

Sermon – Persisting in Humility
Sunday, October 24, 2021
Scripture – Job 42:1-6, Mark 10:46-52
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Our first reading is Job 42:1-6. This is the fourth Sunday our lectionary readings are from the Book of Job. We have journeyed with Job through horrific loss, misguided comfort from friends, theological debate, grandstanding, and a life changing encounter with YHWH.

Job's struggle is brought to a resolution in today's reading. His journey of persistence which began with integrity and moved through lament and reverence culminates in humility. Following Job's encounter with YHWH, he is a transformed person...able to forgive and to pray for the friends who saw his suffering as God's punishment. Job's persistence has transformed the community to which he belongs into one of affirmation rather than blame.

The commentaries make an observation about the verb *ma'as* in verse six. Although the NRSV Bible translates it as *I despise myself*, many agree a more accurate interpretation would be "*I yield myself*" in the presence of Yahweh. Self-loathing does not fit the context. Commentaries also remind us that "repent" does not only refer to being sorry for one's sin but has a wide range of meaning including to regret, to change, and to have compassion. Job's pause in the presence of God leads to an embrace of his humanity and a persisting in humility. Hear now the Word of God.

1 Then Job answered the Lord: 2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 4 "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I yield myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Amen.

As we continue the sermon series on persistence, our second reading is Mark 10:46-52. Today we are introduced to *Bartimaeus*, a man who like Job, persisted in crying out even when others wanted to silence him. Bartimaeus' encounter with Christ was life changing, not only for him but also for those within his community. Hear now God's Holy Word.

46 They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to Jesus, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way. Amen.

The title of the sermon: Persisting in Humility

The text: Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Job 42:3

Let us pray: Loving and merciful God, give us the humility that comes from being in your holy presence. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*If you can keep your head when all about you
are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
but make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
and yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;*

With these words Rudyard Kipling begins his beloved poem “If,” written in 1895 as sage advice to his son, John.

As a young, single woman persisting in a call to ministry amidst cries of doubt, criticism and blame, I found strength reflecting upon this poem with my therapist (who was also an Episcopal Priest) on my journey pursuing a doctorate degree in pastoral counseling.

Years later when Peter and I welcomed Paul into the world, we chose the poem “If” to frame and hang in Paul’s bedroom, greeting him each morning growing up. One lazy Monday morning during the summer following Paul’s junior year in high school, I offered him \$100 if he memorized the poem “If” before I did. I went blithely to work rather proud of myself thinking this would keep him occupied for at least a week and a good challenge for me as well. By noon that same day Paul called me at church to recite the poem. He received his \$100 by dinner and Peter and I later had a conversation about my parenting initiatives.

There is something within the character of Job and Bartemaus that resonates with Kipling’s poem IF. Both are resolute and persistent with voices that cry out, even when others seek to blame them and quiet them. The voices of others cannot mute their cry to be acknowledged by their Creator and Savior in the midst of suffering. Both are rewarded for their persistence and their refusal to be silent with “eyes that see God.”

How delightful to meet Bartemaus in today’s gospel reading, whose name means “Son of Honor.” What a comfort to discover in his story parallels with our friend Job. Bartimaus refuses to be defined by his circumstances, by the prejudice which associated his blindness with sin, or by the expectations of those who are able to see, who appear to be close to Jesus, and who even presume the right to speak on Jesus’ behalf. Rather than trust others, Bartemaus trusts himself, and persists until his call is heard by Christ.

According to Dr. Lincoln Galloway, Professor of Homiletics at the Claremont School of Theology:

The persistence of Bartimaeus sets in motion a wave of mercy, blessing, and change. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus calls for Bartimaeus. Those around Jesus call Bartimaeus to Jesus. The breakthrough of mercy begins with the recognition that those who once enjoined Bartimaeus to be silent, not to bother Jesus of Nazareth are now transformed. They are no longer speaking sternly to him. Indeed, their excitement is palpable: Take heart! Cheer up! Get up! On your feet! Jesus is calling you! They have become witnesses to and vessels of mercy.

This story of mercy put into motion by the persistence of one person's refusal to accept the status quo of those who presume to speak on behalf of God we also see in Job's story. In the midst of his struggle, Job holds fast to God and clings to his dignity as a human being. Because of Job's persistence, God enters into a dialogue with Job which affirms who God is and reminds Job of who he is. Job is transformed in the presence of God. With wonder, awe and gratitude Job proclaims: *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.*

Previously, Job knew God by what he heard about God from his family and faith community. Now Job meets God in his own life, in the thick of the storm that is his life. Because of Job's willingness to persist in integrity, lament, and reverence, Job finds himself face to face with his loving Creator. In this culminating encounter Job yields himself and finds comfort in the dust and ashes of his humanity, once again persisting; this time in humility.

The Latin word for *humility* is very close to the Latin word for *humanity* and means to be *grounded, created from the dust and ashes*. Humility affirms one's intrinsic self-worth as a child of God, formed from the clay of the earth by the Potter into a human being. Humility accepts and embraces the limitations that are a part of being human...*I have uttered what I did not understand, ...Therefore, I yield myself and repent in dust and ashes.*

When Job gets up from his ash heap of loss and sorrow to get on with his life, his deepened experience of God summons him to new ways of seeing, leads him outside of himself, and creates of him a new being in the midst of his community; a community which no longer judges him or tells him to be quiet, but a community that eats bread with him; shows him sympathy and comfort, and takes an offering on his behalf. It seems that not only Job is transformed. The community is also changed by what they learned about God because of Job's persistence. (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4, pg.196*)

As we celebrate Stewardship Dedication, we are grateful for the generations who have come before us, and who, like Job and Bartimaeus, persisted in seeing God. Because of their faith and tenacity, we are a part of a congregation that remains steadfast and grateful to the God who meets us in our lives, who calls us friends, and who invites us to reach beyond ourselves.

As we continue on the way, may we follow Kipling's advice, trusting ourselves when others doubt us, choosing love when others hate us, and, yet neither looking too good nor talking too wise. May each of us persist in integrity, lament, reverence, humility and so be transformed by the mercy we have received at the hand of God. So be it. Amen.