

**Sermon for Proper 24(B)
Year B**

[RCL] Psalm 104:1-9,25,37b; Job 38:1-7,(34-41); Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

One remarkable thing about a lot of Christians is the way they approach the world and one another. There is a quiet reserve, a sense of hospitality and genuine submission to one another. People who observe this often mistake it for weakness, but it is a genuine behavior marked by love and concern for the other. That is because Christians who practice their faith and heed the teachings of Scripture do amend their ways over time.

In today's Hebrew scripture and Gospel readings there is a theme of submission that is easily ignored in our culture of strong egos and competition. We begin with Job's encounter with God. Job's friends are debating why such suffering has been inflicted upon him. Job has lost his family, his cattle and land and has suffered impoverishment and illness. They finally conclude there is no answer except that God is "great in power and justice."

Then God himself answers Job out of the whirlwind in some of the most majestic poetry in Scripture. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth...On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?" (Job 38 vss. 4-7 *NRSV*)

This is grandeur on a scale of which we need to be reminded. We often personalize God and reduce God's image to that of benevolent teddy bear who gives us warm hugs. This God is no teddy; and Job is swept up in the presence of the God of creation resulting in his own humbling submission.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus is confronted with a request: James and John want to join him as a power triumvirate in heaven. They presume their friendship and respect for him comes with a reward, and they want to lock it in while things are going well. Jesus' response is to use their request as a teaching moment for his disciples and each of us: "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?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mark 10:38-40 *NRSV*)

So, Job and James and John are looking at things the way we often do. They tend to see God as someone to be placated either through worship, obedience or honorifics, but they expect something in return. In Job's case, he gets unmitigated suffering and loss. James and John are also warned that the cup of suffering will be theirs. Okay, so who signs on for that?

Well, many do. There are Christians throughout the world that have embraced the God of the whirlwind and have accepted the cup of suffering. Desmond Tutu comes to mind as one who could have simply held the positions of Bishop of Johannesburg and then Archbishop of Capetown with their status and privilege. Instead he used those offices and his Nobel Prize to challenge the evil of apartheid, risking his own life because he knew, loved and served a God who was above and beyond all earthly powers.

Carl is a man who had a successful career as a consultant. After his retirement he continued to attend his church, but he also devoted his time to finding out who were the poor in his community and

bringing people together to help serve them. He helped organize weekly suppers for everybody at his church with meals supplied by local restaurants. He created new community where people from the neighborhood and all walks of life met for food and fellowship. He also organized a successful program that began providing food on the weekends for children in need. Now afflicted with a serious illness, he and his wife continue to remain interested and concerned about others.

These examples of Christians who are willing to drink the cup Jesus drinks are our guides to Christian living. They know what truly matters to God and they are at work in the world without care about their place or prominence in the Kingdom of God.

The readings today help us focus on the question of what God expects of us, and how we are loved by God. The teddy bear hugs are replaced with leadership for true and laudable service to one another, especially the stranger, the poor and the needy. When we behave as people of God on a mission, little else matters.

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