

Sunday, October 17, 2021 – Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Today's gospel starts with disciples obsessing over who will be closest to Jesus, leading to Jesus teaching his followers about God's take on importance and power. Here Jesus makes it explicit that the reversal of values in God's community is a direct challenge to the values of the dominant culture, where wielding power over others is what makes you great. When we pray "your kingdom come" we are praying for an end to tyranny and oppression. We pray this gathered around the cross, a sign of great shame transformed to be the sign of great honor and service.

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you turn your greatness into goodness for all the peoples on earth. Shape us into willing servants of your kingdom, and make us desire always and only your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Job 38:1-7 [34-41]

At the end of the book of Job, after Job and his companions have argued about the cause of the great suffering Job endures, God finally speaks. These verses begin that speech, which is a grand vision of creation, describing God's ordering of the cosmos and inviting Job to marvel at its beauty.

¹The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

²"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³Gird up your loins like a man,

I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

⁷when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

³⁴"Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,

so that a flood of waters may cover you?

³⁵Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go

and say to you, 'Here we are'?

³⁶Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,
or given understanding to the mind?

³⁷Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

³⁸when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cling together?

³⁹"Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

⁴⁰when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?

⁴¹Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?"

Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35b

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul; O LORD my God, you are | very great!
You are clothed with majes- | ty and splendor.

²**You wrap yourself with light as | with a cloak
and stretch out the heavens | like a tent.**

³You lay the beams of your chambers in the wa- | ters above;
you make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings | of the wind.

⁴**You make the | winds your messengers
and flames of | fire your servants.**

⁵You set the earth upon | its foundations,
so that from now until forever it shall nev- | er be moved.

⁶**You covered it with the deep as | with a garment;
the waters stood a- | bove the mountains.**

⁷At your rebuke the | waters fled,
scattered by your | voice of thunder.

⁸**They went up into the mountains and descended down | to the valleys,
to the place where | you assigned them.**

⁹You set the limits that they | should not pass;
never shall they return to cover the | earth again.

²⁴**How manifold are your | works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full | of your creatures.**

^{35b}Bless the LORD, | O my soul.
Hal- | lelujah!

Second Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10

Using imagery from scripture and from Jewish worship practices, Jesus is presented as the great high priest who was obedient to God's saving plan. Through his suffering and death he has become the source of eternal salvation.

¹Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

⁶as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:35-45

On the way to Jerusalem the disciples ask Jesus to grant them seats of honor. Jesus responds by announcing that he and his followers will “rule” through self-giving service.

³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴²So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Prayers of Intercession

Set free from sin and death and nourished by the word of truth, we join in prayer for all of God's creation, saying "Hear us, O God," and responding, "your mercy is great."

A brief silence.

Holy One, for the gift of the church handed down through the ages and for all who carry on the servant ministry of Jesus, we praise you. Send your Holy Spirit upon all who are discerning calls to ministry in its many forms and equip them with your gifts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating One, for the lush and abundant habitat you provide for all your creatures, we praise you. Provide healing for the earth so that waterfowl, reptiles, wild horses, dolphins, and all living things flourish as you intend. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Suffering One, for all who work toward peace and who lead nations with a servant's heart, we praise you. Bring justice for all who suffer violence, persecution, discrimination, hunger, poverty, and homelessness, and create places of refuge for all people. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Merciful One, for all who do the work of healing in mind, body, and spirit, we praise you. Surround and comfort all who struggle with depression, anxiety, cancer, diabetes, dementia, or any illness (*especially*), that all may be healed. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Sustaining One, for all who volunteer for the vitality of this congregation, we praise you. Strengthen and encourage greeters, ushers, office volunteers, bakers, counters, committee and group leaders, teachers, students, evangelists, singers, builders, nurturers, and all who serve with generous hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Risen One, we thank you for those who have shaped your church and shared your gospel. Through the witness of your saints (*especially Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch*), continue to inspire us with hope until we all are gathered at your eternal feast. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Confident that you hear us, O God, we boldly place our prayers into your hands; through Jesus Christ, our truth and life.

Amen.

A reflection for the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost...

Sharing in Your Glory: Success or Service?

“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Like James and John, we too are quick to assume that following Christ leads to success, power, and glory. Like James and John we ask for what we know and think we want—and we know that this world rewards success, power, and glory with even more of the same, and we want it! Yet Jesus turns our lust for success, power, and glory on its head: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” This servant leadership that finds power in self-giving is to be a hallmark of Christian community. For this servant-leadership is both modeled on and empowered by the living Jesus himself. His greatness is exactly in his humility, his strength is in his weakness, and his whole life is given a ransom for our sake. Indeed, Isaiah reminds us that “The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous.” Those who end up sitting at his right and left hand in his glory will not be the privileged and powerful, or even the disciples, who shrink back from sharing in his cup of suffering. Those at his right and left hand will be condemned criminals, crucified alongside him as he offers himself as a ransom for many. Likewise, those who will be great among us will be servants, finding Christ’s strength in their weakness and giving of themselves fully, following their Lord through failure, weakness, and shame into true and eternal glory.

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