

From Compromised to Conscripted to Humbled

Care of Creation September 2022

Job 38:1-18 Luke 5:1-11 Psalm 104:1-9

Psalm 24:1-2

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,  
The world, and those who live in it;  
For the Lord has founded it on the seas,  
And established it on the rivers. – Psalm 24*

### SLIDE 1 – Lake Superior water only

Today we begin a four-part preaching series on the Season of Creation. The preaching series begins with Ocean Sunday with a focus on wisdom. The wisdom of the ages includes the assertion that the Lord God is creator and owner of the earth and all that is in it. I couldn't help but recall the words of Psalm 24 which I memorized 35 years ago. Scripture, the words of the Bible, are meant to become so familiar to us that they bubble up in our thoughts when we are thinking critically about life.

Today we also observe the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Bible Milestone, handing out an incredible study bible to our students as they begin confirmation. This is the first bible I received, held in my hands and began to read at the age of nine years. With this and weekly attendance at worship and Sunday School, Confirmation Instruction and a high school bible study, the Spirit of the Lord nurtured faith and shaped me to be a follower of Jesus. I have owned, read and studied from six or seven other Bibles throughout my years. The Word of the Lord is precious and life-giving when I submit to the study of the Word.

Let's turn our hearts and minds to Creation and the Ocean and wisdom in scripture. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. How do we think about the earth and our place in creation? Do we believe that God loves us only when life is good, as in having an abundance of possessions and a harmonious family life and good health?

A foundational story in the Old Testament is that of Job. Job, the main character, is a man known to the community because of his family and wealth. One day he loses everything for no apparent reason. In one day Job lost his seven sons and three daughters when a great wind came up and collapsed the roof of the house

where they were gathered. On that same day his livestock of 500 hundred yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys and 3,000 camels were taken in raids while his servants were killed. 7,000 sheep and their attending servants were caught up in a fire and destroyed. Job had been one of the prominent men of the east and suddenly he was a man who had suffered great losses of family and wealth followed by sores covering his body. He found himself in a world of pain.

Job began to question both the order of the cosmos and the existence of divine justice because he did not deserve any of the tragedies that happened. Job cries out in pain imagining the un-creation of the world where there is no light or possibility of life. Job and his friends run down the laundry list of causes for his suffering. Why did this happen to Job? In a sense they are trying to protect God's reputation. If it's human sin, human beings are the main source of suffering, this a problem if the suffering is connected to someone as coming back to them for a particular sin. If it is more generally, we live in a world of sin where bad things happen and it can happen to anybody, a bit easier to swallow. A third possibility is that suffering can lead to some greater good, some benefit. Job does not accept any of these answers to his suffering. Job doesn't think he is so bad that he deserves his suffering.

Job directs his questions to God about how the Lord would allow such disorder and injustice. Friends of Job try to console him but instead of praying to God they talk about God. Finally God restores trust with Job praising him for addressing his suffering directly to God.

### SLIDE 2 – crashing waves

God responds to Job out of a great and dangerous whirlwind. You would expect to be afraid but the Lord begins by defining himself according to theologian Kathleen O'Connor as wild yet beautiful, as free and yet deeply disturbing. God is not a bully but a being of authority, wisdom and mystery. First of all, the Lord God is the divine architect of the cosmos, laying the foundations in the depths of the ocean, sinking massive pillars down to the bedrock to keep the cosmos from shifting unpredictably. God responds, "I laid the foundations...I laid the cornerstones...I prescribed the boundaries." The Lord asks where Job was when this creative activity took place. Job sees that his understanding of the deep mysteries of the earth is small, and though his personal tragedies are great, God

has heard his cries, and this renews Job's trust. Job sees how his life as being a mortal, compromised life next to the grand movements and wisdom of the Lord God.

Before we can trust in God we come to terms with our lack of faith, our lack of understanding, but once we see that, it is like we are all in with trusting and following the Lord. Conscripted if you will, that is, so compelled that you can do no other but trust in, direct your prayers to, and shout praises to God. The act of following God is a free act yet the work of the Holy Spirit makes it as if one were compelled, so shaped for following. Near the end of the book of Job, he confesses his need to repent. Job finally is humbled as he realizes there are limits to what he can know. The one answer he does have is that God is trustworthy. God listens to the depths of his pain and suffering. And God responds. Job can then do no other than turn himself once again to God and dare to live again and to love, having children again, and being blessed by his extended family.

The God who gives birth to all creation, who listens to our pain and suffering, renews in Job the will to live again.

### SLIDE 3 – Northern Lights

In the larger narrative in the book of Job the Lord God is imagined as a mother giving birth to the sea and quickly making clothes for it out of the clouds and the swaddling it in deep, beautiful colors of the night sky. (This is a photo from my niece as she captured the Northern Lights up in NW Minnesota a week ago.) Ancient legends tell of the violent origins of the cosmos but the scriptures describe the Lord as birthing chaos and nurturing it. These are acts of a loving God. Chaos is a part of the Lord God's divine plan and it is a treasured part of it, yet the chaos of God's good created order is given boundaries so that it does not endanger the stability of the world. I don't think we have always rightly understood this about God.

