

## Sharing God's Mission

Last week in our First Testament reading we heard Job asking “Where is God?” Today in our First Testament reading we hear God’s answer: “Everywhere.” After nearly thirty-five chapters of Job pressing God for an answer to the problem of his suffering, now, finally, out of the whirlwind, God speaks. And the answer God gives is not the answer Job expected.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” God says. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk; or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, ‘Here we are’? Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or provide for the raven its prey? Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind?”

Job expects an answer to the question of his suffering. But the answer God gives is a guided tour of Creation. Instead of zeroing in on Job and his problems, as Job would like, God gives Job a sweeping vision of the wonders of the universe, from the beginning of time to the movements of the weather, from the depths of the sea to the pinnacles of the sky, from the lifeways of animals to the mythical creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. God opens Job’s mind to witness all of this Creation, and everywhere God’s creativity making and sustaining and fulfilling life. Perhaps it’s God’s way of putting Job in his place, God’s way of saying to Job, “You see, in the midst of all this wonder, your problems really aren’t that important.”

Perhaps. But I think there’s something else going on here as well. God is not only putting Job in his place, but God is also inviting Job to share *God’s* place. By showing Job the mysteries of Creation, God is sharing with Job something human beings do not ordinarily have, God is letting Job in on the God’s-eye view of things. For a moment, Job sees the world as God sees it: as filled with creativity, as made with wisdom, as guided by God’s own mission to bring right relationships and well-being to all creatures. God puts wisdom in Job’s inward parts, and understanding in Job’s mind, and a sharing of creativity in Job’s spirit. And because of that sharing in divine creativity, Job is able to look again at his own suffering, and to see it in a bigger context, and to begin to transform it into something new. God makes Job a co-creator with God, to make Job’s little corner of Creation better. We’ll hear more about that in the First Testament reading next week.

But for now, I think the take-home message for us is that, just as God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, so also God speaks to *us* in Jesus, and, more specifically, God speaks to us in this liturgy, in this communion today. And just as God called Job to share in divine wisdom and divine creativity, so also God calls us to share in divine wisdom, and to let divine creativity dwell in us and move us to share in God’s mission of building up right relationships and mutual well-being and justice and peace and compassion and love and communion in all the world. We see that in today’s Gospel, when Jesus teaches his disciples—Jesus shares his wisdom with his disciples—Jesus teaches his disciples that his mission is not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom, as an instrument of freeing and liberating grace, for many. And in sharing his wisdom with his disciples, Jesus also calls them to share his mission, to become themselves the servants of all, to let their own lives be taken up into God’s creativity and made instruments of God’s liberating grace. James and John and the Ten are all called to share Jesus’ cup and baptism—the baptism of death that leads to new life, the cup of suffering that leads to communion—they are all called to share in Jesus’ mission in the world.

And it is that same teaching, that same wisdom, that same call the Gospel puts before us today. Like James and John, like Job, the good news for us this morning is that God speaks to us and shares

creativity with us, so that we might take our place in God's mission to make communion in the world.

And that message is especially directed to us today, as we begin our Stewardship Pledge Drive for 2010. I often make a distinction between *stewardship* and *pledging*. Stewardship is the Christian discipline of being mindful of all the ways we give, work, and pray to further God's mission in the world. Stewardship encompasses all we do with all we have all the time. Stewardship is a fundamental practice of the faithful life. Within the discipline of stewardship, pledging is what we do to give particular resources to the church so the church can do its work. Pledging means making a promise to give a regular amount to the church at regular times in the week or the month or the year. Pledging supports the budget, so that the budget can support the mission. Pledging is just one small part of stewardship; giving financial support to the church is just one small part of giving of ourselves to be in service with God. But pledging is a very *important* part of stewardship. Without pledging, the church would not have the resources it needs to bring us all together and coordinate our works of stewardship, so that we can all participate in God's mission in the world. Pledging and stewardship are both parts of how we work with divine creativity to build up communion in our corner of Creation.

Because when we pledge, when we give, that is God's creativity at work in us. So often in our stewardship talk we say things like "God has given so much to me; I feel like in gratitude I ought to give something back." And there is truth to that: being grateful for God's generosity is a good thing. We do it in every Eucharist. But I think it also goes deeper than that: I think that when we give, it is God's Spirit moving within our spirits, God's creativity motivating our generosity. I think giving is one single act—not two acts, God giving to us and then us giving back to God—but one act, God giving in and through and by means of our giving. God yearns, God longs to give justice and peace and compassion and abundance to this world—and we, you and I, and everyone in the church, are among God's chosen instruments to do that giving. *God* is the giver; and when we practice the spiritual discipline to attune ourselves to God, then we get to participate in God's giving. *God* has a mission of communion, and when we give ourselves to God, then we get to participate in God's mission. And all of that is reflected in how each of us makes our pledge.

Our pledge drive this year is going to be kind of short: two weeks. We begin today, with this message of God's creativity everywhere and our call to share as created co-creators in God's mission. Next Sunday afternoon we'll have our Pledge Party, when we'll reflect together how God calls Trinity to be in mission, and how God calls each of us to be in mission, and how Trinity's mission and our missions work together in God. Each week we'll have Stewardship Moments, when members of the congregation will share with us their thoughts on what Trinity and stewardship and mission mean to them. And finally, two weeks from today, on All Saints Day, we will make our commitments, we will place our pledges on the altar as outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace by which God empowers us all for the mission of communion. Throughout these two weeks we'll be asking for your prayerful consideration about how God moves you to give and pray and work for the spread of God's mission through Trinity. The pledge drive time is kind of short; but the meaning and the significance and the importance of this pledge drive goes a long way.

Our scriptures this morning give us a vision of the wonders of the universe, and everywhere God's creativity making and sustaining and fulfilling life, and ourselves called to be co-creators with God, giving of our livelihoods and our lives for the building up of God's communion in our corner of Creation. That is the mission to which we are called; that is the gift by which we give. Amen.