

**Sermon by the Rev. Bollin M. Millner, Jr.
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Job 38:1-7, (34-41)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements-- surely you know! Or 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? " "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'? Who has put wisdom in the inward parts, or given understanding to the mind? Who has the wisdom to number the clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens, when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?"

Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But 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?" They 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; but 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."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So 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. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

I am sure you know the story of King Midas. It comes out of Greek mythology but it is perhaps best known to us through Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Book of Wonder for Boys and Girls" that was published in 1853. But Midas is granted his wish, that everything he touch might turn to gold. At first he rejoiced in his power, however, things began to get difficult. He saw his "food grow rigid and his drink harden into golden ice."¹ And in Hawthorne's version, when Midas touched his daughter, she turned to gold as well. This story has many lessons to tell. And one of those lessons is, "Be careful what you wish for."

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midas>

In today's gospel two of Jesus' disciples are making a wish, asking a favor of Jesus. James and John ask, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Now, they aren't asking for something that would turn out to be a curse, far from it. At the same time, they don't really have a clue what they are asking.

Last week in my sermon at Shrine Mont I talked about how in the Bible time is divided into the present age and the age to come. In the present age, though there is much to celebrate, it is also marked by sin and death. In the age to come, God's justice and love are fully realized, there is a new heaven and a new earth, where death is no more. It is radically new and different.

James and John's outlook is formed by the present age. The present age is about power and domination. It is about patronage and keeping people in your debt. It is about lusting after gold. It is about the seats of honor. They think Jesus is going to have all the power and privilege you could want when he comes to glory and they want to sit right there.

Who can blame them for thinking that way. I mean, go to a dictionary right now and look up "glory." You will find it means "praise, honor or distinction extended by common consent." Glory is "something that secures praise or renown. (Like the) glory of a brilliant career."²

Glory is earning a million dollars. Glory is climbing Mount Everest. Glory is jumping out of a plane at the very edge of space and landing on your feet. Glory is quarterback Robert Griffin III running 76 yards to score a touchdown. We know what glory is. James and John know what glory is. Well, we know what glory means in current usage.

But Jesus is the start of the new age, and everything is turned upside down. The cross is his glory. This is not an honor or distinction. It is degrading, sadistic and violent. You will not find it in the dictionary. Under the definition of glory, there will not be the phrase: "See death on the cross!" And yet, Jesus claims it as "glory."

How can this be? Well, let's look around us. We know that there is great beauty in this world, in its people and in the natural world. We also know there is great degradation and sin. Often we wonder why there is such inhumanity in the world. Why people hate and kill each other. Why we oppress one another. The Chinese and the Japanese are currently at each other's throats. The English and the Irish have a history of conflict.

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glory>

Mexico is falling into chaos due to drug wars driven in no small part by our insatiable appetite and abuse of mind altering chemicals. And what about the Middle East and parts of the Arab world?

Christianity doesn't have an answer as to why these things happen, other than that to say, sin is real. And God, doesn't answer our philosophical questions about good and evil. He just sends the whirlwind and tells us to be quiet. I suspect God commands silence because the answers to the questions we ask are beyond our ability to comprehend. And not only that, God knows, answers don't necessarily change things.

God doesn't give us a complete answer as to "why" there is suffering. What God does is take it on, He takes it to himself. God enters in, and that is better than any answer or theory.

That is why the cross is Jesus' glory. At that moment, God in Christ, stretches out loving arms to embrace all the suffering of the world past, present and future. God is in the midst of it all. God is working his purpose out, to turn it all over, to set it all right. And that is glory and it happens at the cross of our Lord.

Peter Gomes, the pastor of Harvard University, at the time of the 9-11 attacks held a service in the chapel there. Churches always fill up when there is a crisis. A student shouted out, "Where was God when the towers went down." And Gomes shouted back, "Where were you?!"

God in Christ went down with the towers, and with everyone in them. God was there at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania. That is the glory of the cross.

And you see, the cross is the turning point. Through it came resurrection. Through it came the dawning of a new age. The old rules no longer apply. Whoever would be great but be a servant. Whoever would be first, must be a slave of all.

The New Age is coming, it has begun in Jesus, in the glory of the cross and it is inevitable. As we look around, with the eyes of faith, with cross shaped glasses, we see glory in amazing places.

I think I saw it this past week in a 14 year old girl in Pakistan who stood up to the Taliban and in favor of education for girls and women and was shot and almost killed for saying this. The Taliban says it will try again to kill her as soon as they get the chance. What is it about women that inspires such fear and hatred? It has been going on forever and all over the world. But thanks be to God for that brave girl. And thanks be to God for the thousands of peaceful protesters who filled the streets to support the witness of that young girl. And in that I see glory.

We can also see the glory of the cross much closer to home, in the way we give our money away. You know, in the present age, wealth is to be accumulated. The person who dies with the most toys wins. Wealth is for my personal enjoyment, to insulate me from problems and from other people, if need be. It is all about my entertainment, prestige, leverage and happiness. It is about control.

But for us, as pilgrims who walk the way of the cross, glory is not in the accumulation of wealth, but in the letting go of it. We do not aspire to be on a segment of “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.”

Rather we reflect Jesus’ glory by sacrificial giving. That can take many forms, and for many, the tithe, giving away 10% of our income each year, has been a gracious guide and pointed the way to the foot of the cross.

But regardless, it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Faithful stewardship is the means by which we get in touch with that radical reality of the glorious cross and claim it as our own.

Can I tell you a secret? Thinking about the cross as glory scares me to death. Thinking about taking up my cross makes me want to run away. Jesus’ way seems so unnatural sometimes. It doesn’t make sense. I am afraid so often. I can fear writing that check and giving it away. I am afraid to focus my time and talents around a new age I can’t see as clearly as I’d like. I am afraid to build my life around a future that the world thinks is ridiculous and doesn’t believe is going to happen for one minute.

And in those moments I know that Jesus looks at me and loves me. He reaches out and says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest.” And every time I let go of my fears and trust, I learn once again, Jesus is the way, and the truth and the life. I forget all about wanting a Midas touch and feel once again Christ’s touch, from the cross, giving life to the world. Amen.