

Hillcrest Congregational UCC  
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Swirling Winds and Tossing Seas AND In the Boat Together  
Scripture Job 38:1-11, 40:1-14, (Mark 4: 35-41)

It's a good thing Jesus came along to save us from God isn't it?

I mean, look at the scriptures we heard today. A mighty God challenges Job from the midst of a whirlwind. Again we have the Charlton Heston as Moses/ Disney image. We can imagine Job with the wind whipping his hair, the water of an angry God roiling all around him.

God challenges him to gird up his loins like a man and shut in the sea, saying, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped.' If Job can do it, God would clap him on the back and acknowledge his victory. It sounds to me like the author of Job has made God a big bad guy- challenging Job to a duel, be a man, do all these things and prove your worth. But Job can't do that because he is only human.

So, like we saw in our earlier celebration, in Mark 4: 39, along comes Jesus with his disciples, sitting in a boat, and he jumps up, almost like Superman in his red cape and says, "Peace! Be still!" and saves them from peril on the angry seas. If we conflate these scriptures, thank goodness gentle Jesus came along to save us from the waves created by the mighty Creator God! A God who is so powerful and whose righteousness is so overwhelming, only his only son could jump in and hold back the tidal wave of our sins before God.

But I don't think that is what Jesus' message and ministry was about. So let us go back and look at these scriptures again. In fact, let us go all the way back to our invitation to worship printed in the bulletin. Adapted from Psalm 107, here we see a mighty Creator with wondrous works.

When the people went down to the sea in ships, God commanded and raised the stormy wind, the waves of the sea were lifted. The people's courage melted away and they were at their wit's end, just like the disciples in the boat. But when they cried out to God, God made the storm and the waves be still. Ah, now that's a God I can relate to.

But how do we reconcile that with the challenging God of Job? Job chapter 38, verse 1 says God answers Job out of a whirlwind. So the first thing we have to do is ask what question is it that Job has asked that God is answering?

The background to Job's story is that he is a good and faithful man and has received every blessing of God. Then, a member of God's heavenly council, the "Adversary" (the Satan), challenges God to prove that faith can stand up to adversity by allowing Job to be tested. Job loses his possessions and he contracts a painful and debilitating disease. His wife tells him to turn his back on God. Finally Job loses his entire family, but his faith is unshakable. He says in chapter 1 vs 21, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Job's friends come to advise him; perhaps he has not really been good enough or prayed hard enough. But this is all a lie. Job has been faithful to God. Yet, no matter how strong his faith, Job's lot keeps getting worse! After 36 chapters of torture, Job complains to God about God's indifference and asks God why misfortune has happened to him.

And in chapter 38 God answers from a whirlwind: a bunch of rhetorical questions. God tells Job, stand up like a man; answer the questions I put to you. Were you there when I created the earth? Are you God?

And you gotta give Job credit. He says in chapter 40 verse 4, "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I will not answer." Which I think means, "Gee thanks God, never mind." Job confirms what he suspected all along: he and his friends thought they knew God; now he realizes that they do not.

My father told me that he had difficulty with the book of Job. So I actually took a seminary class on the book. At the end of the class, I am not sure I had any better idea what to do with it than when I started. It presents a perspective on God that causes me consternation. I have to agree with Job, why do bad things happen to good people? Why would God allow that?

But you see, that question misses the point. Job and his friends had a certain viewpoint on God. I think the story represents a change in the understanding of God the "theologians" of that time.

I think the people thought that if they just sacrificed at a certain time, followed all the rules, pleased and appeased God, then God would do what they wanted. If they followed some of the rules, some of the time, they could get certain things from God. If they followed all of the rules all of the time like Job, then they should rightfully expect God to pour out the blessings.

Kind of like a vending machine God. If you have a whole dollar you can buy the big bag of chips. They set about to domesticate God. But the wisdom of Job says that isn't how it works. God will do and be what God will do and be; you cannot control God.

If you read all the way to the end, you will find that the book of Job has a happily ever after ending. Job gets back his health, possessions and a family- even better and bigger than before. God even chastises Job's friends for questioning Job's faith, and Job and God seem to have resumed their former good relationship with Job obeying a mighty Creator God.

But that still doesn't satisfy me. Not that I am not happy for Job, of course. But it is not the perspective of God that I have been taught or experienced. So let us climb back in the boat again with Jesus and the disciples. Mark 37 A great windstorm, the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat is being swamped. And there is Jesus in the stern, asleep on the cushion. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

In our lives we often feel like we are on a big ocean in boats way too small. And while Jesus understood that human experience, he asked, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" What Jesus is trying to point out with his question, and the purpose of the story about the calming of the sea, is to invoke the image of the psalm- God answers the people when they lose courage, God is there, God does not want us to be afraid of anything in life, even death. Look at it once more- what are the bookend blessings of the invitation to worship? God's steadfast love.

God does not cause or allow bad things. Things happen. It is the nature of creation, the nature of life and death. God wants for our good, for us to be empowered to be to who we were born to be to experience the fullness of life. When good things happen, God is there to rejoice with us. But bad things happen to good people. In the last two months we have had to say goodbye to two people who were very special and very loved by all of you, Alice Jensen and Randy Brunk. But I tell you, when bad things happen, when we lose someone we love, God is right here, holding us, and crying with us.

I know that this was the perspective that Jesus wanted to share with us about God. The reason I know that is because of the relationship he had with God. Jesus' image of God was not Job's mighty God. Jesus did not even call God Father. Jesus called God Abba- Daddy.

If we know that God is with us and God is in us and we are in God, then we know that there is nothing in this world that can ever separate us from God and God's love. I'd like to share a little song based on Romans 8:38-39.

If God is for us, who can be against, if the Spirit of God has set us free. If God is for us, who can be against, if the Spirit of God has set us free. I know that nothing in this world can ever take us from God's love.

If God is for us, who can be against, if the Spirit of God has set us free. If God is for us, who can be against, if the Spirit of God has set us free. I know that neither death nor life can ever take us from God's love.

Nothing in this life can separate us from God. Be not afraid, take courage, be bold. God is with us always! And by the way, the other blessing God has given us, we are all in the boat together!