

■ The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 24 B – RCL
 Sunday, October 21, 2012
 Christ Church Clarksburg, WV
 The Rev. Anne West

Job 38:1-7, 34-41
 Hebrews 5:1-10
 Mark 10:35-45

Then the LORD answered Job, out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.”

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Humility – It’s a word that doesn’t seem to get much play time these days in our society. Admitting your limitations is not seen as a sign of good leadership or success. Certainly all of the political ads on TV and radio right now don’t embrace or extol humility. A recent bumpersticker said, “I’m awesome at being humble.” Another posting online said, “Just when you think you’ve got humility, you have already lost it.”

Both the lessons from Job and Mark address humility.

Though he had experienced great loss and suffering and was haunted by unanswered questions Job is divinely corrected as God spoke to him from the whirlwind. Where were you when I, meaning God, laid the foundations of the world? “On what were its bases sunk, and who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings?” In a verse we skipped over this morning, God asked Job,

“Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?”

“Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?”

While the beauty of the poetry of God speaking to Job is obvious, it is also clear that Job is no match, no equal for the One who created heaven and earth. Instead of trying to explain to Job all the whys in his life which as Frederick Buechner says it would be like trying to explain Einstein’s theories to a little-neck clam,ⁱ God does not explain any thing to Job, but reminds him of his place as God’s created being.

Frederick Buechner wrote this about God and Job,

“Maybe the reason God doesn’t explain to Job why terrible things happen is that he knows what Job needs isn’t an explanation. Suppose that God did explain. Suppose that God were to say to Job that the reason the cattle were stolen, the crops ruined, and the children killed was thus and

so, spelling everything out right down to and including the case of boils. Job would have his explanation. And then what? Understanding in terms of the divine economy why his children had to die, Job would still have to face their empty chairs at breakfast every morning. Carrying in his pocket straight from the horse's mouth a complete theological justification of his boils, he would still have to scratch and burn. God doesn't reveal his grand design. He reveals himself. He doesn't show why things are as they are. He shows his face. And Job says, 'I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see thee.' Even covered with sores and ashes, he looks oddly like a man who has asked for a crust and been given the whole loaf. At least for the moment."²

We also encounter an exchange between James, John, and Jesus.

I can relate in so many ways to James and John's rather crass request of Jesus. The 2 most important things I do in life are being a parent to my son Samuel and being a minister of God's word and sacrament. Like all of us these important things require patience, often beyond my imagined capacity. Like you I have days when I wonder if what I have accomplished will make any difference. Some days I have talks with my son that yields more sarcasm and blank stares. Some days cleaning out the Church basement of accumulated things is what I do but doesn't seem to be the goal of what I am to do.

It is not difficult to see myself in a weak moment asking Jesus to promise me some reward for my labors.....even if I can not see the reward now.....if I know that in the end I will get a seat of recognition.....from this perch, from this vista James and John's request may look selfish but it looks familiar ~~~ more familiar than most of us want to admit.

Again in Jesus' manner, he turns the response upside-down from the usual understandings.

To be great is not to be a ruler or have a special seat beside someone important, but rather to serve, to be the servant to the others, no matter their station in life. Here Jesus shows himself in his reply to James and John much like God showed himself to Job. They have seen and heard, straight from the Lord himself that to be great, one must forego the trappings and understandings of this world, and give one's life in service to others. It is the paradox of the Christian faith, and God in Christ reveals this glimpse into the divine plan in light of human arrogance. Secular wisdom says it best; that there is simply no such thing as a free lunch. The grace of God is free but accepting that grace is not without cost. The grace of God does not make the obstacles in our lives, in our church, in our nation and in our world magically disappear. Yet it is that same grace that enables us to take a deep breath and walk out into the world and engage it. It is that same grace that gives us the courage that we would not have on our own. It is that same grace that allows to learn the way self-denial, to be first in service, last in power, and willing to surrender our lives and embrace the irresistible power of God's redeeming love. The good news here is that we do not have to concern ourselves with building our own greatness, our own rise to power, but instead to serve God by serving others. Ours is not the continual asking of why, but of faithfulness to God as we serve. There is freedom, there is peace, and there is the abiding love and presence of God serving others, losing our self-focus and centeredness.

- i Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993 ed.), 55.
- 2 Ibid., pp 56-57..