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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? ~Job 38:1-7, (34-41)

I will admit to being rather excited when I saw the lectionary for today. We get to read from the Book of Job! And not only that, we get my FAVORITE passage. We get God speaking to Job out of the whirlwind.

I could easily spend an entire sermon on all the things I love about the book of Job and why I think it is such an important part of our canon, but don't worry I will restrain myself and focus in on our passage from today. I love this passage because it helps us to realign our priorities.

It could be easy to see this passage as punitive or demeaning. Depending on the tone of voice we think God is speaking in, it could certainly be read as a diminishing text. If God is harshly saying to Job "WHERE were you when I laid the foundations of the earth," then it would feel very harsh indeed. If God were taunting Job that could be quite cruel. Then this text would sound like a playground bully. But taunting and cruel are not words that fit with my understanding of God.

I read this passage, and I hear a quiet, gentle voice. This is not a God who is raging at Job. It is a God who is kindly reminding Job of his place in the grand scheme of things. Sure, one could hear this and feel small. One could also hear this and feel a wonderful sense of relief. If we were not there to lay the foundations of the earth, if we do not create lightning and floods, if we do not need to provide food for lions or ravens, then maybe, just maybe this means we are not in charge after all.

I don't know about you all, but I have found the news particularly overwhelming lately. From multiple natural disasters in a few short weeks to political crises to ongoing headlines about violence in our communities and around the world. It can feel as though we are all carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders. But in our reading today we have an invitation to turn it over. It does not mean that we get to abdicate ourselves from the responsibilities of being a citizen or of being a follower of Jesus, but it does mean we don't have to be in charge or in control of all of it.

There is a [wonderful interview with writer Wendell Berry](#) in which he reflects on the magnitude of the ecological crises that our planet is facing. He offers that our hope specifically comes in our smallness. He says that the solutions to the enormous problems we face will not come from some single act by those in the halls of power. “Instead, the answer will come from millions of people in thousands of places around the world learning to love and then starting to defend those local places — both their nature and their culture. Second, we need to accept that lots of little solutions may solve big problems well but, like all high quality work, it won’t happen quickly.”

Phew. The wisdom of Wendell Berry and the insight of Job have me breathing a huge sigh of relief this week. I hope they offer the same to you. It is not all up to us. We don’t need to decide it all or fix it all, and we certainly don’t need to do so on our own. Only together in a whole variety of small ways can we make a big impact. I believe that this applies not just to our ecological crises, but really to any huge, seemingly insurmountable problem we encounter in our own lives or in our communities.

A number of years ago, a presenter at a clergy retreat invited us to consider the way in which shared labor can decrease our pain. Again and again in Scripture, and in our own lives, we see how the reality of inviting others to share in our challenges to quite literally “share the labor” with us leads to transformation and new life.

In the book of Job, we see how the failure to share the labor ends up adding to one’s burden. What do Job’s friends do when they come to see him? They sit around talking about what sort of horrible things he must have done to deserve such pain and suffering - NOT helpful.

A better example would be the wonderful way the leadership of the Israelites is shared among Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. They need each other, and they support each other in their work (at least most of the time - there was that incident with the golden calf).

Throughout the Gospels, we see the disciples trying to share leadership - as in today’s passage where James and John assure Jesus that they can go with him to the end. They will do whatever they need to do. Lofty goals and determination that is not quite realized when it turns out the “end” involves Jesus dying on a Cross. But the women who follow Jesus do show us shared labor. They stay with Jesus. They go to the tomb together. They proclaim his resurrection.

Think about this in your own lives. Think about the times you have been carrying around some pain or hurt and then you have time with a dear friend. Maybe you pour out your soul to them. Maybe you stay silent, but that friend is willing to sit with you in the midst of the pain. Doesn’t that lessen the pain a bit -just to have it shared, just to no longer be alone in it?

So there we have it. Today we are invited to let go of some of our burdens or at least to allow them to be shared. We are invited to join Job in remembering that we are not in charge. We are not responsible for everything. The world is far bigger than we are. God is far bigger than we are. We can, and we should, do our part in our communities. And we can do that work together. For it is in practicing shared labor that we will be able to bring about transformation. AMEN.