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Infinite Power and Ultimate Service 10.21.2012. FPC Allegan

Job 38:1-13

Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind:² Who is this darkening counsel with words lacking knowledge?³ Prepare yourself like a man; I will interrogate you, and you will respond to me.⁴ Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me if you know.⁵ Who set its measurements? Surely you know. Who stretched a measuring tape on it?⁶ On what were its footings sunk; who laid its cornerstone,⁷ while the morning stars sang in unison and all the divine beings shouted?⁸ Who enclosed the Sea^[a] behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment, the dense clouds its wrap, when I imposed^[b] my limit for it, put on a bar and doors and said, "You may come this far, no farther; here your proud waves stop?"¹² In your lifetime have you commanded the morning, informed the dawn of its place so it would take hold of earth by its edges and shake the wicked out of it?

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵ James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.³⁷ They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory."³⁸ Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?"³⁹ "We can," they answered. Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left hand isn't mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."⁴¹ Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John.⁴² Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around.⁴³ But that's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant.⁴⁴ Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all,⁴⁵ for the Human One^[e] didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

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This past week Thursday, as my car was idling in line for the funeral procession for Bea Wendt, I noticed a strange rattling sound coming from the back part of my car. It really worried me. As I sat there wondering what could be making a sound like that would be in the back half of my car, I resolved to do whatever it took to get that looked at right away. I do not want to be without a car for pastoral emergencies! And so the very first thing that I did on Friday morning was to call my mechanic to make an appointment. --I was relieved to find out that they had a slot for me available immediately! And so, I took it. As I waited for my car to be analyzed and repaired, I looked through the windows into the service bay at the racks and shelves of the thousands of car parts that were sitting there waiting to be installed. I watched the mechanics in their uniforms with their pneumatic tools reaching up under those cars and others working away with their heads deep under car hoods. --While those mechanics knew exactly what they were doing, I had no idea how all of those parts went into the cars, nor how they could be used to repair them! I was completely at a loss as to what could be wrong with my car. Finally, after a very long wait, the counter person came to talk to me. --The occasional rattle that I heard coming from my car on Thursday was just from a broken baffle rattling

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around inside of the muffler. If I wanted to replace the muffler it would cost me \$400. --But since the broken baffle wasn't going to hurt anything, if I could put up with a bit of occasional noise, I could simply live with it if I didn't want to spend the money. ---Relieved that the sound was something that I could safely ignore, I went ahead instead with an already overdue oil change and transmission flush.

Now, this little story isn't just an update on my car. It is an illustration that we as humans do not know how everything works, we definitely do not understand everything, and often when we ask God for things, we cannot even remotely understand the implications of what we are asking for! We so often want to put ourselves in charge, with the potential for disastrous results. Imagine for a moment, what the reaction of my auto mechanics would have been, if I had put my car on their lift, raised it up, grabbed their tools and began to dismantle my own Mazda. Their protests would have been heard all of the way over to Detroit! I am not a certified Mazda technician, I have only the most basic idea of how the systems in my car work together, but so many times, we as humans do the same sort of thing. We get the big idea that somehow we know it all and that we are going to tell God what to do. That we are going to be in charge. That is what is happening in our New Testament passage today.

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Here in Mark 10, we have James and John, --the loudmouth “sons of thunder” causing trouble again. They seem to think that they can tell God what to do. Their request to Jesus seems too audacious to be believed. “Hey Jesus, they say. “We want you to say yes to whatever we ask.” These two sound like a couple of kids who approach their parents with the old manipulative question, “Hey Mom, do you promise to say yes to whatever it is I am going to ask you to do?” But, just like all parents from the beginning of time, Jesus does not fall for this trick. Without promising the two boys anything, Jesus asks them to tell him what it is that they want. –And when their request for ultimate power alongside Jesus comes out, we can almost hear Jesus laughing out loud at their unbelievable audacity and their misunderstanding of what he is all about. James and John seem to be operating under the greatly mistaken notion that Jesus is going to overthrow the Roman government, and they have no clue that the cup that Jesus is speaking about will be the shedding of his blood and the breaking of his body. They have no idea that the baptism that Jesus is speaking of is a reference to his own death on a Roman cross. They think that they understand what Jesus is all about and what he is doing, but they simply don't get it.

