Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Columns
Spirituality



In this photo illustration lightning strikes across a night sky, lighting up a body of water below. (Unsplash/Niilo Isotalo)



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Poor Job! Miserable as he was, he made everything worse for himself by picking a fight with God. And God seemed to enjoy the challenge.

Poor Job! He questioned the Almighty who only questioned him back. But, lo and behold, Job's questioning resulted in a greater sense of himself and God and their relationship. That's well worth the embarrassment of being asked if you think you're ready to replace the creator.

Job's interaction with the God of wind and sea led him into awe, traditionally called "the fear of God." What Job heard from God underpins something Pope Francis wrote in "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" (Paragraph 99), "From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole." Every bit of creation reveals God to those who have eyes to see. God is near, always.

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 23, 2024

Job 38:1, 8-11
Psalm 107
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41

One of Mark's most striking depictions of Jesus' self-revelation as Son of the Creator comes in today's Gospel — a story repeated by Matthew and Luke. Mark offers a subtle hint about what's going on as he quotes Jesus' decision to take the disciples over "to the other side." This was no jaunt. It marked a real transition. Jesus had just taught about the subtle, prodigious seeds of the reigning of God. What he didn't explain was that moving into the new would be far from peaceful. (Remember the seed that must die?)

Crossing over, the boat got caught in ferocious weather. Mark's word for the "squall" denotes a whirlwind — a favorite term used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe God's powerful, disturbing communication. This same word describes God's address

to Job, from out of the "storm." (Matthew uses a term like tsunami.)

The folks in the boat with Jesus suddenly felt like Job: uncomprehending and panicked. Job had no idea why he was suffering. The disciples couldn't explain the tempest, they could only react with terror. In both cases, God was not acting like they expected. Job was not being justly rewarded for his goodness, the disciples felt that if Jesus had been sent by God, they should be safe with him. Job cried out to God (Job 7:17-21) and the disciples tried to awaken Jesus to their shared plight.

Why did God let it happen? Why was Jesus unperturbed by the raging storm?

We should probably interpret this story in the light of the cross and Resurrection — after all, Mark wrote it with that hindsight. Perhaps the transition Jesus was leading his disciples through entailed a new understanding of their relationship with God. Like Job, they seemingly operated in a transactional world: do good, get rewarded; stay with God and you'll be safe. If they were with Jesus, there should be no storms.

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When they woke him up, Jesus addressed the storm, shouting something like, "Shut up! Be muzzled!" This sounds like an exorcism.

Exorcism was core to Jesus' ministry, especially when we understand that expelling demon(s) was but a minor part of it. Throughout his ministry, and especially in the cross and resurrection, Jesus demonstrated that evil does not have the upper hand — he banished it time and again. From day one of his ministry, Jesus revealed how God's mysteriously ever-present love overpowers even death.

What might this say to us? In a sense, it seems easier for us to appreciate Job's experience than that of the disciples. We are sometimes willing to hear God's voice putting us in our place and calling us into a deeper relationship. The disciples at sea witnessed a phenomenal, seemingly unrepeatable, feat of power over nature, something more in the category of resurrection than everyday life.

Jesus asked the disciples, "Why are you terrified? Have you no faith?" Perhaps that questions us as much as it did them. Do we live like people who believe in the Resurrection? Do we behave as if God can absorb and transform everything that is evil and dangerous? What would it look like to live with that kind of faith?

Job and the disciples came to believe that God's ways were not theirs, that God's love appears in unexpected, seemingly chaotic circumstances. If we can learn that kind of faith, we might be freed from holding God to our expectations and be unafraid to venture the transformational crossings over Christ would lead us through. St. Paul takes this one step further and says that if we believe, the impelling love of Christ will carry us to live, not for ourselves, but for and with and in him who has led the way.

Today's Liturgy of the Word is a not-so-subtle call to live as a new creation. Instead of cowering in the storm, we can be people of the Resurrection — and discover how whirlwinds can blow us into deeper faith.

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