

Pentecost 21 (Lectionary 29) Year B October 17, 2021
Job 38:1-7, 34-31; Mark 10:35-45
Epiphany, Winnipeg

(James, John, Jesus, Job...Let's add Janet, Jillian, and Josephine to the list too, because even though the Bible was probably entirely written by men, and most of the main characters are men, this whole story of our life and our faith is about all of us, not just the men. Just to be clear...)

If you were out in the country on a late evening earlier this week, you would have seen the most spectacular Northern Lights that we've seen around here in a long time. Lighting up the sky, lighting up the ground as some even said, colour and light and dancing in the sky in a stunning and always surprising way for no real purpose other than the really useful purpose of being beautiful, and jaw-dropping, and beyond-words amazing.

That's the kind of thing that makes life down here seem kind of small, doesn't it? I lost sleep over a meeting this week – no, it was not a church council meeting – and while I lost sleep over a meeting the sky lit up and the heavens were alive while something so much bigger than me was happening. What did the Aurora Borealis care about my meeting? And the Bombers and the Jets practiced for whenever their next games might be, and some colour and light started to wiggle and squirm on the northern horizon and do the northern lights even know who....whatever that guy's name is on a rink or a field?

That part's easy. But while the northern lights did their northern lighting thing there were how many people living on Winnipeg's streets while the temperature drops and cold nights settle in? While the lights in the sky danced

someone was planning a bow-and-arrow attack in a Norwegian supermarket, and someone in ICU was one step closer to dying, and somebody lost their job, and someone else grieved, and we could keep adding to the list forever. Do the northern lights notice these things?

That part's not easy.

I asked you to think about yourself and your place in the world while you heard the word from Job being spoken. I mentioned a few weeks ago that this is a story of someone who had what we might call a good life. Job was rich and successful. Ten children, thousands of sheep and camels, hundreds of donkeys and who doesn't want hundreds of donkeys? And he loses everything, except his wife – she loses everything too, you know – and he doesn't quite lose his life. For the two of them it's a complete writeoff – everything's gone. She tells Job to curse God and die; she gives him permission to take God to task. And while Job doesn't quite curse God he follows his wife's advice. He calls on God again and again to give some kind of reason for what is going on, and he wonders why he's being attacked by God. He cries out that God is just hiding and nowhere to be found, and while one or two times he sounds a little more sure, more than anything else it's just "Why, why, why?" and "It's just not right," and "how could you do this to me?" And why don't you just leave me alone? And Why?

As Job cries out can't you just hear everyone who has suffered, or been enslaved or oppressed or traumatized or afflicted or sick or dying or at the end of the rope calling out "Why?" And don't you just wish God would answer, "Well, it's like this..."

But after all of this calling out to God, Job and his wife, who have lost everything, don't really get an answer. Instead, they hear what we started to hear today from God: "Who is this who speaks and tries to make a case without knowing anything? I'll ask you the questions now. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth and set the limits of the sea, have you told the sun when to rise, and have you been to where all the snow and hail are stored, do you find food for the lions, did you set wild donkeys free to play in the field, or did you make the mighty Hippopotamus, that Behemoth, or the sea monster that no one can defeat? Huh, did you? Did you? So who are you to hound me?" For four chapters God goes on like that. As though Job's loss amounts to nothing. As though the Northern Lights blazing across the sky just don't care. Our little lives don't count.

Who does that?

I won't try to defend God here. But one thing that God does not do is give Job some kind of answer. God never says, "This is why this is happening to you." Job's questions are never answered... But isn't that a good thing because we all know that there just aren't answers to so many things. And a simple phrase or an easy answer, just won't do.

But even without answers, Job's life goes on (and it gets better, but that's a story for next week). And now he's also seen that what is going on in his life is a piece of the whole life of the whole creation. He lives and loves and laments and cries along with the earth and the stars and the creatures and the sea and the Northern Lights and he is created by God's hand, just like the hippopotamus and the sea monster. It's no consolation, I'm sure. But maybe what we hear as we cry

out with Job is not that our lives are small because creation is so big. Instead, we hear that our losing and our growing, our living and our dying, are part of a bigger picture that always gives new life. There might not be answers to all of those “Why” questions. But our losing and our growing, our living and our dying, are all woven in with all that God has made and that God is still making alive. Again. Always.

Fast forward a few hundred years from Job and his wife, and we meet Jesus on the road with some of his disciples. I’m sure Janet, Josephine, and Jillian are there in the travelling crowd too. James and John come to Jesus and ask him if they can have a share in his glory when he finally takes his seat in the kingdom and he ends up saying, “That’s not mine to give you. I can’t give you what you want.” Instead, he tells them that he will suffer and die, and then rise...and he tells them that they will drink that same cup themselves. Maybe he’s thinking about that old story about Job, about how suffering can’t just be blamed on God, and it can’t just be blamed on the person who suffers. It’s not a good thing, but it’s just what happens when you care, it’s what happens when you’re human, it’s what happens when you’re alive.

And then he paints a picture of his own life that is not a picture of glory and kingdoms and thrones, but is a picture of a servant who cares for the people around him, and who will not stop loving the people around him, even if it costs him his life.

“I can’t give you what you want. All I can give you is my life.”

So imagine this: We are a community that doesn't give and get what we want – that's not our call - but we serve; we offer our life...for one another, for our neighbours, for our world.

Imagine this: that the leaders of the nations don't get what they want as they struggle for power over each other and over their people. But they serve; they offer their life...for one another, for our neighbours, for our world.

And imagine this: that the world is a place of giving, not getting; serving, not being served; caring for one another, not taking from one another. It's a world being made new. It really is.

Today we follow Jesus into Jerusalem, into Fort Richmond, into Winnipeg and into wherever we go. He walks ahead of us and says "I can't give you what you want." But while we live these lives where we suffer or hurt, where we might be wrong or confused, or we struggle or we lose, Jesus walks beside us and says, "But I can give you my life." And you know, that's all that we need.

AMEN.