The image of God giving birth and nurturing the chaos of the great deep underscores the generativity that is part of God's cosmos. Life as God made it is a process of expanding and unfolding and growth and at the same time it includes death and receding and collapsing. Growth and decay are two sides of the same coin. For growth to occur, some things must fail. For there to be new orders, the old order must tumble. For there to be space for new life, some things must die.

For there to be newness like in a garden, there needs to be soil overturned, for a time there is a seeming disorder.

#### SLIDE 4 – sunset by the ocean shore

That chaos is part of life is a mystery. The Lord does not explain or defend this truth in his response to Job who has suffered greatly. But the Lord asserts that the story of life is bigger than us humans, and that we are not the main characters. Instead we are part of the fabric of life. And in other parts of scripture it is clear that we are intended to be partners along with the whole of the created order following God's lead to nurture the created order. The Lord does not so much answer Job's questions as re-frame them and offer Job a new way to see the world in which his grief and his experiences are not the end or the entirety of the story. The Lord is willing to have the conversation about the deep mysteries of life concerning order and justice and creation. The Lord is willing to listen to our deepest pains.

#### SLIDE 5 – Cliff along North Shore

The big story then is about divine authority, wisdom and mystery. The world we live in is quite complex. The story includes the oceans and the mountains, the animals and the birds, the atmosphere and the galaxies, and the span of time from the first spark to dinosaurs to humans and beyond. The story is about tragedy and renewal, about mercy and mystery. How do we care for the earth and all that is in it? How do we act responsibly for the sake of God's good created order, to allow it to be nurtured, to thrive and flourish?

That is our biggest question. How do we care for the earth and all that is in it? Some think of the earth and its treasures as things to be consumed. But in the beginning of Genesis the Lord gives humans the responsibility to care for life so that there is flourishing for all peoples and creatures and forms of life. There is no talk of consuming the resources of the earth until they are fully depleted. Today we are facing stark realities of climate change and the extinction of creatures which can be linked to human over-consumption and the disturbing of natural habitats. This has happened in large part because humans have not understood what affect our actions have on whole of life. Too many humans have failed to nurture creation.

### SLIDE 6 – North Atlantic Right Whale

On this Ocean Sunday we can look at the North Atlantic Right Whale as one example. This whale is endangered. They are the length of a school bus, weighing 150,000 pounds, more blubberous and buoyant than other species and likely to be more present at the surface of the ocean than other aquatic life. In the 1600's the Pilgrims claimed they could walk across Cape Cod Bay on the backs of right whales. They were harpooned and sought for their blubber and baleen and meat. Their buoyancy made them good targets since once harpooned and killed they would continue to float on the water and could be easily dragged to shore. The blubber from one whale would boil down to 1,300 gallons of lucrative oil used for oil lamps, soap, and as lubricants for machines was popular through most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The baleen or whalebone when dried would become a strong yet flexible fiber used in women's corsets, hoop frames for skirts, as buggy whips or hat brims. Evolution in the industrial world lessened the market for what could be gleaned from these whales.

At one time these whales were killed for products that were useful to daily life like oil and meat, and some used for fickle fashion like a women's corset which I can definitely live without. The harpooning and killing of these whales was so great that their numbers in the ocean were greatly reduced. Today these grand and beautiful creatures are in danger of extinction. They are no longer hunted but they often get entangled in fishing lines. The lines can cut the whales' flesh or get so tightly wrapped on the body that the whale cannot free itself. Teams of researchers count the remaining whales and try to free those who are bound by fishing lines. Meanwhile, fishermen no longer wanting to inadvertently catch these whales in their lines are seeking the development of new lineless crab and lobster traps. They are becoming aware of the great creature in need, of their own mortal, compromised life, and the need for a new way of accomplishing their work.

### SLIDE 7 – Lake Michigan shoreline

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How do we think about the earth and our place in creation? We are children of God, formed in the waters of baptism, being given the Word of life, and incorporated into Christ and the body of Christ, the Church. God has shown Godself to be loving and wise, creative and nurturing, merciful and compassionate in days long ago and again in Jesus. God finds us in our pain, our emptiness, our suffering, our weakness. As God meets us where we are, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see God in Jesus, God embracing us, and identifying with us in all the pain and sorrow of our existence. God identifies with us in our weakness and exposes and defeats the powers of sin, death, and evil in the world. By the death of Jesus, and God raising him to life, God frees us from all that would keep us bound and down. We are free to let God be God. We are freed to be human. We are free to follow God, follow Jesus, in love, nurturing the earth, all peoples, all creatures.

SLIDE 8 – Sailboat in the distance

*(Pause for a moment here.)*