

Sermon for 20 October 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost/Laity Sunday

Scriptures: Job 38:1-7, 34-41; Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c (*Insert, alternate leader and people*);

Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

Sermon

Let it be noted that the invitation to preach was widely offered and not accepted, this Laity Sunday.

Going beyond that, let this be the day when we sit with the fact that we are not in charge of our lives or the universe, and face that as the first order of business. God has let Satan do everything but kill Job, and Job has had his say about that, and God has listened.

Now God answers.

So?

The psalm elaborates the good side of that. Today, Job just listens. It's an awesome story, and we live with it and die with it. It doesn't change. We learn, over time, how to adjust with Job.

Then the Letter to the Hebrews comes as close as anything in the Bible to describe what that was like for Jesus. He was totally human. We are called to keep that in mind, always. In war, at peace, "in sickness and in health," as the wedding vows say. That was God's idea, just as being us is. Then, just like that mysterious priest, Melchizedek, he was also ordained, set apart, authorized. All those things, we agree to believe, make up God's way of getting through to us in love.

That's a lot of facts. Then the door opens, and we hear James and John ask for seats on either side of him when he comes into power...and it sounds like ... well, like church. The other ten are furious... And watch what Jesus does.

He doesn't criticize, either the two who asked, or the rest who resented. He just says that's not the point of everything. "Your job is not to look out for yourselves. You're to look out for each other." Just that simple. All this wonder God surrounds us with; all these opportunities to enjoy and cooperate and be part of creation ... It's all like that movie some of us are old enough to remember, "East of Eden," based on the novel by John Steinbeck ... work, manage for yourselves, stay out of trouble ... but first and foremost, see what the other fellow needs and get it for him and her ... see that she and he have it, like you do. That's your job.

He even tells them, for the third and last time in Mark's Gospel, that that's his own destiny: be a sacrifice, ransom for many. That's what God has decided. Everybody naturally wants to be first ... we're made that way ... and the point is to understand that's not how you're to deal with how you're made. God has plans for you and me that go past how we're created. God works

inside things, alongside families, ahead of us, always in that direction. "Do unto others as ye would that they do unto you."

Didn't we learn that in Sunday school, if we went? Isn't that what we hear Ms. Clo tell us over and over up here in front, we youngest ones? Satisfaction and joy and well-being all come that way to us human beings. We work together, or nothing works. Suffer, yes; but it's never the same as selfishness. It has a point. It's how things are set up to work.

Let us pray.

Lord, on this day when we remind ourselves leaders are only for followers, Presidents are only here for everybody else, not for themselves, teach us how to head that way, in this country, in this family, in life and in death, all days and all ways. Work it out with us, mood after mood and age beyond age. Give us the inner spirit of love that rules everything, and let each of us head in that direction, through your loving son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.