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# Calm Seas

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 23 June 2024**

Job 38:1-11 • 2 Corinthians 6:1-13 • Mark 4:35-41

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's Bible readings are all lessons in humility.

First we have the reading from Job. Job and his four friends have been arguing, ever since they came to see him, as he sat in his sackcloth and ashes. He has been brought low by Satan, who took away his family, his home, and his livelihood. What Satan could not take away was Job's faith. Job still follows God, but he has begun to question his fate. Why have all these terrible things happened to him? Why me, Lord? he asks, in effect, not unlike some of the people in the Psalms. More than that, Job has challenged God to answer his complaints, sure that he is in the right:

Oh, that I had someone to hear me! [he cries]  
I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me;  
let my accuser put his indictment in writing. (Job 31:35)

Job demands an answer from God, demands that God explain himself, why he has brought Job so low. The beginning of God's answer is our reading today:

Who are you to question my wisdom with your ignorant, empty words?  
Now stand up straight and answer the questions I ask you. (38:1)

Job is called on the carpet, like a recalcitrant schoolboy. His question is thrown back at him, as God makes him understand his place in God's world. In glorious, sweeping phrases — Job really is a fabulous book — God challenges Job to see just how small he is. Were you there when I made the world? Who enclosed the sea, and told the mighty waves to stop? If you read on in the following chapters, you find God asking Job if Job could tame the elephant or the great whale in the sea. For four chapters, God questions Job, putting him in his place as just a small part of the creation, insignificant next to God. At the end of this, Job repents and humbles himself, covering himself again in dust and ashes as a symbol of his abasement.

Yet God's anger passes quickly. He loves his servant Job, and indeed it was for this that God allowed Satan to taunt Job. Does it seem cruel to you that God let Satan nearly destroy Job? We may view God's actions as harsh; and yet, are we not then as guilty as Job, in measuring God by human standards? For there is no standard when it comes to God. God is unique and not like any other being. The passages in the Bible which say things like, "God's ways are not our ways," or "God's ways are as far above ours as ..." are not just bits of poetry. For God is truly infinitely above us in power, in goodness, in grace, in knowledge, in wisdom.

But we share a little bit of God's Spirit. God is not foreign to us. God made us in his image, and we are the apple of his eye. And because he loves us, he corrects us when we need correcting.

God is all about truth. We humans never seem to completely outgrow our childish desire to have our own way. We want to be the captains of our own destiny, yet we are not; God is our Captain, our Lord, and it is God's way which will prevail; and this is right, because it is God's way which is the best.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;  
for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. (Psalm 24:1-2)

We live in God's world. If we do not realise this truth, then we have a false conception of the world. Paul, in the passage from Corinthians, speaks of us as God's servants. It is not a light thing to be a servant of God. As Paul recounts it, God's servants are beaten, jailed, overworked, mobbed and starved! But they are also pure, patient, kind, honoured and glad, for they possess everything, by God's grace. By God's grace we have Christ in us, and Christ's promise in our hearts, to be forever in his grace.

If we accept what the Bible tells us about the world, then we will accept that any misfortune, tragedy or pain is nothing compared to the tremendous gift of eternal life in Christ, which may be ours if we have true faith. This is a point which Paul often makes too. He says of himself and his fellow Christians: “We seem to have nothing, yet we really possess everything” (2 Cor 6:10). And elsewhere he writes: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). The prospect of being in eternal Communion with God allows us to withstand the sorrows of our human life. And more than that, that prospect can infuse our human life with great joy, inspired by God’s love for us.

And if we accept what the Bible tells us about God, then we will accept that God is right and justified in all his actions. For all authority is with God. God justifies himself. If a human were to act this way and claim self-justification, it would be wrong; but for God, it is correct. It is the truth, and the way things are. God is good and always righteous. This should be the basis of our faith. With faith in God comes trust in God, as the disciples learn in the Gospel passage today.

Do you know what I mean by “relaxing into an idea”? It is what happens when you fully accept an idea or a situation. The disciples in the boat being tossed by the waves could not relax, for they did not fully trust Jesus to save them. With greater faith, they would not have been afraid; they would have been able to relax and accept where they were. Similarly, when we fully accept the truth of God’s love and God’s authority over us, we can relax and live our lives in peace. If we doubt, we create tension in our lives. Doubt of God’s love or sovereignty throws us back on ourselves, back on our own devices, and we will constantly worry, for we know that we can’t live our lives only through our own knowledge or wisdom. But if we turn over all authority to God, then we may live at peace, trusting that God’s ways are the best for us.

This is the kind of humility we ought to practice, for it alone will lead to happiness in this life, and complete fulfilment in the next. Praise be that we may put complete trust in our Lord and Saviour, now and always. Amen.