

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

10/20/2024

Luann Yutzy

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

Mark 10:35-45

The Wisdom of Not Knowing

I'm wondering how you all are doing in these weeks leading up to a very contentious election? Or have you not heard that's going on?

Is it consuming you? Do you feel inundated with news and information and the latest polls?

Have you wondered where God is in all of the chaos?

There have been many before us and people now in chaotic times somewhere in the world.

One of those people is Job and we are going to join Job today in a world turned upside down which you entered last week with Pastor Lois.

In the OT, God is actively involved often in the form of retributive justice where God orders the world so that everyone receives reward or punishment based on their behavior. "If I do A, then B will happen. If I live righteously, then God will reward me." God was actively involved with Abraham making a covenant that Abraham and Sarah's descendants were to be a light, a blessing to all nations. There was the flood for all those who did evil and they were warned. God goes ahead and makes a way through the Red Sea when the enslaved Hebrew people were escaping from Egypt. God sends the Assyrians and the Babylonians to destroy the nation of Israel and Judah because of their turning away from the one true God and they wouldn't listen to the prophets like Jeremiah who was sometimes called the weeping prophet because he had such a message of doom that he didn't want to give.

It can all make sense so far if you're going with an eye for an eye way of living. You reap what you sow. In that context, Judgment Day is every day and there's no getting out of it.

You can see where we are going here if you heard last Sunday where Pastor Lois went into the depths of Job with you and you sat with him and it was very disorienting and it didn't make sense how this could happen to Job. To have everything taken away. It was a whole deconstruction of who Job thought God was.

And Job wants to be heard...by God. He has had many rounds of debates with his friends and has heard that his suffering must have been from his sin yet Job retains his innocence. He wants to speak his piece to God.

Today in Job 38 -it is all God, God speaks up. God has been listening.

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God appears to Job in a whirlwind or a violent storm and God basically says, "Listen, Job, get up and pay attention! I am asking the questions and you can respond!"

Going on from what was read this morning in verse 8:

"And who took charge of the ocean
when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb?"

That was me! I wrapped it in soft clouds,
and tucked it in safely at night.

"Have you ever gotten to the true bottom of things,
explored the labyrinthine caves of deep ocean?"

Do you know the first thing about death?

Do you have one clue regarding death's dark mysteries?

And do you have any idea how large this earth is?

Speak up if you have even the beginning of an answer.

"Do you know where Light comes from
and where Darkness lives

So you can take them by the hand
and lead them home when they get lost?"

Have you ever traveled to where snow is made,

seen the vault where hail is stockpiled." (The Message)

The scripture text last week of Job 23 was what I would call deconstructive. What we thought we knew about God did not fit with what was happening.

This week in Job 38 the word I would use is decentering. Job, and we too, often look at the world with us at the center. We might be the ones who have the maps that our country is front and center.

God is saying to Job, "You are in this world too and it will help us all if you can remember the world does not revolve around you. The world was created without you- look at the wonders around us that you did not create.

Did we ever think about whether creation needs humans?

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“During the pandemic, In many megacities of the world, the concentration of particle matter and carbon and other emissions declined by greater than 60% during the lockdown period. The air quality index (AQI) also improved substantially throughout the world during the lockdown.”¹

It’s as if the earth breathed a sigh of relief and said, “Just let me rest from all of you.”
I wonder if our wonderful creation could do very well without us and our advancements.

God has Job hold two things at the same time in chapter 38- the great wonders of the world far beyond our imagination and very hard questions that don’t have easy answers (or any answers).

This is another side of God.

Only God is God. If we really want to live, we need to let go. We don't have to know all the answers.

It was Augustine who said, “If you understand, it is not God.”

We may be able to recognize God but we really will not know all about God.

God goes on and on according to the author of Job for a couple more chapters and in chapter 40 God says, “Job, what do you have to say for yourself?”

In the version I’m reading it says Job replied:

“I’m speechless, in awe—words fail me.

I should never have opened my mouth!

I’ve talked too much, way too much.

I’m ready to shut up and listen.”

And we will let Julianna take it from there next week with Job 42.

The question I invite you to remember and reflect on from the Job passage this week is:

How is it liberating to be decentered and realize that it is not all about me? Repeat 2x. I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

On to Mark 10, where we see some more planets revolving around people, at the center of their universe, two brothers, James and John tell Jesus, their teacher, “We need you to do something for us. We want to sit on your left and right in your coming glory.”

¹<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8819204/#:~:text=In%20many%20megacities%20of%20the,significantly%20during%20the%20lockdown%20period.>

“Donald Meichenbaum, one of American

Psychologist's ten most influential

psychotherapists, tells of the time that his car was struck by lightning while he was driving.

Once he was safe at home, Meichenbaum began to share his ordeal with his teenage son, expecting at least some small degree of sympathy. Instead, his son interrupted, "Dad, let's go buy a lottery ticket. They say the chances of being hit by lightning are like the chances of winning the lottery."²

James and John were trying to get in on the action. They must have seen hope in Jesus in order for them to ask to sit at his right and his left or was it that they just sensed power? Maybe they could tell in this man from the first time they met him by the sea where they were mending their boats, calling them to come follow him, that there was just this way about him, a steadiness, a sense that he was someone great.

