

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 7 – Year B – 6.20.21

Job 38:1-11, Psalm 107:1-3,23-32, 2 Corinthians 6: 1-13, Mark 4:35-41

A Message for Father's Day, Bill Skubi

This is not the first time I have preached to you, but always before I cheated by using the “super power” of searching the lectionary in advance and choosing a Sunday with plenty of time to prepare and scriptures of my choosing.

I got a little puffed up when Joan asked me on short notice to preach on Father's Day. Once I realized this effectively canceled my ‘super power’ I panicked.

The more I tried to draw a message out of these scriptures the worse it got. My stumbling block was firmly rooted in the difficulty I have with the patriarchal underpinnings of our scripture, faith and theology.

Just as our Bishop has beseeched us into covenant against racism, so have thousands of years patriarchal cultural, religious, and political practice provided cover for rape, harassment, oppression, trafficking, and exploitation of fully one-half of all fellow human beings. On a personal level I am also aware that few people have uncomplicated relationships with their earthly fathers.

My prayers were answered in conversation this week with two men, both fathers, one who believes not a word of our scriptures, and another and the other who believes every word quite literally.

First, I will introduce you to my cousin Alan. six cousins were born to my mother and her two sisters in a six-year span between 1945-51, then seven years later the stork brought my kid cousin Alan to Aunt Mavis in Kansas. When Alan was 6 or seven years-old he charmed us by declaring he was going to be a pro quarterback like Bart Starr, or a rock star like Mick Jagger.

When I recalled this in our conversation this week Alan dryly remarked, “Well that didn't work out so well.”

In the year 2000 Alan paid us a visit on Whidbey Island. He had just been to Hanford where he and a team of scientists were working on the LIGO Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory. The team had built, at great time and expense two, two and a half mile long tunnels one at Hanford and one in Louisiana with instrumentation so precise it could measure the change in distance between mirrors at either end to a fraction of the width of a proton one of the building blocks of a single atom. The observatory became operational in 2002 and for eight years Alan studied the resulting data, and no gravitational waves were detected. The LIGO instrumentation was rebuilt between 2010 and 2014 to make the most sensitive observatory ever built 10

times more sensitive. Within days of operation with the enhanced detectors, on September 14, 2015, at Hanford WA and Livingston LA confirmed the world's first detection of gravitational waves. The gravitational waves detected that day were caused by the collision of two Black holes nearly 1.3 Billion light years away.

Like you I may have looked at the pictures and tried to read the text of one of Stephen Hawking's coffee table books, but if I told you, I can only imagine what my cousin Alan has been doing, thinking and writing about for the last 20 years I would be lying, I am an intelligent person with a relatively good imagination and I simply cannot fathom the work he does. In our Old Testament reading from Job when God asks Job,

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.

Who determined its measurements – surely you know!"

Of course, I am humbled to read this, the same words spoken to cousin Alan are a challenge to get to work.

Were Alan's son to ask me the age-old question, "What does my dad do all day?" I could honestly answer him, 'Oh he's just trying to find out what his Heavenly Father has been doing the last 2 billion years.'

Who am I to say that Alan's lack of Church involvement detracts in anyway from the righteousness of his life's work? After all the holy scripture records another group of stargazers outside our religious tradition who were among the first to recognize the importance of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

And then there is the uncanny "coincidence" that my cousin Alan's last name is Wiseman.

So far so good, but two days ago with this message only one quarter written I decided to clear my thoughts by taking the dog for a walk in the woods. As we were entering a three-acre clearing known for its blackberries I was roused by the sound of children's voices. A troupe of four or five young children were accompanied by my Neighbor Carolyn and her dog Diva, and Cory, the children's father. Jan and I had been in a neighborhood couples bible study where we met and got to know Cory. Equally intent in searching the meaning of scriptures Cory and I sometimes butted heads over his more literal approach. I would stand my ground that it was only after wrestling with God that Jacob and his tribe become known as Israel (a word that means, wrestles with God.) Differences in exegesis aside Cory and I are brothers in Christ who uphold one another in prayer. So, when he crossed the field to talk with me the first thing I asked him was to pray for me this morning.

Cory is an EMT, following rules and procedures, with excellent training and faith in God, and the ability to exercise good judgement moment to moment in a crisis is exactly what you want in an emergency first responder.

I shared with Cory what I had been thinking about the Psalm and Gospel reading, essentially the same story about being saved from angry seas, with the Gospel story personalized with Jesus present in the boat. I admit my thoughts were half baked and made no mention of Jesus chiding his disciples for lack of faith. Cory thought this a most important point that Jesus in wanting to share salvation with his disciples especially wanted them to share the faith that he had in his father, as if to say, "Yes, I saved you, but I saved you to have faith in God, and share your faith as I have shared my faith with you." This is such an act of fatherhood, brotherhood, and friendship.

So there, God had answered my prayer for explication of three of four of today's reading and I was left standing alone in a clearing in the woods, alone except for our recently rescued dog, Echo, on a leash. And the inspiration for the final part of my message comes by way of this unusual source. We keep Echo mostly on a leash when we go walking because even at a spry 11 years-old she has a capable nose and powerful prey instincts. Once off on a scent she will not hear me call even if in line of sight and only a few yards away. If I let her off leash for part of our woodland walk, still she seems almost relieved even thankful when I leash her up before reaching her special hot hunting corner, to spare her temptation.

Echo has been with us less than 6 months and we are still working on strengthening the bond of trust and pack order between us. Jan is something of a dog whisperer and sometimes when we get flummoxed trying to understand our own relationship with God, we often ask how this relates in comparison with our relationship with our dog. This thought occurred to me as I was walking Echo and trying to coax a message out Of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians beginning,"

'As we work together with Christ, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

This quote from Isaiah was for Paul the word of God, at the time he wrote this his writings were not scripture just letters to a church.

And it occurred to me that I could address this quote from Isaiah to Echo.

‘When you needed a home I listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have taken you to live with us and put your dog bed on the floor.’

Then it was clear to me the big idea Paul was given through the Holy Ghost, and the reason his letters have become scripture is this:

The one and only creator of the universe has only one begotten child, all the rest of us may become children of God in only one way, by adoption through the freely given grace of god’s only begotten son who died for us.

We are all rescues, there is no way to be pure bred into the family of God, not even Episcopalians, we are all adopted. The saying so true that God has many children but no grandchildren.

The rest of this portion of Paul’s letter is about the hard but joyful work of church building, and as it applies to us, church rebuilding. Let us expect that the Holy Spirit will be blowing hard through these halls in the months ahead. Opportunities we could never have imagined may come our way, doors will open, and other doors will shut, such a holy haunting that some of you may actually join me in reviving the old Holy Ghost.

Throughout any and all changes ahead, let us continue to be a welcoming church where a person whom God may be calling away from religious skepticism into faith, and a person of strong and committed saving faith in Jesus troubled by the noise of prejudice and intolerance both can find a home among us.

And this we fervently pray in Jesus’ holy name, Amen