Isaiah writes, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Job 38:2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

Have you ever dealt with someone who didn't know what they were talking about?

Do you become frustrated because they draw conclusions from half truths?

Have you ever been hurt by gossip and half truths?

Why do we think we know the whole story?

Why do we think we can judge better than God?

When are you being called to listen more and talk less?

Commentary on Mark 10:35-45

It is always easy to tell what is important to the writers of the Gospels by what they repeat. Mark tells of three times that Jesus predicts his death (8:31-33, 9:30-32, and 10:32-34). After the first prediction, Jesus teaches about the cost of discipleship and the disciples witness the transfiguration. After the second prediction, Jesus tries to teach the disciples about the humble innocence of children (9:36-37, 9:42, 10:13-16). The lesson for some, however, did not seem to take because after the third prediction James and John asked for seats of honor in heaven. So much for humble innocence. Jesus, hearkening back to his predictions and the cost of discipleship, questions if they are really ready to suffer as he will suffer. Their famous response, "We are able", will be proven unreliable when Jesus is arrested and crucified. While, according to Church tradition, John escaped martyrdom and died after exile to Patmos, James was one of the first disciples to die (Acts 12:2). Mark concludes Jesus teaching a lesson on servanthood which is similar to the teaching that the Gospel of John uses after the washing of the feet.

Mark 10:38 "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Have you ever volunteered and found yourself in too deep?

How did it make you feel?

Did anyone try to tell you what to expect? Did you believe them?

Have you ever felt that way about being a disciple?

Did you commit your life hoping for healing and instead found transformation?

Can we really drink the cup of total obedience no matter the cost?

Commentary on Hebrews 5:1-10

Before the Exodus, God is referenced as the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. After the journey through the wilderness, the relationship is redefined as one between God and the entire people of Israel. In this relationship, there are certain “anointed” or “messiahs” who intercede between God and the people. If God wants to speak to the people, God speaks through the "prophets". When God wishes to lead his people, God works through "judges" and then "kings". If the people want to speak to God, they go through a "priest". It is the priest who intercedes on behalf of the people for God's mercy and compassion during times of suffering. The Book of Hebrews states that we now have a perfect priest, Jesus, who was chosen by God and not humanity. Jesus is said to be of the order of Melchizedek. The "Order of Melchizedek" first appears in the story of Abram rescuing his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:14-20). Abram encounters King Melchizedek of Salem who “brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.” The only other time the "Order of Melchizedek" is mentioned is in Psalm 110:4 which is quoted in the Hebrews text (Hebrews 5:6). Psalm 110 begins by saying "The LORD says to my lord" which Jesus uses to respond to Pharisees in Matthew 22:42-45 when he is asked about the Messiah. Hebrews uses both of these texts with the image of the bread and wine (communion) and the LORD of my lord (Christ) to show how Jesus is the obedient son and high priest appointed by God.

Hebrews 5:2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward

When have you had to “deal gently” with someone?

Were you tempted to loss your patience?

Did understanding their situation help you be patient?

By placing yourself in their situation, did it help you be more “gentle”?

How does Jesus experiences of suffering help you to know he understands?

Sermon “Our Gentle God”

While it is true that our God is an awesome God, the creator of all that is and will ever be, it is also true that our God is a gentle God. For those who think that they are god, God reminds them of their fragility in the floods, plagues, and the mighty wonders of God. But for those who have learned that the beginning of wisdom is a healthy respect (fear) of the LORD, God is both loving and merciful. There are not two different gods but rather one God who works with people where they are in their faith journey.

For Job, his faith was strong but his understanding was still restricted by his human perspective. From that perspective, it is difficult to perceive all that God is doing in our lives and our community. We fail to see the whole picture and often misunderstand what God is doing until much later. When Job spoke out of his ignorance, God reminded Job that unless Job could see the complete picture of reality any explanation would be beyond Job's understanding. It is not only that God sees outside the constraints of time but also God sees the hidden things of the heart. Our view is so limited compared to God's view, even more so in the midst of suffering.

Given God's ability to see and know beyond our limited capability, how then can God grasp how hard it is for us to accept what there is no way for us to grasp? For some religions, their understanding of the divine is based on total obedience and blind faith. Our understanding of God, however, is based on the fact that God loved us so much that God entered our limit grasp of reality seeing the world through our eyes. Jesus knew our suffering and feelings of helplessness. Because of this, God through Jesus deals gently with our ignorance and waywardness. We have faith in a God who has faith in us. We are obedient to a God who became a servant to all. We love a God who has first abundantly and continues to gently love us.

When Jesus was asked a question by James and John based in ignorance, he as always dealt

gently with them. Jesus questioned if they truly understood what they were asking. He reluctantly grant their request knowing that one day they would understand. God in Jesus deals gently with our ignorance and waywardness because our God not only created but became created so that all might be restored. In the end, God is awesome not because of God's power but because of God's gentleness.