

**‘Turning the world upside down’
A reflection for One World Week
Rev’d. Tanya Stormo Rasmussen
21 October, 2012
Job 28:1-7
Mark 10:35-45**

Both of our readings this morning involved setting men straight on what God is up to, and how we’re meant to view the world.

It’s easy, when you’ve experienced a great loss or something tragic has happened to you that you can’t explain, to feel that you’ve gotten an unfair deal. We’re very consumed with fairness as human beings, aren’t we? It’s a little mystifying, how tiny children, toddlers even, will shout, ‘No fair!!’ when they sense that things aren’t going their way, or that somehow they’re being disadvantaged, or not getting what they want or deserve. I don’t recall ever teaching our boys about the concept of fairness, but they sure knew how to identify from very early days when things didn’t feel fair to them!

How much longer, though, does it take human beings to show outrage and umbrage when *others* aren’t treated fairly? The concept of justice—of justice that extends to others and to the earth itself—is one that we have a long way to go in teaching from the earliest ages on up through adulthood. That’s one of the aims of One World Week.

I suspect that James and John thought they were doing a little bit of strategic planning when they approached Jesus. They were behaving just as people who want to be successful in the world would do, scoping out their prize and letting the Master know what it is that they were aiming for. They claimed they were even willing to undergo whatever it was that Jesus would have to do. . . they sensed his greatness, and they were prepared to do what it took to emulate it. But, as Jesus pointed out, they didn’t know what they were talking about. He went on to talk about true greatness, and how the greatest of all would be the servant of all. Not quite what the disciples expected, nor the kind of ‘fair treatment’ they had hoped for in their forward planning!

Job, as we know from hearing bits and pieces of his story across the past several weeks, had not given in to what everyone else suggested he should do, according to the world’s ways of relating to God in the midst of a major crisis of unjustified loss. His wife said he should just curse (or bless, depending on how you translate it) God and die. And his friends all said that he should repent of his sin before God—just own up to whatever he’d done, because surely he’d done something to deserve his miserable lot.

Both Job’s wife and his friends represent the typical human responses to theodicy. But Job wasn’t content to just accept what had happened. He decided the only way he was going to be able to live with himself and in relationship with God, was to demand an answer.

Good for him! I think that if Job’s story is meant to teach us anything, it’s that God is big enough to take our anger and our demands for an answer—and God actually appreciates a person who will engage God that way, rather than remaining mute and disengaged.

God’s response to Job could sound as though it’s a royal dressing-down; depending on the tone and demeanor with which it gets read, it sound really scathing, and belittling to Job. But I think that the voice in the whirlwind intended to help Job see how, having been influenced by his friends and his wife, and having given himself over to some self-pity, he had lost sight (or had had his

vision skewed) of the bigger picture—if he could ever have really seen it—which was that the world around him, whether his wealth or the beauty of nature, or the amazing ways in which the earth provided for him and his family, was not all about him at the end of the day. Job’s success in everything had nothing to do with his own creativity or endeavours—it was always all about God’s creativity and God’s project. And our lesson today aims to help Job zoom his perspective out just a bit, to consider the grand sweep of everything going on in creation. . . . to realise it wasn’t just him and his family, and the people and material things that mattered to him. The point is, the grand storyline about life is all about something much, much greater than my life or yours.

One World Week challenges us to remember this. It’s easy, in the day-to-day routines that most of us establish, to begin to think that we understand this world and what’s going on; we begin to entertain notions that we can ultimately be in charge, by eyeing what we want and going for it like the disciples did.

But in fact, scripture tells us over and over again, we understand little, and we so often get it wrong.

When we set our own agendas aside, and instead look after God’s children and the rest of the earth—when we take a moment to step back and contemplate God’s broader agenda in the sweep of history and in this day and age—we begin to understand that it’s not all about us. Even if we should lose everything, we gain what’s really important when we’re paying attention to God’s agenda.

But make no mistake: when we’re doing God’s will and following the divine agenda, it often looks and feels to much of the world around us that it’s an upside-down approach to life.

[Our next hymn says a little more about this. Please stand and sing together hymn number 90]

O Lord, all the world belongs to you
and you are always making all things new.
What is wrong you forgive,
and the new life you give
is what’s turning the world upside down.

The world’s only loving to its friends,
but your way of loving never ends,
loving enemies too;
and this loving with you
is what’s turning the world upside down.

The world lives divided and apart,
you draw us together, and we start
in our friendship to see
that in harmony we
can be turning the world upside down.

The world wants the wealth to live in state,
but you show a new way to be great;
like a servant you came,
and if we do the same,
we’ll be turning the world upside down.

O Lord, all the world belongs to you
and you are always making all things new.
What is wrong you forgive,
and the new life you give
is what's turning the world upside down.

(Patrick Appleford)

**Wheatley United Reformed Church
Order of Service
Sunday, 21 October 10 a.m.
One World Week**

Prelude

Entrance

Call to Worship (adapted from Job 28) (at www.rev-o-lution.org)

Where can wisdom be found? Where is the place of understanding?

God knows the way to it, and God will lead us there.

Where does wisdom come from? Where is the place of understanding?

Leaving the ways of evil, and walking in the ways of God.

The wisdom of the world tells me to seek my own path and success.

The wisdom of Christ tells me to serve and love others.

Leave the wisdom of the world behind, and let us follow God!

Let us walk in the ways of God's wisdom: love, justice, and peace! Let us worship our God!

Hymn 187 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness'

Prayer of Adoration and Approach: *Mediation on Psalms 104 & 124*

(Psalms 104:1-4) Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. (Psalms 104:24-28) O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Prayer of Confession: (at www.rev-o-lution.org)

Only Wise God, we confess that we have mistaken the foolishness of the world for wisdom. We have sought our own gain and have left others behind. We have ignored the homeless on the street to get to work on time. We have withheld funds from the poor in order to save for our own rainy day. Forgive us for our foolishness. Call us into Your wisdom, modeled by Christ: to be last of all and servant of all, to welcome into our lives those whom we encounter, to seek the well-being of the last and the least. May we hear Your voice of wisdom, which calls out in our daily lives. In the name of our Christ and the Spirit of

Wisdom, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon:

The Spirit of Wisdom from God reminds us that we can always turn back, we can always start again, we are always given the gift of new life. You are forgiven, loved, renewed and restored. Go and live for God and for others, following the Way of Christ. Amen.

Introduction to the Theme: One World Week activity **Robert Harding**

Hymn 654 ‘We turn to you, O God of every nation’

Old Testament Lesson: Job 38:1-7 **Catherine Harding**

New Testament Lesson: Mark 10:35-45

Reflection/Sermon: We think we understand, we think we’re in charge—we understand little, and we so often get it wrong. When we set our own agendas aside, and instead look after God’s children and the rest of God’s earth, we begin to understand that it’s not all about us. Even if we lose everything, we gain what’s really important when we’re paying attention to God’s agenda. But when we’re doing God’s will and following the divine agenda, it often looks and feels to others that it’s an upside-down approach to life.

Hymn 90 ‘O Lord, all the world belongs to you’ (“The world wants the wealth to live in state, but you show a new way to be great: like a servant you came, and if we do the same, we’ll be turning the world upside down.”)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Notices

Invitation to Offering and Communion

Offertory: Taize Chant (projected onto screen)

A Moment of Silent Prayer

Doxology

Celebration of the Lord’s Supper

Breaking the Bread and Sharing the Cup

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Hymn 500 ‘Jesus, united by thy grace’

Benediction

Postlude