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That assuming that we can understand what God is doing is what is also going in our first text from Job today. Job had lost everything. He had lost his family, his fortune, his flocks and his friends. As he sat there miserable, Job demanded to know from God WHY all of these misfortunes had happened to him. And that is when God speaks to Job out the whirlwind. That is when the vast and ultimate power of God is explained to Job in simple words from his world view so that even he can understand. While we here today may not think about the sea having limits on it or the world needing foundation or a cornerstone, we have other more vast and complicated things to try to explain. How many of us can explain exactly how the formation of a planet occurs? Even if we attempt to explain it, there is not one of us that can **make a planet** through our own power. How many of us can explain how planets orbit around a star? Even if we have basic understanding of rotational orbits, there is not a single one of us that can **cause vast solar systems to rotate and spin and be a part of the immense dance of all of the bodies of the universe**. When we stop and think about the ultimate power of God to create the universe, to create all of the stars, all of the planets, perhaps through a big bang with the power God's will, we are all very humbled and all we can do is to sit down and

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close our mouths. --Just like Job, when he heard the voice out of the whirlwind, he could only admit that he was nothing in comparison with the power of God, in the same way, we too, when we look at the huge plants and solar systems floating in space, we fool ourselves if we think we can explain it all away with our human understanding and all of our human answers.

As a church, we sometimes make an immense mistake by pretending that we have all of the answers and that we can explain everything to you in a 14 minute sermon. But the truth is that God and the creation and all of these huge concepts like love and grace and truth are much too big for our human minds to comprehend. We try to make a good attempt to understand them enough to function, but there is no way that we can ever understand the mystery of God and God's relationship with humanity completely.

In a recent Sojourners article on why so many younger people are unaffiliated with a church congregation, an unaffiliated Christian, Melissa Otterbein from Baltimore writes about how churches with all of their "answers" do not even come close to describing her experience of God:

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*It's this filling, straight from the hand of God, that keeps me coming back for more, not the proving and quoting and selling stuff. I don't want quick, matter-of-fact, quotidian "answers" to questions that no human being can ever fully know. **I'd rather ponder these ancient musings together with you underneath a sky of stars that can be seen but never touched barehanded... you and me and the God who hung them there.** And all of this, I believe will pull us in deeper to each other, to God, and our words will **slowly decrescendo until we look at each other and both hear nothing and everything at the same time.** No audible voices but now that we're quiet enough, at peace enough, still enough, you can hear this God speaking to you with that still small voice. Only the voice doesn't feel small anymore. **It feels large and infinite, like this God is just sitting here with me, lying on the grass in a big open field right beside me, or inside of me, or both, I don't know.***

There are two lessons from our scripture passages today. The first lesson is that we with our tiny human brains, and our tiny human reasoning and our tiny experiences of only a tiny bit of the time frame of the existence of our planet cannot even come close to understanding all of the ways and all of the mystery of God. We are like little kids who grab onto the corner of something, and hold onto

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just a little bit of it without understanding the full extent of what we have gotten a hold of. Whenever we think that we have understood it, we can only know one thing for certain, we are wrong because we cannot understand the ways of God at all.

The second thing that this passage teaches us that Jesus, the human incarnation of the ultimate power of God on earth did not seek to use the ultimately huge power of God in order to rule over people, in order to impose a system of rules and laws and right behavior on the world; instead Jesus Christ came into to this world to serve it, and to give his life in order to set others free. This is amazing news. That the God of ultimate power, the God of all creation, the God who made gravity, planets, stars and the everything that we can think of did not come in order to be an authoritarian ruler and to compel us to obey an eternal set of laws that were unchanging and inflexible forever. Instead, Jesus came and did the exact opposite. He took all of his power and all of his influence as God, and he became a servant to ALL OF HUMANITY; a man who was willing to die in order to prove to us that self sacrificial love is what God and we as Christ followers should be all about. As Christians our work is not about who is to get the glory, or who is to be in charge of this or in charge of that. As Christians we

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are not out to get ourselves into positions of power so that we can feel good

about our accomplishments and so that we can have the authority to make others

listen to us. Instead if we want to follow Christ, we need to live to serve, rather

than to be served. We need to live out of a love for others, rather than a love for

power and prestige. If we are to be Christians, we need to allow God to be God,

and for us to simply be servants, doing the work of love that we are called to do.

Amen.

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