

Sermon for 6 October 2024 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost/World Communion Sunday

Scriptures: Job 1:1; 2:1-10; Psalm 26 (*Insert, alternate leader and people*; Response 465, Verse 4; Mark 10:2-16.

Sermon

What can we do with these scriptures?!

“The patience of Job” has suddenly broken loose!

Our Holy Bible bursts forth with more sarcasm, bitterness, and utter hopelessness than we ever retort to any believer.

Whereas, last Sunday, in the Book of Esther, we saw the totally abandoned Jews in ancient Persia fiercely defending themselves against annihilation, and winning, and learned of their celebrating ever afterwards with their annual Feast of Purim, here, today, we watch, and listen, to the most admirable and trusting Hebrew of all time say the most bitter words of insult to God.

Truly, the depth of human disgust and insult are right here, unvarnished, in what we call God’s Word.

I regard this low point of faith as one powerful resource to be turned, to when we are in our own moments of doubt and weeping. See how brave and unflinching our Hebrew ancestors, brothers, and sisters, remain in the vicissitudes of history, and in the present moment. Allow them to point to the worst of human reaction in their own survival and renewal. Let our own faith in the resilience of goodness and joy include their unsurpassed survival record. We are indeed one, both in our reaction to the spirit and our embrace of holiness through the Jew, Jesus, and his followers.

That’s not to say things simplify in our own experience, or in what we call the Old Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews, mysterious and haunting, builds on Jewish testimony, expanding on the new experiences that life and death produce. In a way our time is demonstrating in our own nation, the resources of other spiritual traditions are connecting with our more familiar ones, and “eye hath not seen” what we may be called to enjoy and develop in the way of expanded consciousness.

Then, of course, we come to the Gospel lesson, which in its own way is full of puzzlements and discomforts. Certainly it’s good to hear Jesus courageously challenge his own religious experts about divorce, and it’s useful to note that allowing women to divorce unfaithful men shows Roman influence right in the time of Jesus nothing’s static in spirituality or physics or any other human system, for goodness’ sake ... but when Jesus comes down so hard on divorce at last, the psychological insight gained in our time challenges his interpretation here. The only

way I can balance this question in scripture is to say that all understanding is incomplete, and that the wisdom of love is not a human construct, but God's own quality for us to respond to and emulate ... as the close of today's passage does so beautifully in Jesus' own, "Let the children come to me..."

Surely that is the message of today's texts, as it always is:
"receive the kingdom of God as a little child..."

"And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them."

Let us pray.

Wisdom beyond all human perceiving, love deeper than anything we can achieve, teach us, lead us like little children, through your presence in us, and around all people, and all things. Open us to the endless delight of what you provide, as we rest, and trust, in you. Amen.

Res09s); Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12;