

“Servant of all”

Reflection: Oct 20, 2024 Rev'd Ian Brown

Mark 10: 32 – 45, Job 38

Life is often such a mess!

We often feel so out of control!

The question we ask then is ‘why?’ We like our world, our lives, our experience to be ordered, civilized and in control. We want to be 'on top' of what's happening!

In our age, nearly everything we confront on a daily basis is either already under control or it is viewed as something to bring under control and to be made use of. In direct opposition to this way of seeing, interpreting, are the creation stories of the Bible and the vision of wild creation in this passage of Job. Wild things in these passages do not need to be rearranged, 'developed,' or made use of before they reach the fullness of their being. Wild things in these passages are already as good as they can be, on their own.

There is something that is not tame about the world or the God who made and the whole text of Job is a reflection on that subject.

Job's friends name God as judge, ruler, king and power. Job names God as faithful, but there are both many questions and many names for God, both within scripture and outside it.

I wonder what names you use for God, know God by? ...

The only name God gives, in the Bible to define God's nature is “I am who I am” – that's consistent with God's answer here to Job, in this poetic wisdom reflection. God remains mysterious and asks ‘who are you to question?’ We try to sort these same things out two and a half thousand years later. But the question remains. Jesus friends were trying to sort themselves out too.

James and John have just a small question, but it seems to get to the very heart of the matter for Jesus. The story before this was about attitudes

to wealth; ‘how hard it is for the rich man’, and this next one, with the issue of power and order.

This is part of the gospel again, from a recent translation. It has a freshness that's helpful:

James and John, Zebedee's sons, came up to him. "Teacher, we have something we want you to do for us." "What is it? I'll see what I can do." "Arrange it," they said, "so that we will be awarded the highest places of honor in your glory - one of us at your right, the other at your left." Jesus said, "You have no idea what you're asking. Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into?" "Sure," they said. "Why not?" But as to awarding places of honor, that's not my business." - and then to the 12; “whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.”

Jesus is realistic about his fate; this is the journey to the cross and he's still optimistic about his followers. He says about power, ‘it won't be like the godless rulers throwing their weight around, amongst you.’ Indeed, still happening!

Perhaps the experience of the disciples is really a very human, if embarrassing pointer. James and John think like many people do - they think of themselves and the rewards that they deserve.

“Teacher, how about a little favour for some close mates? Could you slip us tickets to a couple of the best seats in heaven?” They wanted to come out on top. They found the right person to ask, it was just that they had mistaken the values that Jesus worked from.

The fact that the disciples make mistakes or ask for outrageous favours doesn't mean they are not still disciples! Jesus often seems exasperated with them - as we might be with a child at times, but our children remain our children! It seems to be all part of the journey as a follower of Jesus. This is a reassuring story for us to identify with when we've made mistakes. It also says to us that we need to be tolerant with one another.

This story happens on the road. They're traveling, pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The physical journey represents a spiritual journey, a path of learning and understanding. It's a path that's easy to stray from, but this journey of faith with Jesus is one of not having all the answers to begin with. Discipleship is not about having arrived, it's about the nature of faith and the teacher is always leading his followers further on.

Isn't this precisely why Jesus' teaching is all about matters like anger and forgiveness, money and injustice, losing things and being found - the stuff of real everyday living, rather than doctrine and belief? Jesus gave us a way to follow - a way like his, based on loving service. Mark tells us Jesus called them and said to them, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Jesus way is focused on service of others. And with Jesus, the journey and the nature of our traveling are even more emphasized than the destination!

In this reading Jesus tells his friends for the third time that he must suffer and die. It makes you wonder if they were listening at all! He was talking about giving his life, they were looking for the inside running in heaven! Rather than pull out his hair, Jesus uses the question to illustrate the point. His life is to be given in service for others and his disciples would follow him in self giving. Jesus helps them to see that to be first in God's kingdom is to choose to be last here, to serve, to give. He works from a value of giving up his power, not seeking more.

Back in the Hebrew scriptures, Job had cried out to God, questioned the wisdom of God and the fairness of his lot. God's reply to Job, questions Job. God turns Job's attention from his own woes to a larger picture. In the same way Jesus turns the attention of these sons of Zebedee to the bigger picture of the values of God's

kingdom and of the way to travel there by serving.

I guess that means in a community of Jesus followers, filling the roster to serve morning tea would be a hotly contested privilege, those who organized the visiting of the sick and housebound would be swamped with offers. In a body of people following Christ's way, we might have to check with folk that they hadn't given too much to the poor and had enough to live on themselves. There would be a long list of those willing to transport the frail, an overabundance of nominees to serve on all sorts of helpful groups. There would be floods of offers and good ideas for fund raising. And so there is! It's a reality living and growing here amongst us. Perhaps like Jesus 12, we need to recognize that we too are stumblers, not always getting it right, but on the way.

This is a gospel of challenge! This is good news too, that Jesus way is about how we live now. For us, the only proof we have of the validity of the gospel is whether or not it's capable of producing lives that echo the one we follow - lives based on the reality of Jesus self giving, loving service of others. And if selfish insensitive characters like James and John could make a decent go of it, perhaps there is hope for us too. May God's grace help us to live an authentic following of Jesus way and bless us on this journey. Amen