



“HUMILITY, MYSTERY, POETRY”

SCRIPTURE: JOB 38:1-11

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, June 23, 2024

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

Job 38:1-11

Isabel: A reading from the Book of Job. Hear the Word of God.

And we say together...

ALL: OUR EARS AND HEARTS ARE OPEN.

38:1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

38:2 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

38:3 Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 38:5 Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 38:6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone

38:7 when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

38:8 "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?--38:9 when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, 38:10 and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, 38:11 and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped"?

(Sing in unison at the end of the reading)

We are listening, We are listening; Spirit speak to us

What is the sound of holiness,
The ethereal song of the poet of the world
Quiet, deafening, vacant, pregnant
Thick, rich, quickening, ever so patient
Like the plaintive moan of the bow
Soothing the cello string
Or the underwater chorus of
Ancient whales harmonizing
With the depths of family, dark
Beautiful, free,
flowing, growing

Swelling toward the edges of
Our imaginations.

Holy is not made
For sentences completed, ended
By imposed orderliness
Sliced and diced up to fit our
Tiny idea of a God who
Authorizes our sad lust
For control, patrolling the landscape
For more, for a score that the
Universe never counted, never
Mounted in our favor, never
Never, never, did we ever stop
The feverish race for meaning
And just ride the waves of mystery
long enough to drink the
Elixir of humility, the magic of
Poetry—the wisdom of fragments
The beauty of the incomplete
The magnificence of knowing
margins of our errors, the
Freedom of consecrating our terrors
The awe of leaving room for God
To speak, to tweak the things we
Think we know, the things we think
We grow, claim to have made, mark
The stones we've laid—the debts we've paid
In the rush to be something, someone
God never asked us to be.

Listen, shhhh.
Do you hear the textures of quiet?
Of still? Of unknowing, of ungrowing
Our quests and our tests, our
Seemingly endless requests.

Let there be darkness,
Let there be shadow,
Make room for the empty,

For the never to be found
Let there be space, let
This void be a familiar place
This nothing is everything
It's our teacher, our friend
This nothing coaxes us to
Embrace and release
the meanings we make
It removes our eyes' scales
So we know what's at stake.
This black hole of comprehension is
Where we meet God—
the beyond,
the immersive here, now

Words are suggestion,
not description
Words are tiny fish in a
Sea of mystery, mercy, love
Divine, excelling, rebelling,
Dwelling in the caverns of our
Hunger and thirst for tenderness
worth trusting, worth resting
In the Beauty we only
Glimpse in unguarded wonder,
From nascent amazement
Bundled in latent insights of our
Place, the utter grace, of
Our genealogy, the primal
Waters of our beginnings

Language was not our birthright
But born of necessity
A tapestry woven in time
Unique in cadence, rhythm, rhyme
Words were born in shared
Need, in desire for freed
Misunderstanding.
Words gestated stories
Yearning to wrap us in

Blankets of meaning,
In the impulse for screening,
Scanning the horizon for
Safety, for friendship,
For home.

Words began in agreement
In mimicry, in docility
In reciprocity, in collaborative
Curiosity.

As words came of age
Some happened upon the
Temptations of pomposity,
Virtuosity, animosity, and
Oh the fictional explosion of
Religiosity.

Words have saved lives
And words have taken them, too
Words have ennobled, words have
Troubled, words have soothed and
Inspired the people grown tired
Of the lies words can cement
Of the endless cause for lament

Words have power, they can
Make us cower under the threat
Of make it stop,
of I'll do anything if you'll just...

Words trail off when life is too much
Only groans and murmurs,
Hushed despair, air thick
With stones of sorrow
Laid on our chest—no rest
No contest, no behest, no
Confession, but arrested
Expression

It is not only sorrow or terror
Than can disarm our chattering,
Our desperate mattering, our
Splattering of words on pages
In hopes of finding something
We can hold onto when
Time runs out.

These words—all the sounds,
All their power, all their
Suggestion, all our ingestion,
These blood fables of our
Importance,
of our compostability,
These jagged accusations of
Our culpability, of our susceptibility

These soft, round pillows of our
Comfort, of our penchant
For sweet respite in phrases
Turning the cogs of our zeal
For true affection and care
For love that takes risks
And slows down, for fidelity
That is unbound by propriety
Or sobriety, but that
Has dreamed in the color
of Elysian joy,
The intoning of Divine
Secrets, all will be well,
Everything, all things
Will be well.

Sweet sojourners on the way
This poetry, this mystery,
This humility
This is why words should not
Become gods, this is why
Words welcome play,
They thrive in fresh resonance

In the thrill of trying again
In the improvisation of
Healing, feeling, wailing,
The inhale and exhale,
The unveil.
The protection, the inflection
This genealogy of words is
Why we must take care of each other
Why we must not hide behind
Tradition, or familiar rendition
Or simple recitation without
Elucidation of the impact
Of clinging to words that
Were never meant to stay
Forever, that were never
Built for undying deference
They were always gentle reference
Fleeting preference.

The life of faith is the wisdom
Of (un)grasping the grip of
False deities that trap us
In harm, that forget our humanity,
That feed more insanity than
Nourish capacity for a world
That doesn't have to hurt this much.

Faith is the urge to create,
To gestate mysterious possibility,
Promising agility
Faith dissipates fragility
It refines malleability
Faith feasts on creativity
And resists captivity
To Imperial delusion
To greed's confusion
Faith tends to the hurt
And teaches us the promise
Of hope that does not grasp,
That does not cling

To the thing that became
A weapon for shame.
Language is a tool,
Not the identified patient
Words are instruments
That can induce a more
Life-giving arrangement

It's not words on a page
That will save us
That will free us from
The captivity of our impaired
Humanity
No, our birthright if not language,
it is creativity
Which is exceedingly distinct from
Productivity.

We inherit the promising play
That can birth new worlds,
New days, new ways
Of saying to love's family
let's try again.

Thanks be to God.