

**Comments**      **Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost**      **October 20, 2024**

*These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.*

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**Job 38:1-7,(34-41)**

NRSV

Job has complained of God's indifference and injustice to him; he has asked why his misfortune happened. He has pleaded that God hear him, answer him. Now God, appearing in a "whirlwind" (as he does elsewhere in the Old Testament) answers him by asking him rhetorical questions. First he asks: *who are you to doubt, in your ignorance, the sum total of my plans and works? Stand up like a man; answer the questions I put to you* (vv. 2-3). Our reading is only a small part of God's speech. He asks five main questions: (1) Were you present at creation? (2) Do you know your way around the cosmos? (3) Would you know how to operate it? (4) Would creation and creatures obey your commands? and (5) Are you capable of providing for animals and birds?

Question 1, vv. 4-15, has three parts: earth, sea and light. In vv. 4-7, "earth" is pictured as a building: who were the architect (v. 5a) and the surveyor (v. 5b)? Who laid the foundations ("bases", v. 6a)? "Who laid its cornerstone?" On this festive occasion, the "stars sang" (v. 7) and God's heavenly court rejoiced. Now for Question 4 (vv. 34-38): even if you gave the right orders, would they be carried out? Only God has the "wisdom", the combination of great knowledge and experience, to have the "clouds", etc. obey him. (People believed that a set of pudding bowls covered the earth; here rain is stored in "waterskins", v. 37. V. 38 describes the effects of rain.) Question 5 is in 38:39-39:30. Nine creatures are described. Can Job care for them and nourish them as the creator does? The last, the war horse, is the most amazing of all.

After God's speech, Job says: "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? ... I will not answer" (40:4-5). God's appearance has invalidated the very basis of Job's complaint. He is at last able to articulate what he has been suspecting all along: he and his friends thought they understood the world; now he realizes that they do not. And so his complaint against God evaporates.

**Psalms 104:1-9,25,35b**

NRSV

This psalm is a hymn of praise to God, the creator. Vv. 2-4 tell of the creation of the heavens and vv. 5-9 of the earth. To the ancients, "light" (v. 2) was a *thing*, so likening it to a "garment" made sense. God built his heavenly dwelling on the chaotic (unruly, disordered) "waters" (vv. 2b-3a). The hot wind in v. 4 is the sirocco, a desert wind from the east; the "wind" (v. 3c) brings rain clouds from the sea; both are under God's control. People saw the earth as a disk supported by pillars ("foundations", v. 5). Before God's creative acts, the "waters" (v. 6) covered the earth. God chased away chaos, bringing order; he restricted the waters to the mountain tops (as snow) and the "valleys" (v. 8, as rivers). He will never again permit the waters to cover the earth (v. 9) and all that lives (vv. 10-18): creatures

depend on him for their very existence (vv. 27-30). God's "works" (v. 24) are countless. He has made them "in wisdom", with perfection of design and ethic, absolute integrity, truth and beauty. Praise the Lord!

**Hebrews 5:1-10**

NRSV

The author has told us that "we have a great high priest" (4:14) who has been raised to heaven, namely "Jesus, the Son of God". Now he compares the high priests of Judaism with Christ.

People chose a high priest to lead, on their behalf, in matters relating to God, especially the offering of sacrifices for sins. (The author writes as though the Temple sacrificial system still exists.) A high priest was able to "deal gently" (v. 2, to steer a right path between pure emotion and lack of feeling) with those who committed unpremeditated sins because he himself sinned in this way, being "subject to weakness"; he needed to make sacrifice for his own sins too. He did not appoint himself; rather, he was appointed by God, as Aaron was (v. 4).

Christ was also appointed by God – at his baptism, when God said: "You are my Son ..." (v. 5). Christ also fulfills Psalm 110:4 (v. 6): unlike other high priests, he is "priest forever". He ranks with "Melchizedek", the Canaanite priest who brought bread and wine to Abram, and blessed him. (In 7:2, Melchizedek is said to resemble the Son of God.) During his earthly life ("the days of his flesh", v. 7), Jesus prayed to God in anguish (at Gethsemane) to the one who would "save him from death", i.e. resurrect him (bring him back to life). Because of his proper respect ("reverent submission"), the Father heard him. Although already God's Son (v. 8), he learned a needed human trait, obedience, through suffering. His work of salvation complete ("made perfect", v. 9), he, as eternal priest, offers salvation forever to all the obedient, the faithful. He is high priest forever.

**Mark 10:35-45**

NRSV

Earlier (in 9:33-34) the disciples have argued about which of them is the greatest. Now two members of the inner circle ask a favour of Jesus: they seek positions of special dignity at the messianic banquet in heaven at the end of time (v. 37). Jesus answers: *you do not know the implications of what you ask*. In the Old Testament, one's "cup" (v. 38) is one's lot assigned by God, be it blessing or condemnation. Here, Jesus is speaking of his suffering and death. To be baptised with Jesus' baptism is to share fully in God's ways. James and John confidently answer *yes* (v. 39) and accept all the consequences. Only the Father knows whom he has called to special places in the kingdom.

Jesus tells all the disciples: pagan authority depends on power and force (v. 42) but for disciples, it is different (v. 43): to be "great" now and in the kingdom ("become", v. 43 and "be", v. 44) one must serve others; to be "first", one must serve even more humbly, as a "slave". Jesus, the "Son of Man" (v. 45), in his voluntary abasement, is the example: he gave even his life for the freedom of others, gaining their release from punishment and death for their sins.