

Sermon Transcript

The Rev. Canon Betsy Ivey

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Our readings this morning all seem to be pushing us into a better relationship with each other through our understanding of who God is, and what God intended that relationship to be.

The reading from Job is part of what sounds like a legal examination of a defendant in a trial. In this case, the examiner is God, and the defendant is Job, or us. This examination began with Job's testimony of God in Job 37, a pretty good testimony by my estimation, but I think that's where God took issue with Job's testimony of God. God's judgment is that Job cannot give testimony of God, no human can, because we do not have and cannot have and will never have sufficient knowledge of God to be able to testify about God.

As one who is prophetic in their preaching and loves a good legal argument, I am tickled by what I call God's 'closing argument' that begins in Job 38.4 I love how God opens his statement with "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." And God knows that Job doesn't, and try as we might to understand it through our scientific brilliance over the millennia, we are still trying to nail down the exactitude of the 'foundation of the earth'.

God knows that we cannot know what God knows. We are often like the ostrich that foolishly perils the birth of its young thinking we're doing the right thing by them by burying our eggs in the warm earth where they will incubate, but where they will, also, be in danger of being destroyed. God does not judge us for not knowing about the danger but thinking that we can explain the God who knows that we are inclined to do foolish things. God's so-called wrath is fomented when we think and act like we know better than God, listening to Satan and the others who fell from grace for rebuking God's sovereignty, the Satan Jesus likened Peter to in our reading of Mark a few Sundays ago. Jesus got angry with Peter for choosing to think from an earthly perspective, that of the ostrich, rather than from a divine perspective. We cannot be God but we can surely try to be the best of who God intended us to be. For when we think only from an earthly perspective we are going to think only of ourselves.

God didn't create us to think only of ourselves. God created all the flora and the fauna before God created us to take care of this earthly garden. Our thinking of ourselves came into being anthropomorphically through our interaction with the rest of God's creation. Our relationship to the earth wasn't as kind to us as God thought it was going to be, thus we developed the tendency to look out for us first. The Genesis story of the humans eating from the tree of knowledge is the description of the result of the development of our self-serving tendencies. The Bible, indeed is a theological expose of the result and outcomes of these tendencies to think only of ourselves when God created us to think of all else. But, unlike with the ostrich, God didn't let us off the hook. God knew we could do better, and sent Jesus to show us how.

I think we 20th and 21st century Western-thinking folk have had a problem with Jesus' teachings about wealth because we have interpreted Jesus as being against wealth. Our issues with him about wealth are a misinterpretation of what he is saying. In today's Gospel and the similar response Jesus gives in Matt 19, about how to get to heaven if you're rich, Jesus is not saying you have to give up your means of becoming wealthy. He gets angry with the heir in today's reading because he is concerned about himself. The sin is to hold onto the abundance of wealth, the extra you've stored away in the face of those who are dying. When we are out of relationship with each other, when we think of ourselves first, we are spiritually dead. We see this allegorically, says this non-literal reader of the Bible, with the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts of the Apostles. When they decided not to be in relationship with the others of our first church, they may as well have died. The New Covenant was stringent and not one to be played with: either you are with God or you're not. In the face of being 'the new belief on the block', they had to be stringent about taking care of each other. They had to model giving greater meaning to that which they had been given by living into God's original plan that they do so. They went back to the divine plan, to 'the foundation of the earth' to form their practice, and there was no room for deviation from doing what was good for all.

Peter finally got it, this thinking divinely. We need to 'get it', too. I look at all the things that I have accumulated since moving into my house eight years ago. My basement alone has me looking for the feet of the two young men at my door. I need to give stuff away, and rethink how I use my disposable

income to benefit more than myself. My interpretation of Jesus not being against wealth is not self-serving because some of us have the ability to make wealth and some of us don't, and those that don't should not be judged for their inability, but given that which they need to help them to live fully humanity, too.

It would be divine if the world would ascribe to not holding onto things that belong to God, and agree to use the things God gave us to take care of each other as God originally planned. St. Francis of Assisi followed the divine precept of not needing to hold onto what God had given us but to care for it in such a way that we are all cared for. SF: "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Our abundance has convinced us that giving so that others may have is impossible. I purport that it is not. The areas of our world that are dying because we are holding onto that which is not ours but God's bears the witness to not understanding God. We haven't figured it out, we don't get God yet. I can't say given the state of the world now that we even have the foolish well-meaning of the ostrich. But, we can be better humans, we can do better. God created us beyond our understanding of ourselves and gave us the benefit of the doubt, Jesus, to help us to understand ourselves better. We have been foolish in thinking we understand God. We will better understand God if we take care of each other and all that God has created for us. Amen.