Did the part about Jesus' suffering and death, details about his death that he told them, go right over their heads? Was it too much information to hold? Their certainty about Jesus being the one to vote for is sincere. They will have some surprises when Jesus takes office but they are on board for the long haul- all the way to glory, when everything has settled in and appointments have been made. Please let us in on that, Jesus, we are the people for the job. Whatever it is; we are able.

I imagine Jesus looking at them lovingly with a bright sadness in his eyes, saying to them, “You don't know what you are asking, my friends. Can you drink from the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” James and John, (or sons of Thunder as Jesus had nicknamed them in Mark 3) say, “We are able.” I imagine them saying it very boldly as people called sons of Thunder might do. Their reality was what they saw around them, the world they lived in where power was from the top down and with Jesus at the top and both of them occupying the right and left, of course the world is only going to get better. The new kingdom movement will take the world by storm and turn it upside down. And Jesus knowing them as he did, tried to help them gain a new view, a different perspective. It doesn't work that way, he said. You have it right that the kingdom of God will be upside-down, but it will start at the bottom not the top and those who are seen as the least in society will be the greatest.

² David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor

Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume

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The Gospel writer, Luke says it this way when Jesus says to his disciples, “Who would you rather be: the one who eats the dinner or the one who serves the dinner? You’d rather eat and be served, right? But I’ve taken my place among you as the one who serves.” Jesus said, “I am the one who waits on tables.

I am like the one who is not at the best seat at the table but the one who prepared the table, the one who thought about what was needed ahead of time, the music, the linens, the lighting, the one who is adding the spices to the bisque simmering on the stove in the back, the one who will eat in the kitchen later with the rest of the staff, sharing what is left.

Do you see what this means, James and John? Are you able to drink this cup?

Because you will.

It hasn’t sunk in that Jesus is not going to change from who he has been. His won’t be the rags to riches power story they wanted to hear. Jesus isn’t in it for the prestige or the reward.

Jesus is in it for the love.

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

To give his life a ransom.

Ransom-the sum of money or other payment demanded for the release of a prisoner. For James and John imprisoned with the understanding that the only way to live is at the top with power and prestige, a place to look down from.

How do we wrap our minds around this servant lifestyle? How do we wrap our arms around it?

Does this mean we all work in restaurants? No, but Jesus highly praised that way of serving.

Have you ever been to Denny’s at midnight or any 24 hour restaurant at midnight? Robert and I found ourselves sitting at the counter at Denny's at midnight in Tucumcari, New Mexico on our way home from Arizona a few weeks ago. I was so grateful for food after a long day driving and the person serving us was very kind. The night shift at a restaurant serves the weary and the hungry.

Love has to be in the equation if we are to be followers of Jesus, the One who came to wait on tables.

It can seem like an impossible task, to be so countercultural to the world around us.

It can seem overwhelming to know how to let go of power and let go of needing to hold so much information around us and realizing that I’m not as important as I thought I was.

We aren’t at the center of the universe.

We look beyond ourselves to others.

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Remember who is actually on the Throne. It isn't the President of the United States. They are not a Savior. It's the One who shows up in washing our feet, the One who takes time for the children when everyone else is rushing here and there, Our King shows up in our suffering and suffers with us because Jesus knows. For God so loved the world, which translates to the God-hating world. God loved a world who didn't love God back. That isn't retributive justice by any means. It's a kind of justice that gives us what we need.

And look who Jesus spent his time with. Those closest to Jesus never seemed to catch on. They misunderstood, their assumptions got them in trouble. They tried to get him to change his plan. They betrayed him.

There is so much hope for us then. They are just like us. We stumble and fall and we get back up. We can do that because of grace.

We won't always know why things happen. We will know we are loved and love is a powerful, powerful movement.

And we need to learn to say I don't know. I just don't know. There is a lot I do not know and won't know. There isn't always a reason for something. That leaves space for God and gets our "needing to know everything" out of the way of trusting that God has us. God holds it all.

"Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine," writes poet Mary Oliver.

"Meanwhile the world goes on... meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again."³

Jesus invested himself in people. When the world seems chaotic, when we hear lies and the world has turned to meanness, we can look around us and see the people. Focus on who you can encourage today. Open up about despair you are carrying to someone safe. God will be there in our relationships.

And while we see people and invest in them, the world will slowly change. Not so much because of us but because of God who made all the world. We trust God when the world feels like it is slipping away.

³ David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor
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This week, I invite you to close your eyes sometime and sit still somewhere outside and listen. You will hear wonders and sighs from creation. When you feel a gentle breeze or a strong gust of wind, may you be reminded that we are not alone. Jesus left the Holy Spirit to remind us the incarnation of Christ infuses the world.

May we have eyes to see...